

# RISING ASH

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## **PART 1**

ASH sat up straight in his bed, his fox ears standing straight up. He thought he had heard voices coming from the far corner of his room.

His right paw burned.

Ash looked down at the mark in the center of his paw. It was still there. Ash continually hoped it would just go away and stop bothering him. Frustrated that that would never happen, Ash slid from under that covers and moved to his closet. He glanced over at the clock on his dresser. 4:30 A.M. Ash cocked his head to one side and grimaced.

“Something bad’s gonna happen today,” Ash said to himself, “I never sleep past two anymore. Crap, I’m gonna die today, aren’t I?”

Ash took off the T-shirt he slept in and threw it in the hamper in the bathroom. Standing in front of the mirror, Ash examined a large, vertical scar that ran from his waist all the way up to the base of his neck. He ran one padded finger down the scar and shuddered. His hand started to burn again. Ash shook his paw as he turned on the shower with the other. After he was finished, Ash sat in his room and smoothed out the deep orange fur of his tail. With nothing better to do, Ash went through the contents of his backpack once more. In just over two hours,

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Ash would be setting paw in a brand new school. *Whoopteedo*, he thought. He would only be spending his senior year at this school.

Ash went downstairs into the living room and put his bag in a chair. Ash moved to the kitchen and fixed a pot of coffee and poured himself a cup. As he sat at the table, Ash's mother, Lilia, came into the kitchen. She scratched Ash's headfur. He flattened out his ears to show his appreciation over the comforting gesture. His mother went to the counter and fixed herself a cup of the coffee Ash had brewed then took a seat beside him. They sat there for a few minutes, just sipping at the hot coffee in their mugs. Finally Lilia gave him the look she has when she knows exactly what's bothering him, but wants to see if he knows.

"What are you doing up so early, sweetie?" she asked gently.

"Couldn't sleep." Ash said.

"Was it the voices again?"

She was good; there was no doubt about it. She had gotten right to the heart of the problem without any trouble whatsoever. Defeated, Ash lowered his head and his fox ears flopped to either side.

"They're getting worse."

"How so?"

"Well, now they're waking me up in the morning." Ash said, trying to lighten the mood.

His mother smiled despite herself at the childish joke her eighteen year-old son had just let slip. She put one of her padded paws on Ash's arm and stroked his fur. Ash noticed that she was looking at his right paw. He turned his paw where she could see the padding. She took his paw in her own and looked closely at the mark that was burned there. Lilia touched it and it gave off a faint but menacing red glow. Pain shot through Ash's paw and up his arm right in his

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brain. An image flashed in Ash's mind. The image was of a grey-furred fox with leathery wings and eight, whipping tails. The image faded as quickly as it had appeared. Pain showed on Ash's face; his mother let go of his paw.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to..." Lilia began.

"It's alright, Mom. I'm fine now." Ash said comfortingly.

"You sure?"

"Yeah."

"That's my little Kitsune." she stopped, "Well, I guess I can't say little anymore, can I?"

"I won't tell if you won't."

"I see your wearing you father's pendant."

"Yeah."

Ash fingered the pendant around his neck. The pendant was in the shape of Cerberus, the mythical three-headed dog that guards the gates to Hell. It was also the name of a band that his father was the lead singer for back before Ash was born. The other two members of the group dropped by every now and then. They had helped them move to their new house in the quaint little city of Furrtown. Ash checked his watch and noticed that if he waited any longer he might actually be late on his first day of school. Rising, he bid his mother a loving farewell, grabbed his bag and started walking to the school. He saw other early risers walking towards the school. He saw boy and girlfurs of all different shapes, sizes and species.

Ash drew closer to the school and began to hear furs talking and yelling. There were also strange, new smells drifting his way. He couldn't help but feel intrigued by the new school. He thought of all the furs that would be there on the first day. Thought of how many furiends he probably would not make. He shrugged. He wasn't really into having furiends with the

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problems he has to deal with. Ash walked past everybody he came to and right in the front door of the school. He looked around the crowded halls at all the furs leaning against lockers or sitting on windowsills talking. Ash smiled to himself as he walked past a boyfur leading a girlfur into the restroom.

*Something's never change*, Ash thought.

Ash found his way to his first class of the day. Advanced Calculus. Ash was looking forward to a class that might actually take his mind off his problem. Ash took a seat kinda towards the front so he could pay attention without being too conspicuous. The teacher entered promptly at the sounding of the bell. The teacher, Mr. Weaver, was a tall, lean horse with a shaggy brown mane and a pair of glasses resting between his green eyes. Mr. Weaver introduced himself and explained a little bit about what they would be learning that year. Mr. Weaver passed out some forms that needed to be signed by the students' parents. Mr. Weaver moved to the board and began writing a couple of equations, thus beginning the class's refresher course in pre-calculus principals.

Ash sat in his desk and wrote down the equations and worked out the examples given to the class. Ash looked about the room. He noticed a pair of wolves, one male and one female, sitting on the back row. They exchanged the occasional glance and smirk then returned their attention to the teacher. The wolves looked a lot alike and even shared the same shade of grey-brown fur. The male wolf poked the female and then pointed in Ash's direction. She looked his way and caught his eye. She smiled at him. Before he could smile back, his right paw began to seize up and he dropped his pen on the desk. His paw began to burn and shake violently. Ash got Mr. Weaver's attention and asked to go to the restroom. Mr. Weaver granted his request and Ash rose and left.

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Once in the hall, Ash made for the nearest boyfur's restroom. He past the principal who just nodded and continued down the hall. Ash pushed his way into one of the restrooms. Fortunately for him, it was empty. Ash walked to the sink and went to run cold water over his burning paw. The burning didn't subside. In fact, it got worse. Much worse. When he looked at his paw, red flames had engulfed it. His paw burned, but the fur and padding was not actually being damaged in any way. His arm began to hurt then the pain spread all across his entire body. Ash looked at himself in the mirror. His eyes got really wide at what he saw. Standing there, in the mirror, was himself enveloped head to toe in pain inducing red flames. Ash howled in pain and clenched his right paw into a fist. The flames disappeared; Ash nearly fell over from exhaustion. Something moved behind him then he heard a voice.

“Freakin’ spaz.” The voice said.

Ash looked up to see a catboy standing in the doorway. He seemed to be about Ash's age, and he was very well built. The catboy turned and left when he caught Ash's eyes. Ash straightened up and ran a paw through his sweaty headfur. He washed his paws and muzzle then returned to class. The rest of the day up until lunch seemed to be going fine. On his way to the cafeteria, Ash noticed that he was receiving a lot more stares from the student body. He had seen these stares before; they were not stares of admiration or anything of that sort. They were stares of disgust and fear. Apparently word had gotten out about what happened earlier. Ash let his ears droop and walked into the cafeteria. Ash got his food and sat down to eat.

