

Prelude Arrival

Nobody knew where he came from, only that he came.

The day the Cairo branch of the Embassy opened, he stumbled in, beaten, scarred, abused, damaged. He would have died anyplace else, but instead he had fallen down on the floor where someone could notice.

And someone did. Medics were called. Conditions stabilized and checked. Fluids introduced and resources brought in. A double-headed African Dama Gazelle had collapsed... and was in critical but stable condition. His heart was going out, his lungs nearly failing, dehydrated, scarred, and one head's brain showing heavy damage.

The central embassy was contacted, and the decision was made. He was to be transported to College Park Station, ASAP. His condition was downgraded to hyper-critical.

Medics and technicians rushed him to the transportal room. Data on his condition and procedures taken sent to CPS's infirmary. Nothing left to chance, as one medic volunteered to ride along.

As the engineer on the controls started up the transportal, he stirred. The double-headed Dryger medic asked his name. In a short moan from his right-most head as the transportal fired off, he said "Mussi..."

The alarms were sounding off well in advance. The head surgeon, a four-armed Dryger by the name of Captain Mikail Markov, knew this alarm too well. He calmly set his coffee down, grabbed a data pad, and walked out of his office to the main area of CPS's Infirmary.

"ALLRIGHT YOU CUBS!" Mikail howled. "SIDNEY! YOU'RE WITH BJ ON THIS ONE! TRANSPORTAL ROOM WITH HOTLIPS AND CONNER! YOU GOT A NATIVE! AC! DC! TAKE OVER BJ'S PATENT!"

A four eyed, four armed Drygerskunktaur acknowledged the order with a hint of tinniness, while a six armed, three eyed, six eared Dryger said "Gotcha" and handed a data pad over to a four armed Wolfskunk and a slightly elongated Dryger. The taur, Sidney, and the Dryger, BJ, headed into the transportal room, Mikail handing his data pad to BJ. A rather triple-busty Wolfskunk and a similar but less endowed Wolfskunk followed.

"So what do we have, BJ?" Sidney asked, the tinniness still apparent.

"Sounds like a case of overdue maintenance on you, Sidney." BJ said, pulling up the received info as the transportal started up. "Meanwhile, in the next 30 seconds we'll get a... oh boy, hook in Sidney! HYPERCRIT INCOMING!"

"A hypercrit..." Sidney started before the transportal revealed a patent being escorted by a flat-chested Wolfskunk. "I'M LT KAMUND!" Shi started, starting to push the cart. BJ joined in the push with Sidney on the other side. "MALE! MAYBE EARLY 20'S! IMMINENT LUNG, HEART FAILURE!"

RIGHT BRAIN, HEAVY DAMAGE! SCARRING! MISSING LIMB! GUESSING AFRICAN DAMA GAZELLE WITH MUTATIONS! NAMED MUSSI!"

The cart is pushed out and BJ yells "WE GOT IT! SID! WE NEED A SMASH! FUCK THE ESU, WE'RE GEN-TUBING THIS ONE! CONNER! ON THE CART, I NEED A SCAN NOW! HOTLIPS, WE'RE PUSHING!"

The light Wolfskunk hops on the card with a hand scanner, straddles Mussi, and waves the medical scanner over the gazelle as Sidney pushes from behind with BJ on one side and the busty Hotlips on the other. "Doc," Conner yells, "the lungs are nearly gone, the heart's racing, there's no central brain..."

"HARD RIGHT! **BRACE!**" Sidney yells. Conner grabs hold and leans into the corner into the Infirmary.

"...left head's brain is basically dead, right's slipping into a coma. He's running dry." Conner finishes, ducking under a support column as the group rushes up the ramp to the upper level of the regeneration tubes.

"Tank 1!" BJ yelled, and guided the cart over to a full tank's open top. Conner got off on the side, as BJ lifted Mussi up off the cart, moved the creature over to the tank, and slipped him in. Sidney, having moved to the tank's overhead controls, tapped in the order to close the tank and start flooding Mussi's lungs with hyper-oxygenated nanofluid.

Lt. Kadmund looked on, and started to talk, when Hotlips said "The next few minutes are critical."

Sidney's fingers flew over the controls, trying and tuning to stabilize Mussi's condition. "Come on, hon," shi said, "deep breath. You're safe. We got you.". Mussi's mouths opened, and the last breath left out, flooding with fluid. An alarm blipped... but silenced when Mussi started breathing.

"There we go," Sidney said, fingers flying. "Deep breaths. In and out. Let it seep in." Shi worked the controls until the gazelle's vitals stabilized.

"How much time we got?" BJ asked.

"All the time in the world, BJ." Sidney said. "His heart is stabilizing into that regular rhythm now and he's taking fluids. Give him an hour for the UO blood we're giving him to turn into his regular blood. I just fired off the smash. He's stable."

"Oh good." BJ sighed, and turned to Lt. Kadmund. "So what's with this guy?"

"Good question," the Lieutenant said as they guided the gurney back down. "The gazelle just shambled in and did the flop in front of the receptionist."

"There's got to be more than that. You're from Cairo Branch, right? You're not open yet."

"We just opened. The timing is very strange."

