

The Result of One's Freedom

Deep depression filled the atmosphere of the lab. Artemis' office was destroyed; her computer was destroyed, her files lost, and her office supplies gone. Artemis and Dr. Hord summoned the strength to stand up. While Artemis tried to compose herself and speak, Dr. Hord held his head in pain. He had to hold on to what was left of a desk. He looked around at the destroyed office. When his head finally cleared, and he could think straight, he turned around to Artemis, who still seemed baffled.

"Are you all right?" He asked.

"Y-Yes sir, I'm fine." Her voice was shaken and she slowly tried to absorb everything that happened. The lights began to flicker and eventually turned off. Both of them left the office and the cleanup crew followed up inside. Their protective yellow suits were specifically designed to repel any side effects left over by the black matter. Through the hallway the eyes of her superiors fell on Artemis. Several wanted to offer her support while others were eager to question her on the incident. Dr. Hord's facial expression clearly showed he did not want anyone to interfere with this matter. Everyone soon returned to their activities and their whispers of concerns vanished. Artemis walked with Prof. Hord to the medical center. The workers were already prepared for her arrival. As the doors opened, the assistants began scribbling furiously, taking notes on everything that could have changed with Artemis' appearance. They were sure to notice anything, a third hoof, new eyes, extended antlers, 6 fingers, different color fur, and anything else they could think of. Artemis held still had one hand on her head, massaging her temples.

The doctor instructed her to take a seat and she followed. She was checked like any other patient; her temperature, blood pressure, height, normal body parts, mind and heart rate, reflexes, and voice were all recorded normal.

"I know this is all procedure and precaution but I feel fine. I just have a small headache," Artemis said. The doctors ignored her; they were more focused on getting their data set and restoring backup energy to their computers that were suffering technical difficulties.

So it wasn't just my computer, Artemis thought. That energy, that... mind wave, knocked out every computer in the area. The lights are still flickering on and off a bit and it doesn't seem like everyone else has these headaches. Man, my head is killing me. The doctors instructed Artemis to lie down so they could scan her body for any abnormalities. She followed. Prof. Hord stood

quietly. His eyes showed deep concern for the issues he was facing. He waited, while more and more workers came into the office to give him the latest updates on what was happening. He could no longer stay by Artemis and proceeded to leave but informed the doctor that he would return shortly.

In the meantime, Artemis rested and waited for further instructions. The bed moved forward into a circular machine that surrounded her with an overall blue light with small red laser lights. The machine began to hum and on the outside of the machine, a large paper with numerous calculations, numbers, and words began to print out, along with charts and graphs. Beyond the humming of the machine, Artemis could hear the sounds of people muttering “yes”, “oh dear”, “intriguing”, “my, my”, and “incredible”. She wondered what had happened to the young Vulpisdeum and more importantly, what was going to happen to her.

The scanning went on for about an hour and the doctors got all the results they needed. Artemis stood up from her seat and waited for a response. Professor Hord came back in looking more concerned than when he left. Artemis didn’t speak to him immediately but acknowledged he was in the room. The doctors whispered into Dr. Hord’s ear and he nodded as if he expected the news to come the way it did. He approached Artemis.

“I’m glad you’re doing well Artemis, more importantly I’m glad you’re alive. Is your head hurting like mine?”

“It was,” Artemis said. “However, I feel fine now. It was a small headache but it’s gone.”

“Good, good. I know this is all sudden for you but I need you to come to my office. I need to know what happened there.”

Artemis nodded and they began walking. Artemis felt nervous about speaking to Prof. Hord in his office; it was a sign of bad things to come.

“Close the door behind you,” Hord instructed once they entered, his voice more stern now. Artemis closed the door and the tension in her body agitated her. She could feel her heart beginning to beat rapidly. She told herself that she was not in trouble, she didn’t do anything wrong, and if she did, she was willing to fix it. “*It will be alright,*” she continued to think as she calmed herself down.

Dr. Hord's office was filled with books on physics and dark matter, documents on past projects, and writings on the chalkboard concerning quantum physics as well as an image of a Lupinicdeer, broken down to its basic anatomy.. Although everything was disorganized in his office, the space was kept clean. No dirt on the floor, no unusual smells, no dust on the book shelves, and no chalk dust everywhere. Compared to other students and professors whose offices were abnormally big, his office was small in comparison. Of course with him being the co-founder of this physics organization and this office being his headquarters, Artemis thought it more understandable that he would be going to conferences or making sure his associates weren't blowing themselves up with experiments.

"Please have a seat. We," he paused, walking behind his desk to sit down, "have a bit to talk about."

Artemis sat in the seat facing Prof. Hord, still reminding herself that she did nothing wrong.