After a few minutes eating alone, those two wolves from his Calculus class came over and sat down across from him. Ash glanced up from his food then made to get up and leave. The wolfgirl's paw stretched out in sincere plea.

“Wait, don't go,” she began, “We wanted to sit with you.”

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“Why?” Ash asked, harsher than he meant it.

“It’s a free country,” the wolfboy said, “And, I think she’s sweet on ya.”

Ash eyed the wolfgirl. He couldn’t tell through her fur, but Ash was sure she was redder than the apple on her tray.

“Fine. It’s your reputation.” Ash said.

“I’m Calleigh.” The wolfgirl said, “This is my twin brother Cole.”

“Nice to meet you,” Cole said, lifting a forkful of rice to his muzzle.

“Ash.”

“Ash. I like it. What do you think, Cole?”

“What do I look like? His father?” Cole said jokingly.

Calleigh giggled then looked up at Ash. She looked right into the fox’s eyes. She saw that he was hurt. Ash looked back at his tray and closed his eyes. Calleigh looked at her brother and elbowed him in the side. He shot her a dirty look then turned his attention towards Ash. Ash was lost deep in thought. He was thinking back five years to that day when he had his first fit like the one he had this morning. Well, not quite like this last one. He lost complete control that first time and...

“My father’s dead.” Ash said softly.

Cole’s eye’s got really wide; he nearly dropped his fork. Calleigh raised her paw to her muzzle and gasped.

“Look, fox, I’m really sorry. That was totally out of line.” Cole began.

“It’s okay. You couldn’t have known. Really, don’t worry.” Ash said, “Look, can we talk about something else?”

“I’m all for that.” Calleigh agreed quickly.

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For the rest of the lunch period, Ash sat with Calleigh and Cole. They talked and laughed about everything that had happened up until that period. Everything except the incident that morning during Calculus. Ash was careful not to hold his right-paw so that the wolf twins could see the mark on the inner padding. Ash left lunch with the distinct suspicion that he had actually made a friend or two on his first day as a senior at a new school. He smiled to himself as he walked out of the cafeteria. Ash had a free period so he strolled around the school grounds to get some fresh air. He turned and started walking along one side of the building. He rounded the far corner and was met by the fist of a well-built catboy about his age. Ash hit the wall hard. Before he could slide down to the ground, a large bear paw grabbed the collar of his coat. The last thing he heard was a voice whispering in his ear.

*Kill them all. You have the power.*

“No.” Ash replied to the voice in his head.

“Freakin’ spaz.” The catboy from earlier said again.

\* \* \*

*ASH* opened his eyes. Above him the clouds swirled and moved across the sky. Ash rolled over and spat blood out on the green grass. Ash sat up against the wall and stared at the sky. He sat there for a while then he tried to stand up. He found that his ankle was either broken or just sprained really bad. As he fought to stand up, a lion came around the corner. Seeing Ash, the lion rushed to his side and caught him before he fell over.

“Whoa there! You alright?” the lion asked.

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Before he could answer, blood collected in his throat and caused Ash to cough it out. The lion held onto Ash's shoulders as he stood hacking up blood. When Ash was finished, the lion handed him a washcloth to wipe the blood from his muzzle. The lion helped Ash to the nurse and lowered him onto one of the cots. The nurse came over and thanked the lion then turned her attention on Ash. His paw began to shake a little, as it always does when the voice in his head cries murder. The nurse put a bandage over the cut on his forehead. The nurse had Ash remove his coat and after much protest lift his shirt. When Ash finally complied, he removed his shirt. The nurse almost jumped back at what she saw.

The nurse saw the massive vertical scar that ran the length of Ash's torso. The nurse looked at him, but did not ask. She went back to her task and checked Ash for bruised or broken ribs. He didn't have any, but his chest was covered in small bruises and welts. The nurse offered to write him a pass so he could go home and rest. Ash declined the offer. He thanked her then put his shirt back on, trying to hide the pain that showed on his face. He left and headed to his last class of the day. Physics. He'd always liked physics and hoped the teacher could actually teach the material. Ash arrived at the room and found the door opened and the classroom empty.

Almost empty.

A lion sat in one of the forward desks. He was staring at the blackboard, specifically at a complex physics equation written thereupon. The lion saw Ash and rose from the desk. The lion introduced himself as Todd Hunter. Ash gave his name then sat down. Ash thought a moment then spoke up.

"You're the fur that helped me, aren't you?"

"Yes. I am," the lion responded.



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“Well, thanks.”

“I wonder why you’re still here. If it’d been me, I would’ve gone home and slept it off. But, as is apparent, I am not you, and you are not me. See?”

“Who are you?”

“I am none other than Dr. Todd L Hunter. Teacher of Advanced Physics.” The lion responded with mock pride.

Dr. Hunter tried to maintain the expressionless look he had, but soon burst out laughing at himself. He sat down on the stool in front of the board. Dr. Hunter looked Ash in the eyes and noticed that he seemed very tired.

“Why don’t you put your head down and rest?” Dr. Hunter asked.

“I think I might. If it’s alright?” Ash said.

Dr. Hunter gave a little shake of his head that showed that he didn’t care one way or the other. Ash smiled then folded his arms in front of him and rested his head on the desk. The ringing of the bell was followed by the collective sound of hundreds of students swarming the halls. Ash ignored the noises that drifted in through the open door. He heard tennis shoes come to a screeching halt in the doorway then he heard a familiar voice drift his way.

“There you are! We’ve been looking all over for you!” the voice said.

Ash raised his head and looked around. He saw Calleigh and Cole standing in the doorway. Calleigh and Cole walked closer. Cole settled into the desk behind Ash while Calleigh sat beside him. Ash looked at her and she saw the bandage on his forehead and some flecks of dried blood in the fur on his muzzle. She looked him up and down, eyes finally resting on his right paw. It was convulsing badly. She looked into his eyes and opened her mouth to speak.

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“What happened to you?” Calleigh asked.

“It’s nothing. I’m fine.” Ash lied.

“It’s not nothing. Look at your hand, for God’s sake! It’s freakin’ convulsing!”

“I’m fine.” Ash said sternly.

“Whatever.” Calleigh said, exasperated.

“Would you two calm down?” Cole said.

Ash closed his eyes to think. Calleigh shot her brother a dirty look, which he only returned with the same intensity. Dr. Hunter rose from his stool.

“Down, girl! Down!” he joked.