"I'd say." a familiar voice purred.

"Admiral RedWolf?" Sidney asked its owner, a six-armed, three tailed red and white Drygerskunk.

"I just got briefed", RedWolf said. "I'm annoyed but I'll deal with it. What's the condition of our friend?"

"Low end of hypercritical." BJ said. "He's in a regeneration tank now. He's passed out but not in a coma. Unusual anatomy. I think this is more a conjoined pair, but we'll see. Sidney's running the DNA sequencing and analysis now. I'm holding off on the mental poke-and-prod until he's in a better state."

"Ahh, okay, nothing different than what I would of done." RedWolf then turned to Lt. Kadmund and asked "You're Lt. Kadmund, right?"

"Yes sir!" Lt. Kadmund stood up and saluted.

"Admiral RedWolf, CMSC/CMMC. At ease. I'd chat more but you gotta transportal back to Cairo Branch. Hotlips, get Kadmund a new gurney to send back. This one's evidence, and Sidney may need it later. I'll square it with Mikail."

"Admiral? Is there a security breach I should know about back at Cairo Branch?"

"I'm not sure, but Cairo Branch is green-yellow at this time because of it. Commander Sphinx is talking with the local government now. I don't want to get you off your sleep schedule anyway. I'll visit when I get more info."

"Thanks, Admiral." Lt. Kadmund said.

"We get a name?"

"Not really. He moaned the name 'Mussi' but I wouldn't put stock in it."

"Hmmm... Let me call someone about that. Hey Sidney, how long on that smash on our guest?"

"Two hours for prelim results," Sidney said. "I'm playing it safe with the usage here."

Mikail came up to the regeneration tube the gazelle occupied, and looked. He studied it a bit more... and wondered...

"Hey Sidney, you're doing a full smash on this one?"

"Full slow one, Mikey," Sidney replied. "Only using a slot in the processing cluster."

Mikail looked at RedWolf with wide eyes and a grin. RedWolf said "All you, Mikey."

"Sidney," Mikail called up, "give it three slots, I'll authorize it."

Hotlips pulled Lt. Kadmund aside and said "I know that look. Better to escape now..."

"Dismissed, Kadmund!" RedWolf quickly said.

The gazelle audibly stirred from his bed, moaning and groaning, trying to get up and move. RedWolf, right at bedside, noticed, and said in the gazelle's tongue "Wait, shaman. You have found help."

The gazelle groaned, "Where is Mussi..."

"I may know someone who can answer that question, shaman. He will be here soon. But I need a question answered."

"Please ask..."

"I have knowledge to share, but I need to share it in a common tongue. I can teach it to you quickly. May I?"

"If it will get me to Mussi... yes."

"Please be still, this may be traumatic..." RedWolf held one hand on each head, and closed his eyes for but a second.

"Oh... Oh my..." the gazelle's said in English. "...I... we come from tragedy."

"That we do. My name is RedWolf. I am a Canmephian. We come in peace. You had walked into our embassy in Africa and collapsed. You are now in our main embassy and our guest, but I must say you are no longer in Africa."

"My..." the gazelle said, using both heads, feeling with all four arms... feeling the regenerated limb. "...how?"

"Our technology borders on magic. We struggle to use it appropriately for good."

The gazelle shifted, sitting up and seeing RedWolf for the first time, the Canmephian bearing three heads. "We are Shaman Koslu, but it is hard to stay in sync. My left is Nathu, while my right is Tolta."

"I had a feeling you were two," RedWolf said with all three heads. "I am one in three. Whichever head's comfortable, just speak to it."

"How did you revive me?" Nathu asked. "I thought I was gone."

"The damage was only around your ability to move, Nathu. You may have lost that, but we can help you learn again. I know of another person who can help."

"Our son, Mussi," Tolta started, "You said you know of him."

"He is safe. He made it out and into Freeport. His path has taken a rather strange turn, though. It is a long tale, with an unsettling twist. My friend will tell it to you in full detail."

"Is there a cost to this?" Tolta asked.

"Tell me your story," RedWolf said. "How you came to be. How you came to us. What happened to your tribe. Use your mother tongue if you have to. That is payment enough. Others will join, but I will translate for you, for I think I have visited your tribe before... with a longer face."

"I remember you now," Nathu said. "Yes. Your voice is familiar. You healed my tribe once before. There is much to talk about."

"Let us talk then."

The conjoined shaman gazelles pondered the tale told by a terrapin, dressed in a suit, joined by BJ and RedWolf.

"This... is a lot, Mr. Terry." Nathu and Tolta said in unison. "Even in such a short summary."

"It is," the terrapin said, "but my colleague, who is known as Elder, has been around longer than I have by many times. She has seen much more, and handled them all."

"And you have filled in much of the story," RedWolf has replied.

"Has my son... my daughter... where is she now?"

"Nearby," Terry said. "In college. She's found a calling with photography. Producing a story with scenes of real life."

"She was always trouble. I would like to know her latest story..."

"That requires music," Terry said. "And RedWolf, I think you know the band?"

"Oh yes!" RedWolf said. "Mussi's latest story is the story of a train and a band called Throng. Let me get my gear..."