

~Two years after Rising Ash~

FALLING ASH

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The following contains content of an adult nature, including, but not limited to, adult language and content and fantasy violence

If you have comments, send them to ashen.angelfox@gmail.com.

PART 1

ASH walked down a sidewalk in downtown Furrstown with his little brother, Micah. The two foxes were there to do some Christmas shopping. They were discussing what each other should get for their girlfriends. Ash was now officially seeing Calleigh, a wolfgirl with grey-brown fur. Cole, her twin brother, went so far as to say that they were going steady. Micah had become interested in a girlfur very different from himself. Cassie Archer. She was a black panther and she was beautiful. She was very well behaved when around adults, but more like Micah when none were around. Ash and Micah's parents approved of her and had even invited her over for Christmas dinner along with her family. Calleigh, Cole and Zach were also coming over for dinner. Ash and Micah stopped in a jewelry store to look at a necklace for Calleigh.

"Okay, we'll look in here for a bit then we'll head to our next stop." Ash said.

"Cool, I'm gonna go in that new earring place down on the corner when we're finished here." Micah responded.

"Suits me. You wanna just wait here or are you gonna look around?"

"I think I'll look around. Don't worry. I won't touch anything."

"Good boy."

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Ash patted his brother on the shoulder and walked over to the clerk at the counter. Ash told him what he was interested in and clerk brought out few prospective buys. Ash looked at the necklaces trying to decide. Micah walked around the shop, careful not to bump into anything. He kept his tail close to his body to keep it from swishing about too much. He glanced over at Ash then down at his wrist. He was checking the time, but there was no watch there to look at. Micah was born with a self-contained magical power source. He uses it to tell what the exact time is at any moment. He looks at his wrist out of reflex. He has not told his girlfriend, but she thinks it's cute. So, he does too. He looked up. Ash was slipping something into his inside jacket pocket and taking a receipt from the clerk. Ash turned and pointed towards the door.

Micah was outside before Ash. Ash walked out and turned left to follow Micah up the sidewalk and into the new earring shop. Micah moved from turnstile to turnstile. Ash could have sworn that he looked at every single pair of earrings in the place. Ash leaned against a bare part of the wall and looked at the padding of his right paw. The marking on his paw was still there, but it was different. And, best of all, it no longer caused him any pain. It was the only external evidence that he was bonded to an angel. A powerful, fox angel named Un. When he touched the mark, Ash got the feeling that something terrible was going to happen soon. Micah came over and poked him in the arm. Ash looked at him. He held a small plastic bag in his left paw.

“Ready to go?” Ash asked.

“Yeppers!” answered Micah.

Ash and Micah left downtown and headed back home. The feeling of dread stayed with Ash the entire way, but he tried not to show it. Ash got the impression that he was not doing a

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great job as Micah kept throwing concerned stares his way. The fur on the back of Ash's neck suddenly stood on end. He stopped dead in his tracks and looked around. Micah walked a few paces ahead then turned around. He cocked his head to one side and gave Ash a quizzical look. Ash looked worried. Micah started sniffing the air, hoping to get a clue to what had his brother spooked. Micah turned with his back to Ash and looked up the street. That's when it happened.

A monster shimmered into existence. It was about Ash's height, but it had four arms. The thing grappled with Ash. Ash gargled in the back of his throat as he was being choked by the lower set of arms. Ash's gargling alerted Micah that something was wrong. Micah spun around and saw the monster. He stuffed the earrings in his coat pocket and charge two golden energy blasts. Micah threw the blasts at the creature. The blasts hit it on the left side. The monster turned its head and glared at Micah. A black energy blast formed in the thing's mouth. Ash punched the creature on the nose before it could fire the blast. The creature roared at Ash.

With the tip of its tail, the monster created a dimensional rift behind him and threw Ash in. Micah attacked just as the portal closed. The monster vanished, laughing. Micah looked around for the creature. The little foxboy turned left and right, searching for his brother. Ash was nowhere to be found. Tears began to well up in Micah's eyes. Micah dropped to his knees and cried into his paws. Anger boiled up inside Micah. Anger with the monster for taking his brother. Anger with himself for not being able to save him. Micah lifted up his face skyward and howled.

“ASH!”

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A portal from a different world opened up over a park in the heart of a large city. Ash fell out of the portal and fell towards the ground. He tumbled through a tree, bouncing off limbs before finally crashing to the ground. The felt case with Calleigh's Christmas present fell out of his coat. He raised his head and saw it. Blood ran into his eyes. Ash reached for the necklace case. He closed his paw around the soft exterior. He heard somefur or something walking up from just out of his range of vision. He heard voices. Then, everything went black and silent. Ash knew no more for a long time.