“Sorry.” Calleigh said.

“So? Who are you? No wait! Let me guess!”

Dr. Hunter moved to his desk and picked up the roster for his last class. He scanned the roll a couple of times then settled on a pair of names. The names shared the same last name and could have belonged to one boyfur and one girlfur. He glanced up at the waiting students. A wry grin stretched across his muzzle. Pointing to Cole then to Calleigh.

“You must be Calleigh Sommers. So, that makes you Cole. Right?” Dr. Hunter exclaimed.

Calleigh and Cole exchanged worried glances then looked confusedly at the teacher. The teacher returned their confused stare.

“Wait. Strike that. Reverse it. You’re Cole and she’s Calleigh.”

“By George, I think he’s got it.” Cole said dryly.

“What can I say? It’s my first last class of the year. I’m petrified.”

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One by one the rest of the class filed in and took their seats. One of the other students in the class was the very same catboy that had taken part in Ash's beating earlier that day. In fact, he was the first person to hit him and the last person Ash heard speak. The catboy eyed Ash as he walked in. Ash paid him no attention. Dr. Hunter, however, noticed the look the catboy had given Ash and the gears started turning. Dr. Hunter was pretty sure now that the cat did not like Ash and probably had a hand in his beating.

Dr. Hunter did what all the other teachers had done. He went through the syllabus and talked a bit about himself. He turned out to be only about twenty-six or twenty-seven years old. Relatively young for a fur with a Ph.D. in Physics. Then he went through the roll trying to learn how to properly pronounce everyfur's name. He jotted down nicknames where appropriate. With ten minutes left before the final bell, Dr. Hunter walked to the window. He threw the window open and looked out. He looked both ways along the building. When he brought his head back in he was smiling from ear to ear.

"You guys wanna hear a secret? I don't plan on staying longer than I absolutely have to. So, since I have nothing for you guys. Well, to be brutally honest. Get out."

The last phrase came out and the entire class froze. Everyfur looked at each other then at Dr. Hunter. He stood there looking kinda dumfounded.

"Well, what are you still doing here? I said you could go."

With that, everyfur began to pack up their books and papers. Calleigh and Cole were out the door before Ash. Ash thought back to the way he had spoken to her. He shook his head and took off after her. Ash caught up with them outside on the sidewalk.

"Calleigh! Cole! Wait up!" he called after them.

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Calleigh and Cole stopped and turned around. Cole grinned when he saw Ash. Calleigh, however, did not smile nor did she turn away from him. Ash walked closer and flattened his ears out to either side.

“Hey, man.” Cole said.

“Hey. Look, I’m sorry for the way I acted. I really am.” Ash said.

“Well, what happened?” Calleigh asked.

“A group of furs beat the crap outta me. I had some free time after lunch so I went for a walk. Came around the corner and wham. A fist hit me right in the muzzle.”

“Did you see who it was?” Cole asked.

“Yeah, actually I did. You know that catboy in the back right corner of the room?”

“The leopard? Yeah, why?” Calleigh said.

“He’s the one who punched me in the muzzle first. I didn’t recognize any of the rest.”

“So, wait! You took a beating and stayed for the rest of school? Bet that sure ruffled Jake’s fur.” Cole asked.

“Jake?”

“The catboy.” Calleigh offered, “Oh, I almost forgot. Here’s the packet of stuff for English. The teacher gave it to me to give to you.”

“Oh, okay. Thanks.” Ash said taking the packet.

“Look, we gotta run. See you tomorrow?” Cole said checking his watch.

“Sure. See’ya.”

Calleigh and Cole set off to their destination. Ash straightened his ears and walked home. Furs were still pointing and staring at him, but Ash didn’t care. He had actually made a couple of furiends. And, hadn’t killed them. *Yet.* The voice intruded on his thoughts, but he

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ignored it. He got home and the house was empty. He threw his backpack in his room and went back down to the kitchen. Ash fixed himself a sandwich and a glass of orange juice then went back to his room to look through the packet of information for English. As he worked, the voice continued on in his head. It scolded him for not even defending himself, let alone not killing his assailants. Ash ignored it until his paw seized up and he dropped his pen. His chest began to ache.

Ash ran to the bathroom and shut the door. He took off his shirt and threw it aside. Ash looked at the huge scar in the mirror. The scar was red and pulsating. Red flames began to envelop his paw and forearm. Ash glared into the mirror. Ignoring the pain, Ash left the bathroom for a short few minutes then returned. Brandishing a hunting knife at himself in the mirror, Ash raised his right paw and turned it over. He glared at the version of himself in the mirror. This version had red eyes instead of blue and hadn't left with him. Ash placed the blade of the knife to his wrist.

“You need me a lot more than I need you!” Ash said harshly.

He dug the knife blade a little ways into the skin on his wrist. Blood trickled from the small cut and stained his fur. The pain began to subside and the flames died down. The Ash in the mirror nodded lightly and returned to normal.

*You win, boy. This time.*

Ash put the knife down and opened the medicine cabinet. He pulled out some gauze and bandages. Being careful, he wrapped up his wrist and put his shirt back on. He walked back to his room and sat down at his desk. He finished the information sheet then got all the papers his mother had to sign together. He went downstairs and left the papers on the kitchen table. He grabbed his mp3 player from its recharge port and put in the earbuds. He lay down on the couch

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and closed his eyes. He listened to the music coming through the earbuds and fell asleep. He saw images of the furs that had beaten him followed by that dark-grey fox with the wings and eight tails murdering them all. The last thing he saw was Calleigh standing in front of him. She smiled at him and held out her paws. He reached for her when she was suddenly pulled backwards and impaled on a grey fox-paw.

Ash let out a strangled yelp. He shot up straight and almost bumped heads with his mother. Lilia stepped back. Ash took a couple deep breaths then looked at his mother. She looked back at him. Ash held his head in his paws and began to cry. His mother moved in and sat beside him. She took him in her arms and held him close. She stroked his headfur and whisper calming words into his ear. Slowly, Ash's tears began to come less and less. He sat up straight and wiped his eyes. His shirtsleeve fell passed his wrist and his mother saw the bandage wrapped thereupon.

“What happened?” she asked.

“Cut myself.” Ash answered softly.

“Ash! Why would you do that?”

“That thing inside me was hurting me. I could think straight. I threatened my own life so it'd leave me alone. I don't think it listened to well.”

“Next question: Who's Calleigh?” his mother asked smiling.

“She's a wolfgirl from school. She's in most of my classes along with her twin brother, Cole.”

“So, you met her today and your already having nightmare's about her. I see how it is.”