"Artemis, you've worked here for many years. You've showed great attendance, stayed consistent and true to your work, and have always showed a bright interest in quantum physics which I've not seen in many people. I'm glad first and foremost that you're unharmed and even better that nothing mentally or physically is wrong with you. According to the doctors you're perfectly fine."

Artemis nodded. Although she appeared calm she knew something was coming up that would make her feel distraught.

"Now that I've gotten my stuff taken care of," he leaned back in his seat and folded his hands, "please tell me what happened in there."

"Well, I began a thorough analysis of Vulpisdeum. He was not affected by the chemicals in his chambers so he remained awake through my testing and he--"

"Wait, wait, he was awake? Why, d-didn't you increase the dosage?"

“No, see he was curled in a ball so I couldn’t tell if the effects worked so I-”

“So you didn’t contact anyone for assistance in case something like this was to happen? This isn’t like you.”

“I know sir, I was just...” she paused trying to get her words right. “In a way, I didn’t need to.” Hord raised an eyebrow about to criticize her. “The reason for that,” she said quickly, shutting him up, “was because I didn’t get the sense he was dangerous. He was calm about everything and didn’t fight back or show any resistance when I talked to him. He just sat there quietly and he was obedient and cooperative the whole time you were gone.”

“Until I came back and he was destroying the lab,” he added.

“Yes, about that I-”

“Artemis,” Hord said, sighing as he couldn’t believe he was about to say this. “We... I’m afraid I have to... let you go.”

Artemis was speechless. She held back her tears as well as her outburst. She kept her composure as she continued.

“Prof. Hord, I know, I swear I can get him back. I just need a little time. I know I can.”

“It’s not for the reasons you think Artemis. You see, while you were busy getting treatment, I received a message from the organization that supports us. Unfortunately, because our subject, Vulpisdeum as you call him, has escaped, we’ve been shut down. In fact, our entire staff will either be fired or relocated.”

Artemis felt it was her fault, but she didn’t believe it would lead to such a disaster.

“Now, it’s not your fault and I’ll tell you why.” Hord moved in closer, almost afraid someone might hear what he was about to say. “According to the sources provided by that organization,

Vulpisdeum was the source of the thunderstorms that have been occurring for the past 2 weeks now.”

Artemis didn't believe that. Although that young fox had all that dark matter, it was unthinkable he alone was the source of the natural catastrophes happening around the world. Was he really that unstable and powerful? She had been right next to him; she had even looked him in the eyes. Artemis could not believe someone so young could cause that much damage, but there was no other logical explanation.

“Not only that,” Hord continued his voice near a whisper. “There are some photos indicating that 11 small objects traveled in different directions from its origin which was to the north of us. In other words, those 11 items may contain even more dark matter than the one the Vulpisdeum has already.” He leaned back into his chair. “It's unfortunate but without the funds we can't continue our research. The higher ups have insisted that they take over the research we've collected and they've sent an investigation team to track him down.”

Artemis was baffled. Based on everything she just heard, that one fox not only got her fired but shut down her chances of getting a career. This was the only place she felt happy, safe, and where she could pursue her passion in quantum physics. This place was like her home but she could do nothing to stop it.

“I'm sorry Artemis. I know you really enjoyed this place and for years, I loved the passion you showed for your work. With any luck, I can get you another job or recommend you for another area of your study. Please know this is in no way your fault. Things just happen and they happen for a reason.” He got up and walked around his desk. He placed both hands on Artemis' shoulders and looked her straight in the eyes. “Everything will turn out fine. I can tell you're upset and I wish I could help you deal with that. Don't lose heart Artemis; there will be more opportunities for you I promise.” He got up and walked towards one of his book shelves.

Artemis continued to sit in the chair. When she finally comprehended what was happening, she thought of something.

“What if I can get him back?” She asked. “If our supporters want him and I bring him to them, then everything should be alright, correct? He couldn't have gotten far.” Hord didn't answer. He searched for something and after knocking over several books he came across a box. He opened it and took an item out. He walked over to Artemis.

“I won’t need this anymore so I want you to make use of it.” He handed her a device that looked like radar with a compass. She raised an eyebrow. “It’s a device that supposedly could track large amounts of dark matter or energy. I found it useless because it beeped continuously since, in a sense, we all have some level of dark matter within us. We can turn into werewolves, others are able to increase their size, shrink others to the size of a paw, use magic, etc. Artemis, you still have a career ahead of you. Take this as a gift from me. Keep it a secret though. I’m afraid I have to get packing. Too many books to move,” he said with a slight chuckle.

“Prof. Hord,” Artemis said, still holding back her tears. “It was an honor working for you. Thank you so much for this opportunity and this gift.” Prof. Hord walked over to her and gave her a hug.

“The honor was mine and I am glad you came to work with us. Take care of yourself Artemis!”

They hugged for a minute before Artemis left the office, finally letting out a tear as this would be the last time she would walk down the halls of the place she called home.