* * *

MICAH sat on the couch in his house and cried as his mother held him and stroked his headfur. Jesse, his father, was pacing the floor trying to reach Ash on his cellphone. There was no answer. Jesse closed the phone and ran one paw through his headfur. He flipped the phone open and began dialing another number. Lilia watched her husband as the phone rang. It rang a couple more times. Jesses looked out the window. Lilia looked at the back of his head.

“Yes? May I speak with Calleigh?” Jesse said.

He waited for a few minutes. Jesse began to wonder if he was doing the right thing.

“Hello, Calleigh. Would it be possible for you to come over quickly? Great. And, bring your brothers with you. Okay. Good. See you then.”

Jesse hung up the phone and sat down in the chair by the couch. Micah sniffed a couple times and sat up. He looked from his mother to his father. Jesse gave him an encouraging look. There came a knock at the door. Micah rose from the couch and walked into the entrance hall. Before he opened the door, Micah wiped away the tears that had run into his fur. He turned the

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knob and pulled the door back. Calleigh, Cole and Zach stood on the porch. Calleigh smiled at Micah then saw the saddened expression in his eyes.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Micah. Bring them in here.” Jesse called from the living room.

Micah turned and walked back into the living room. Calleigh threw a worried glance back at her brothers then followed the little fox. Cole and Zach glanced at each other then followed Calleigh into the living room. Jesse was sitting in one of the chairs. He had a pained look on his face. Lilia sat on the couch with her arm around Micah’s shoulders. Micah sat looking down with his arms draped between his legs. Ash was... Calleigh looked around the room. Ash was nowhere to be seen. Calleigh lowered herself slowly into the chair across from Jesse. Cole looked at his sister as she shivered in the chair. Zach knelt beside her and began stroking her arm.

“Where’s Ash?” Cole asked bluntly.

“We don’t know.” Jesse said.

“We were walking back from town,” Micah began, “Ash was attacked by a monster. I tried to help him, but I wasn’t strong enough. That thing tossed him through a dimensional gateway. And, it’s all my fault.”

“You shouldn’t say things like that, Micah.” Zach said comfortingly.

“What do you know!? You weren’t there!” Micah cried.

Micah jumped up and ran out of the room. The others heard him ran up the staircase. A door slammed upstairs. Zach looked helplessly at Lilia and Jesse. Jesse hung his head. Calleigh rose from her chair and went upstairs to talk with Micah. She stopped in front of his door. Calleigh took a deep breath and knocked on the door. A tiny voice from inside told her to enter.

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She pushed back the door and saw Micah huddled on the floor. Micah looked up at her. Tears were streaming from his golden eyes. Calleigh walked over and sat down beside him. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and held him. She placed her chin on the top of his head and rocked him back and forth. She did not tell him not to cry or to act his age. She just sat there beside him, silently keeping his company.

* * *

ASH began to hear strange noises. The sounds were muffled though, as if on the other side of a door or a window. He sat motionless on a cold, stone surface. His left shoulder was pressed against a peculiarly smooth surface. He opened his eyes and looked around. On his right there was a stone wall, like a cliff, but it was only about nine feet high. He was sitting on a strange surface cover in dirt and rocks. The far wall was smooth and painted a forest green color. The wall he leaned against and the one to his left were large glass windows. Warm, yellow light shown down on him from artificial lighting built into the ceiling. Ash saw movement out the corner of his eye. He turned his head to see what it was. His eyes widened at what he saw.

On the other side of the glass wall, there were strange creatures looking at him. They were pointing and staring at him. The creatures varied in size and shape. They had no muzzles and their ears were round and on the sides of their heads. The only fur on their bodies as far as Ash could tell was on the top of their heads. A few walked around with fur around their mouths. It did not seem as any of them had tails. They were not furs, whatever they were. Small ones bustled around close to the glass windows. They pointed and grinned. Some pressed their faces to the glass and contorted them into horrific expressions. A batch of females, possibly teenagers,

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was standing clumped together giggling and pointing. Ash wondered what they were laughing at. And, for the first time, Ash realized just how cold he was.

He was sitting in this glass display case completely naked. All of his clothes were gone. His rings, bracelets and necklace were gone. Even the earring in his left ear was missing. Ash sat up and drew his legs close to his chest and wrapped his arms around his knees. His tail lie curled around him on the ground. Ash lowered his head to hide his eyes. His ears flopped over as a sign of sorrow. Slowly, as he sat shivering, Ash began to cry into the fur on his knees. He was lost in a place where to the inhabitants he was nothing more than something different to look at. The thought that he might be trapped in this place for the rest of his life made him cry even harder.