“Mom, in the dream that monster killed her. I think it doesn't want me to be too happy with my life.”

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“Oh. What else happened today?”

“Well, I got beaten up by a bunch of guyfurs. They were in the dream, too. That monster killed them, too.”

“Why kill them?”

“It tried to get me to kill them when they first attacked me,” Ash rubbed his eyes a few times, “But, you know what?”

“What?”

“I won’t let it make me kill again.”

“Kitsune, that wasn’t your fault.”

“True but, it doesn’t make it any better.”

“I know. Look, I signed those papers you left on the table. They’re on the table by the stairs. I’m gonna go start fixing dinner. Any preferences?”

“Nope.”

“Okay, you wanna try to sleep a bit longer?”

“I’ll try. I love you, Mom.”

“I love you, too, Ash. My little Kitsune.”

Ash lay back down on the couch and turned his music back on. He slept right up until supper without having more horrible dreams wake him up.

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*TWO* pleasingly uneventful months past. Halloween was this coming Friday and the entire school was decorated for the occasion. That morning, Wednesday, the principal announced that

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any student who was so inclined could wear their costumes to school on Friday. At lunch that day, Calleigh asked Ash what his costume was.

“I don’t have one.”

“What?! Halloween is Friday and you don’t have a costume?!” Calleigh asked.

“That’s what the fox said.” Cole offered, “He’s not required to wear a costume.”

“Are you going to?” Ash asked him.

“Of course. It’s tradition.” Cole said in his usual off-paw manner.

“What do you mean?”

“Every year, the principal says it’s alright to wear your costumes,” Calleigh said, “So, it kinda became informal tradition to do it. Everyfur wears a costume.”

“Except me, apparently.”

“Why not?” Calleigh asked.

“I’ve just never really been in to the whole costume thing.”

“Okay. Right after school, Cole and I will take you out and find you a costume. Right, Cole?”

“Whatever you say, Calleigh.”

“Don’t I get a say in this?”

“No!” the twins said simultaneously.

Ash threw his paws up in defense. He looked at his watch and noticed that Calleigh and Cole were going to be late for their next class. They left Ash alone at the table. Ash got up and threw away his trash then headed to the gym. He had decided to use his free periods to exercise. Ash walked into the locker room and changed into a sleeveless shirt and a pair of loose, comfortable pants. Ash walked into the coach’s office and retrieved the duffle he had left there



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earlier. As it turned out, the coach, a well-built bear, was an old friend of his father's. Inside the duffle was a pair of wooden practice katana and two wooden wakizashi. He removed the wakizashi and began to spin them around himself. Ash practiced for about ten minutes when he noticed that he was being watched. He stopped and looked.

The group that had gathered to watch him was the same pack of furs that beat him up the first day of school. They all had on the padding and jerseys that showed that they were members of the varsity football team. The pack was led by Jake, the leopard quarterback. The coach came in behind them, but did not draw attention to himself. The quarterback replaced his helmet and rushed Ash. Ash rotated away from the charging football star and clubbed him at the base of the neck with the butt of the wakizashi. The leopard quarterback dropped to the floor motionless. The other four players dropped their helmets and ran at Ash. Ash shook his head and began ducking in and out and around the more muscular players. After watching for a few minutes, the coach walked forward and cleared his throat. Ash stopped in his tracks. The other four furs, however, continued to advance. The coach threatened the players' position on the team and they backed away. The coach walked over to Ash.

"You okay, son?" he asked.

"I'm fine. Thanks for the help." Ash said.

"You're pretty handy with those things. Good thing they're made of wood."

"Yeah. Look, I'm sorry about this. I don't know what happened."

"Have they tried this before?"

"Once."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

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“I’m not one for being the center of attention. Particularly after what happened to my father.”

“Oh, okay. I understand. I’ll keep this quiet. You know they will after what you did. Go get cleaned up.”

“Okay. Thanks.”

Ash took a shower and then left for English. He arrived just before Calleigh and Cole. Calleigh still intended to take Ash to get a costume after school. Ash rolled his eyes and looked at Cole for sympathy. Cole threw his paws up to show he did not want to get in the way. Ash smirked and looked back at his book. After English, Ash walked with Calleigh and Cole to Physics. Todd, as he prefers to be called, was as lively and humorous as ever. Jake sat in the back of the room and brooded over what to do about Ash. He was actually surprised that Ash had not turned him in. He would be sure to repay him for that someday.

After school, Ash started to walk home when Calleigh and Cole came up behind him. They walked on either side of Ash and kept throwing him odd glances.

“Thought you could sneak off, didn’t you?” Calleigh said.

“No. I was thinking we could drop our books at my house then go wherever it is you’re planning on taking me.” Ash countered.

“Sounds like a great plan.” Cole said.

The furs arrived at the house and Ash let them in the front door. His mother was not there. They put their bags down in the living room. Ash left a note for his mother on the kitchen table. Then Ash let himself be dragged by the wolf twins off to look for a costume. Calleigh and Cole took Ash to a shop in town that sold all kinds of costumes. They searched for an hour.

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Ash couldn't find anything that he liked. Cole was all for giving up and going home, but Calleigh would not be beaten that easily. Ash pleaded with her to let them go.

“Mess with me, and your going as a giant pink bunny rabbit.” Calleigh said.

Ash stepped back and clasped his hands behind his back. Calleigh walked up to the bear owner of the shop and explained their dilemma. He came around the counter and looked Ash over. The bear cocked his head to one side then turned around. He walked to a door and motioned for Ash to follow him. Ash glared at Calleigh then followed the shop owner in the back room. The bear pulled some things from a rack and had Ash try them on. The owner saw the scar on Ash's chest when he brought in a coat to try. The bear got an idea. After a few minutes, Ash decided to go with the bear's suggestions and had the owner package the stuff for him. Calleigh paid and the three furs left the shop. Calleigh heckled Ash all the way back to his house about what was in the box.

“No. You'll just have to wait until Friday like everyone else.” Ash said.

“Stop now, Calleigh.” Cole said.

Ash let the twins in so they could get their books then they left. Ash took the box up to his rooms and put it in the closet. He found his mother in the backyard carving a pumpkin. He picked up a knife and started in on a second pumpkin.

“Since, when were you so up on Halloween?” his mother asked.

“I'm not. I'm just lending my beautiful mother a helping paw. Anything wrong with that?” Ash said.

“No. So, did you find a costume?”

“Strangely enough, yeah. Not sure if I'm gonna wear it though.”

“Why not?”

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“Well, the store owner just kinda threw it together. He caught a glimpse of my scar and decided to leave out the shirt he had originally brought.”

“So, you’re going topless. What about everyfur seeing you scar?”

“The guy thought of that, too. He threw in a thing of makeup used to make false scars free of charge. I told him I’d return it after this whole thing was over.”

“Well, that was nice. You looking forward to Friday?”

“Of course not.”

Ash sat with his mother and talked and laughed. They finished carving the pumpkins and set them on the front porch. Ash went up to his room and worked on his homework until dinner was ready. After dinner, he finished his homework then watched a horror movie with his mother. Ash was pretty sure there was a plot line, but could not find it amidst the blood and gore of the slasher movie. When the movie was over, Ash went upstairs to bed. Ash lay under the covers and stared at the ceiling. When he finally fell asleep, Ash had dreams like the one from before.

He saw Calleigh walking, through a field of bright yellow flowers, towards him. She was smiling the way she always did when she saw Ash. Something swooped down out of the sky. A fox with grey fur, a muscular body and two large, leathery wings landed behind Calleigh. The fox walked towards Calleigh as she continued to move closer to Ash. Eight tails whipped around behind the winged fox. An evil grin appeared on the fox’s muzzle, revealing sharp fangs dripping with blood. The look on his face spelled out murder. The fox quickened his pace and came right up behind Calleigh. Ash watched as one of the fox’s paws came through Calleigh’s chest. Ash tried to scream but could not.

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The scene before him changed rapidly. Ash now saw a kit barely ten years old. The little foxboy was outside playing with his father. Ash stood and watched as a dark mist with two piercing, red eyes came down out of the sky. He watched as the mist entered the body of the small kit, the father rushing to his son to see what was wrong. The scene changed again. Ash now saw that same kit at the age of thirteen. The kit was dressed up as a pirate for Halloween. His father was waiting to take him out for a night of fun and games. When they hit the front lawn, the kit seized up in pain. His father helped him to the ground and yelled for help. The kit's paw went to his father's throat, his eyes red with evil intent. The father stared at the foxboy in surprise. A pair of leathery wings and seven more tails grew from the kit's body. The kit also began to increase in size. When the transformation was over, the kit was the same grey fox Ash saw everywhere he looked now.

Ash sat up in his bed. He sat there, breathing heavily. Tears were running through the fur around his muzzle.

"Dad. I'm sorry." Ash said quietly.

*No, you're not. You enjoyed it.*

"Leave me alone, Kordak!"

*No, you leave me alone. I want this body.*

"Then take it and stop pestering me."

*You are too pure of heart for me to just take you. You must kill first.*

"What do you call what I did to my father?"

*That was I. You had nothing to do with that.*

Ash sat on the edge of his bed. He looked down at the scar on his chest. The only other mark on his body that showed his was the keeper of an evil demon bent on destroying the world.

## *RISING ASH*

On the padding of his right paw was a symbol that had appeared on his hand after the death of his father. Ash got up and got his shower. He went downstairs and found something to eat then head off for school. That day was very uneventful. *Thank God*, Ash thought. When he got home, Ash did his homework. The rest of the afternoon he thought very hard about if he even wanted to leave the house on Friday, Halloween. His mother made up his mind for him and told him to go.

\* \* \*

*FRIDAY* morning, Ash woke up and got his shower. Ash put on his costume, but threw some regular clothes in the duffle he would leave in the coach's office. When he arrived at the school, Ash discovered that Calleigh had not lied to him. Sure enough, everyfur was wearing a costume of some sort. Ash even saw a couple that made him less uncomfortable with not wearing a shirt. Ash met up with Calleigh and Cole shortly before school. Calleigh was dressed as a Victorian noble woman, while Cole wore the trappings of a pirate. Calleigh and Cole looked Ash up and down and commented on his costume.

Ash's costume consisted of form-fitting black leather pants and a pair of very deep crimson knee-high boots that the pants were tucked in. He wore no shirt, but had on a long blood-red leather coat that split in the back starting at the waist. Ash's tail swished back and forth between the flaps. The collar of the coat flipped up to give a darker feel to the costume. He wore a pair of matching black gloves on his paws. Calleigh leaned in and began to examine the scar on his chest. She moved to touch it, but Ash grabbed her by the wrist. She stood and looked into his eyes. Ash just shook his head and let go of her wrist.

## *RISING ASH*

That day at lunch, Ash explained how the shop owner had just thrown the costume together after looking him over once. He even lied and told them that he had put the false scar on and did not want to have to do touch ups as it took too long. Cole believed him and did not bother him anymore. Calleigh seemed less convinced, but said nothing. Lunch was going fine until Jake strolled up flanked by the other four football players. One of the players, a large horseboy, grabbed Ash by the collar and stood him up. Ash shook himself free and backed away from the players. A crowd began to gather to watch what was going to happen. Some teachers even came to watch. Even the principal stood back and said nothing. He knew what the players had previously done to Ash.

“Kick their asses!” the principal yelled.

Everyfur turned and looked, except Ash and Jake. They continued to stare at each other. Jake snarled at Ash. Ash gave him a small, taunting smirk. Cole and some other furs moved a bunch of the lunchroom tables out of the way to give them some room. Jake lunged at Ash. Ash pivoted out of the way and put his paw on the back of Jake’s neck. With a flick of his wrist, Jake flipped over and landed on the linoleum floor with a loud thud. A quick otterboy and a strong mouseboy, both defensive guards, rushed towards Ash. Ash ran towards them and somersaulted over their heads. Hitting the ground, Ash stood and spun around, bringing one crimson boot around to connect with the back of the mouse’s head. Rotating away with the recoil, Ash swung around and kicked the otter in the face as he turned around.

Ash turned to look at the remaining two players. One was a large bovine boy with huge muscles. The other was a horse with a similar bodily structure. Ash gulped when he saw them. The two players came at him. Ash ducked their first couple of swings. The bull tried to kick Ash in the chest, but he grabbed his hoof before it connected. Using his attackers present state,

## *RISING ASH*

Ash flipped the bull over on his face. The bull tried to get up, but Ash planted one paw in the center of the bull's back and launched himself into the air. Ash rotated and kicked the horse full in the chest, sending him flying backwards. Ash continued through a back flip and landed on the floor gracefully on his back paws. The cafeteria erupted in thunderous applause.

Ash turned and looked around at all the faces staring back at him. Some furs were jumping up and down cheering him on. A group of girlfriends swooned when he looked their way. Ash began to chuckle when he saw Jake trying to stand back up. Cole walked over to Jake and whispered something in his ear. Jake nodded and lay back down on the ground. Ash laughed a bit harder when he saw this. Calleigh could not contain herself any longer. She ran towards Ash and kissed him full on the lips. The entire crowd began to cheer louder. Cole took one look then began to feign betrayal and helped Jake to his feet. When he was standing, Jake declined the chance to try again and walked out of the cafeteria. Calleigh pulled away from Ash so she could look in his eyes.

Ash went to pull her closer when his right arm began to seize up. His paw burned painfully. Ash lost his balance and fell forwards. Calleigh and Cole rushed to him and got hold of him before he hit the floor. Calleigh accidentally put her hand to the scar on Ash's chest. Pain shot through Ash's entire body. His knees buckled again, but Cole had a firm hold on Ash by then.

"Get me out of here." Ash pleaded.

Cole and Calleigh helped Ash out of the cafeteria and into the empty hallway. They led Ash down the hall and into a wider area. At Ash's request, the wolf twins lowered him to the floor and took a few steps back. Ash cried out in pain. His chest was pounding and his right paw was burning. Something moved inside Ash's chest causing him to cough up blood. Orange



## *RISING ASH*

flames began to engulf Ash without actually burning him. He could feel the heat of the flames on his fur. Ash gritted his fangs. He removed the black glove from his right paw then reached into the pocket of his coat. From the pocket he pulled a pocketknife.

“I warned you!” Ash yelled.

Without hesitation, Ash flipped up the blade of the knife and stabbed the tip into the fur and skin of his right wrist. He yelped in pain. He continued to push the knife deeper into his wrist. The blood that spilled from the wound was soaked into the surrounding fur. He pushed the knife deeper then drew it along his forearm. He jerked the knife out of his arm and watched the blood ooze from the wound. His eyes widened as he watched the blood run from the wound then begin to recede back towards the cut. The blood seeped back into the wound. Once all the blood was back in, the fur on Ash’s arm began to change color. His back began to hurt and his tail felt strange. Ash let out a howl of pain that slowly turned into a snarl of hatred.

Calleigh and Cole stood back and watched as Ash transformed before their eyes. Ash’s one tail separated into eight long, swishing tails. All the fur on Ash’s body had changed into shades of grey. Two large leathery wings exploded from Ash’s shoulder blades. Blood dripped from the newly grown wings. Whether it was Ash or not, the fox rose up on its hind legs. The grey fox tilted his head to one side then flapped the wings a couple of times. Blood flew from the wings and splattered on the walls and across Calleigh and Cole. The fox turned to face them with red eyes glowing and sharp fangs showing. The fox was not Ash in any sense. Even the scar had disappeared.

The grey fox walked towards Calleigh and Cole, his eight grey-furred tails swishing about menacingly behind him. He stretched out his fingers causing sharp claws to appear at the

## *RISING ASH*

tips. An evil grin stretched across the fox's muzzle. He opened his mouth a little and drew his tongue around the outside of his muzzle. He was hungry for something. Or, somefur.

"Come. Play with me, little wolfgirl." The fox said menacingly.

"Who are you?" Cole asked.

"I am Kordak. Come, now. I will not hurt you."

"Yeah right." Calleigh said sharply.

Cole looked around at her, his eyes going wide.

"Do not insult the fox who's trying to eat us! Please? Thank you!"

"Cole!"

Just as Calleigh screamed his name, Cole was sent flying down the hall by the monster that now stood directly before Calleigh. Kordak moved in and wrapped one clawed paw around Calleigh's throat. Kordak lifted Calleigh from the ground. Tears streamed from Calleigh's eyes. Kordak squeezed. Calleigh gasped for air. She looked down at Kordak's face. He began to open his muzzle wider and wider. When it was big enough to engulf her head, Kordak started to pull Calleigh closer. Then gunshots rang out. Three bullets enter the left side of Kordak's body. One bullet embedded itself in the grey fox's skull. The other two hit him square in the chest. Kordak turned his head and glared at the shooter.

"Put her down!" the shooter yelled.

Jake, the leopard quarterback, stood frozen in place gripping a smoking handgun in his outstretched paws. Smoke curled from the barrel of the gun and three bullet casings rolled around on the floor. As Kordak glared at Jake, the wounds in his chest and head began to heal themselves. Kordak cocked his head to one side and let go of Calleigh's throat. Calleigh hit the floor hard. As she gasped for air, She looked up and saw Kordak stretching out his wings.

## *RISING ASH*

Kordak's piercing glare slowly became a look that spelled out murder. The grey fox kicked off from the ground and soared through the air towards Jake. Jake fired again and again, but to no avail. The claws on the fox's paws extended until they were almost a foot in length. Paws out ahead of him, Kordak drove his claws into Jake's chest all the way up to his fingertips. The grey fox pulled out one set of claws and slashed Jake's throat with one claw.

Jake's dead body slumped to the floor. Kordak began to laugh at the now dead quarterback. Kordak turned and began to walk back to Calleigh. Halfway there, the grey fox stopped and wrapped his arms around his gut. The monster cried out in pain then flew off down the hall. Kordak threw a fireball at the double doors that stood in his way. The doors exploded off their hinges and Kordak flew off into the sky. Calleigh stood up and walked over to Jake's lifeless body. Cole got up and staggered over to his sister. The principal had come out of the cafeteria with some of the other faculty when they had heard the gunshots. Jake O'Connell, the star quarterback of the varsity football team, lay on the floor in the middle of a growing pool of his own blood.

\* \* \*

*KORDAK* flew high over Furrstown, but then his wings gave out and shriveled away to nothingness. The wingless Kordak plummeted towards the ground. Below him there was an abandoned warehouse that would surely hit. Kordak began to feel weaker. His eight flailing tails merged into a single tail. As he fell, Kordak's fur changed into a deep orange color. A large scar appeared on the fox's chest as Ash returned to his normal self. Still falling, Ash rotated around and looked below him just in time to crash in to the roof. The roof gave under the

## *RISING ASH*

impact and Ash began to fall through the warehouse. He bounced off of girders and other outcroppings. Ash hit the ground hard and lay there. His head hung at an odd angle from the rest of his body. Blood ran from the corners of his mouth. Ash lay on the floor of the warehouse, dead from a broken neck.

\* \* \*

*CALLEIGH* and Cole waited at Ash's house for any word on the missing fox. Lilia sat on the couch and explained what was wrong with Ash and what had happened to his father. Calleigh sat down beside Ash's mother as she told how her thirteen-year-old kit transformed into a winged, eight-tailed, grey-furred fox and murdered Ash's father. Ash's mother began to cry as she remembered watching her husband ripped to pieces by a monster that used to be her son. Calleigh put her arms around the weeping mother's shoulders. Cole walked to the window and peeked out the blinds. The sun was setting low over the distant mountains.

It was late on Saturday afternoon. The principal and the coach were out looking for Ash along with other teachers and police officers. They called in periodically to give them updates but they had not found anything by now. Cole sat down underneath the window and began fidgeting with a silver ring he had had on a string around his neck. Lilia noticed that Calleigh had one as well. She asked about them and Calleigh told her that they were a gift from their grandparents before they passed away. Ash's mother tried to get a good look at the ring without seeming too interested, but could not. Cole saw her and put his ring away.

There was a knock at the door.

## *RISING ASH*

Cole got up from the floor and went to the door. Without saying a word, Cole stepped through the door and closed it behind him. Lilia watched curiously as he did this. Calleigh stayed beside Lilia and put one paw on her shoulder. Lilia sat on the couch and started to think. She thought about Ash's new friends. She thought about how Ash had been acting since he met them. He was livelier and he smiled a lot more. Calleigh and Cole were the best friends a fur could ask for. But, something was wrong. Something was horribly wrong. And, Lilia was going to find out what.

\* \* \*

*ASH's* body lay on the floor of the warehouse. Light from the setting sun shone in through the windows. The warm rays of light hit Ash's open but lifeless eyes. Ash's eyes began to blink to shield them from the light. Ash began gasping for air as his head lolled to one side. He lifted his paws and placed one on his head and the other on his neck. With one good push, Ash snapped his head back into place. He sat up and looked around him. He had no idea where he was. He tried to stand but found one of his legs was broken. He reached down and pushed the broken bones back into alignment. Rising, Ash dusted himself off and began looking for a way out.

Ash looked up and saw the hole in the ceiling. He shook his head as images of what had happened that day began to flood back into his mind. He remembered the pain of the transformation and of watching through Kordak's eyes as he threw Cole aside and advanced on Calleigh. He saw the look of horror and disgust on Calleigh's face as he watched Kordak's paw close around her throat and lift her from the ground. His jaw ached as he thought about how Kordak tried to eat the poor wolfgirl. Then, Ash remembered the he felt as three speeding

## *RISING ASH*

bullets entered Kordak's body. Ash dropped to his knees as the scene of Kordak murdering Jake began to unfold before his eyes.

Ash threw his head back and let out a long howl of pain and sorrow. His mind turned to Kordak and his painful wail became a growl of hatred for the demon living inside him. Ash swung around and drove his fist towards one of the steel girders. His fist connected with the girder. The sound of metal wrenching apart filled the abandoned warehouse as the girder split in two. Anger filled Ash. He clenched both fists and held his paws above his head. Orange flames formed around his clenched paws. Quickly, Ash lowered his arms so that they were stretched out to either side. The orange flames spread outward from his paws. The warehouse exploded in a ball of bright orange flames.

As the debris from the warehouse fell from the sky, Ash launched himself into the air. Red flames trailed after the distraught fox as he rocketed skyward. Ash began to launch balls of multicolored fire into the clouds. The clouds burst and it began to rain. Ash didn't think it was possible, but it was. The state of the afternoon sky now mirrored how he felt inside. Ash flew into the clouds and hid for a while. Pain began to build inside Ash's chest. His right paw and the scar on his chest burned with white-hot intensity. Ash let out another mighty howl that shook the world. The clouds flew away and dissipated.

A jetliner appeared head straight for Ash. The tiger pilot gasped when he saw Ash floating in midair. Just as the jet was about to collide with the floating fox, Ash looked at the plane. His eyes flared red. Ash stretched out his right paw, palm outward. The symbol burned on the padding started glowing. A large circular field of swirling energy appeared before the oncoming jet. The jet entered the field and began materializing on the other side of Ash. The jet continued on its way as Ash watched after it. A dark cloud formed above Ash. He looked up

## *RISING ASH*

and saw a pair of great big yellow eyes staring back at him. A voice boomed in his ears and racked his body with pain.

*VESSEL. YOU HAVE DONE WELL.*

“Who are you?” Ash yelled at the cloud.

*I AM CLOTHOR THE DESTROYER. RELEASE KORDAK UNTO ME.*

“Never! I’ll never release him! I would rather die!”

*WELL THEN. SO BE IT!*

A bolt of lightning issued from the dark cloud and struck Ash in the center of his chest. Ash fell from the sky. As his speed increased, Ash began to lose consciousness. His vision blurred and his head began to pound. Blood ran from his nose. As he fell, Ash began to tumble head over heels. One moment the ground was above his feet, the next it was under him. He stopped tumbling and was left facing the ground. He was above his house and it was getting closer by the second. Before he totally blacked out, Ash saw two furs standing on the sidewalk in front of his house talking. One was a wolfboy with grey-brown fur. The other was a adult Neko man wearing a black overcoat, his tail swishing behind him.

\* \* \*

AS Cole finished his conversation with the Neko man, something fell from the sky and crashed into the front lawn of Ash’s home. Cole ran to see what it was while the Neko hung back on the sidewalk. Cole found Ash’s body lying in a newly formed indentation in the ground. Cole looked back at the Neko man with a pained look in his eyes. Cole turned towards the house and yelled for Calleigh and Lilia. The two canid-women came running out of the house. They

## *RISING ASH*

stopped dead on the edge of the lawn. Cole stood up and took a few steps back from Ash. Lilia began to walk towards her son when he began to move. With his one good arm, Ash turned himself over so he was lying on his back.

Ash sat up, part of his muzzle sat at a skewed angle from the rest of it. Oblivious to the three furs looking on, Ash placed his left paw on his broken arm. He clamped his lower right arm between his thighs to steady himself. Ash pushed and there was an audible crack as he set the bone. Then he placed both paws on either side of his broken muzzle and pushed it back into alignment. Ash spat blood out onto the grass. He stretched his neck then stood up. His knees buckled and he almost fell over. His mother was at his side before he noticed her and the twins. He stared at the twins with eyes wide with fear.

Then Ash noticed the Neko man hanging back on the sidewalk. Ash eyed him carefully. The Neko reached into his coat and pulled out a sword. He dropped his coat to the ground, revealing his muscular frame. His clothes were those of a warrior trained in many different forms of combat. He wore a patch over one eye and had a single silver ring on the ring finger of his left paw. Green energy began to radiate from the silver ring. Extending his left hand, the Neko man launched a blast of green energy at Ash and his mother. Stretching out his left paw, Ash absorbed the energy blast and redirected it at the Neko man. The cat batted away the blast and leapt at Ash. Without thinking, Ash shoved his mother away and jumped to meet the Neko. The Neko slashed at Ash with his sword. Ash ducked away from each slice.

*Kill!*

The Neko held the sword at his side and lunged at Ash. Ash twisted away from the stabbing motion. He placed his right paw just behind the guard of the sword just above the Neko's paw. Ash pulled the sword from the Neko's grasp and took a step away from him.



## *RISING ASH*

Twisting on the ball of his hindpaws, Ash twirled the sword above his head and brought it to rest at the Neko man's throat. Calleigh ran forward.

"Master! No!" Calleigh yelled.

"Master?" Ash muttered.

"Let him up, Ash." Calleigh said.

Ash pulled the sword away and stepped back. The Neko man straightened up and looked from Calleigh to Ash. Ash pointed the sword at the Neko. Cole moved around till he was between the two furs.

"Who are you? Why did she call you 'master'?" Ash asked.

"Because that's what I am. I am Calleigh and Cole's master. I am Victor," the Neko responded.

"What are you doing here?" Ash said.

"I came to kill Kordak." the Neko replied.

"Fine." Ash said.

Turning the sword over in his paw, Ash tossed the sword back to Victor. Victor snatched the sword out of the air. Ash took a couple steps back and dropped to his knees. He leaned forward and held out his head. Ash was putting his life into the paws of this Neko man come here to kill him. The Neko walked around beside Ash and lowered his muzzle to his ear.

"I don't relish this." Victor whispered.

"Just get it over with." Ash said.

Victor stepped back and placed the blade of his sword on the back of Ash's neck. He raised the sword high above his head. Setting his paws in the ground, Victor brought the sword down towards Ash's neck. Before the blade could slice through, Victor changed its direction

## *RISING ASH*

causing the blade to slice into the ground. He took a few steps back from Ash. Cole moved to Victor to see if he was alright. Calleigh walked to Ash and placed her paws on his arm and helped him up. Ash rose from the ground but kept his eyes on the swaying sword. He glanced over, saw Calleigh's paws the looked her in the face. Something clicked in his head. Jerking his arm away, Ash stepped back from Calleigh and her twin.

"Ash? What's wrong?" Calleigh asked.

"You were my furiend." Ash said.

"Ash." Cole began.

"Get away from me! I don't know you anymore!" Ash said to the twins.

Ash gave his mother a pained looked then took off running down the street. Calleigh turned to follow, but Victor grabbed her by the arm. He just shook his head when she looked at him. Calleigh looked to her brother with tears in her eyes.

"What have we done?" she croaked.

\* \* \*

*ASH* ran down the sidewalk at top speed. Tears streamed from his eyes; his fur ruffled in the wind as he ran. The long red coat he was wearing flowed behind him. Ash ran and ran. He pushed anyfur that got in front of him out of his way. Ash hurdled over some small kids squatting in the middle of the sidewalk. Furs looked up from their daily chores to watch Ash run by. Fur children tried to give chase but were soon tired by the pace that Ash had set. Ash looked ahead of him and saw a band of furs roughly his own age. They were standing on the corner.

## *RISING ASH*

They each had a cigarette and were harassing anyfur that got too close. They were in his way, too.

Ash slowed his pace to a brisk walk then stopped when he reached the furs. They were hounding a young heifer. They stopped shoving her back and forth when they saw Ash. One of the furs drew a butterfly pocketknife and approached Ash. The fur flipped butterfly knife around a little until the blade was exposed. He swung the knife. Ash grabbed him by the wrist. Ash began to twist the furs hand back around the wrong way until he let go of the knife. The knife fell into Ash's right paw then he kicked the fur in the chest. He flipped the knife around to close it then threw it and hit one of the other furs in the head.

Ash advanced on the other five. One large horse pulled out a lead pipe and swung it at Ash's head. Ash ducked and planted his fist in the horse's gut. Spinning around, he kicked an attacking bear in the head sending him slamming into the lamppost. One of the remaining furs, the one holding the girlfur, ordered the other two forward. The two furs, both foxes like Ash, stood on either side of him. Ash looked from one to the other. The one to his left attacked first. Ash ducked out of the way and retrieved the pipe the horse had tried to bash his skull in with. The two foxes advanced. Ash moved in and hit one in the stomach with the pipe then kicked the other in the shin. Grabbing one, Ash hit him several times with the pipe then threw him into the second fox.

Ash moved to the last fur. He shoved the girl away and lunged at Ash with a blackjack. Ash grabbed him by the throat and took away his weapon. With the blackjack, Ash beat the fur for a couple minutes then threw him to the ground. Ash tossed the blackjack aside and stepped over the fur. He bent down and grabbed him around the collar and lifted him from the ground. Ash got right in his face.

## *RISING ASH*

“Are you the leader?” Ash asked him.

The fur nodded his head slowly.

“Is one of these cars yours?” he asked looking around.

The fur nodded again.

“Which one?” Ash growled.

The fur pointed to a late model sports car on the far side of the road. Ash threw the fur away and looked at the car. Ash raised his right paw and it began to glow with green energy.

“This is what you get for harassing that poor girlfur.” Ash stated.

With a flick of his arm, a green energy blast flew from Ash’s paw. The blast collided with the hood of the car. The front end of the sports car blossomed into bright orange and green flames. The angered fur started rise from the ground. Ash turned and kicked him in the muzzle. The fur flipped over and landed on his back. Ash turned and moved to the cowering heifer. Ash leaned over and offered her his paw. The cowgirl looked up at him with fear in her eyes. She tried to crawl away from his outstretched paw. Ash’s left ear flopped over in a show of confusion.

“What’s the matter?” Ash asked.

“Please don’t hurt me.” The heifer pleaded.

“I’m not going to hurt you.”

“Take whatever you want just please don’t harm me.”

“But...”

The bovine girl began to sob harder than before. Ash straightened and took a step back from her. Ash looked down at the seven furs lying on the ground. He was not sure if any of them were dead or not. Ash thought he might have hit one or two of them harder than necessary.

## *RISING ASH*

Ash looked across the street at the burning car. *What if somefur had gotten hurt*, Ash thought. Ash closed his eyes and lowered his head. He clenched his fists and growled under his breath at himself. He heard boots scraping the sidewalk and looked up. A police officer stood in front of him with his gun pointing at Ash. The officer ordered him to freeze. Ash looked back to the ground.

“I am a monster,” he muttered under his breath.

Despite the officer’s warnings, Ash turned and ran out into the street. The officer took a step forward, but stopped. Ash kicked off from the pavement and soared high into the air. The distraught fox flew away out of the officer’s range of sight. The officer approached the scared cowgirl.

“It’s okay, now. You’re safe. The bad fur’s gone.” the officer said soothingly.

*END PART 1*