“Calleigh...” he muttered.



CALLEIGH'S eyes shot open. She had fallen asleep on the couch. She sat up and looked around the room. Jesse, Cole, Zach and Victor were still sitting in their meditation circle. They had hoped that by putting their mental powers together they could at least contact Ash and communicate with him. Calleigh could hear Lilia in the kitchen trying to keep herself busy. Micah was not in the living room. Calleigh rose from the couch silently and walked into the kitchen. Micah was sitting at the table with a glass of milk sitting in front of him. He looked up and smiled at Calleigh as she walked in. Lilia closed the oven and straightened up. She smiled at Calleigh and removed her oven mitts.

“All most done.” Lilia mused.

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“They smell great, Mom.” Micah said looking up at her.

“Yes, they do.” Calleigh agreed.

“How’re the guys comin’ along?” Lilia asked.

“Dunno. I didn’t bother them.” Calleigh admitted.

“Probably shouldn’t disturb them anyway.” offered Lilia, “You wanna glass of milk?”

“Please.” Calleigh said.

Lilia moved to the refrigerator and got out the half-full carton of milk. Micah jumped up and retrieved a clean glass from the dish strainer and placed it on the table. Micah then moved to the cupboard and grabbed three saucers for them to sit their cookies on. The timer went off just as Lilia finished pouring Calleigh a glass of milk. Replacing the mitts, Lilia opened the oven and pulled out the tray of cookies. She picked up a spatula and transferred the cookies onto a large platter. Micah lifted the platter and placed it on the table as Lilia put the next batch in the oven. Lilia set the timer and sat down at the table. Calleigh reached for a cookie and set it on the saucer in front of her.

Lilia and Micah were silent for a few minutes. Calleigh waited to eat the cookie when they began. She found out later that chocolate chip cookies were Ash’s favorite kind of cookie. Calleigh wondered for a moment if she would ever see Ash again. She scolded herself for thinking such a terrible thing. Shaking herself from the thought, Calleigh lifted the cookie and took a bite of it. It was warm. The chocolate chips melted in her mouth as she chewed the cookie slowly. For a few minutes, the three furs sat in silence eating the fresh cookies. Micah sat in his chair and did not say anything at all. If not for the external signs of his breathing, one would think Micah had died. Lilia and Calleigh exchanged knowing glances.

“How you holdin’ up, Micah?” Calleigh asked.

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“I’ve been better.” Micah admitted.

“We all have. Don’t worry, we’ll find him.” Calleigh soothed.

“I hope so,” Micah said, “I just help thinking it’s somehow my fault.”

“You did all you could.” Lilia said.

“Besides, from the way you described the creature, it was a pretty powerful monster,” Calleigh comforted, “You were lucky it didn’t tear you apart then and there.”

“I know.” Micah said.

Cole walked into the kitchen. He saw the platter of cookies and became hungry. He started to reach for a cookie, but remembered what he had been sent in here for.

“Micah. Could you come in here for a second?” asked Cole.

“Sure.” Micah said standing up.

“We’ll have him back before you know it.” Cole said slipping out.

Calleigh and Lilia were now alone. Lilia looked across the table at Calleigh. Calleigh looked into her eyes and knew what she was thinking.

“How are you handling this?” Lilia asked.

“I miss him,” Calleigh said, “I miss him, a lot.”

“I know. We all do. He’ll come back to us.”

“I’m sure you’re right. I hope you’re right.”

“I hope so, too.”

“Girls! Come in here a sec.” Jesse called from the living room.

Calleigh and Lilia exchanged inquisitive glances and rose from the table. They walked into the living room to see what Jesse had wanted. They found Micah sitting in the center of the circle formed by Jesse, Victor, Cole and Zach. Micah’s eyes were wide and distant. His fur

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rippled as waves of golden energy pulsed over him. Calleigh noticed that his mouth was moving ever so slightly. Calleigh and Lilia sat down on the couch and waited for something to happen. Micah began to mumble something unintelligible. It was a chant to grant him the ability to look into other dimensions. The only problem was that Micah would have to know what dimension to look for. And, he didn't.

“Ash. Where are you?” Calleigh muttered.

* * *

ASH sat huddled against the artificial cliff wall. He had no idea as to how long he had been locked in this glass prison. It could have been days, or even weeks. All Ash knew was that he was cold and hungry. A bowl of water was placed in the cell with him every so often, but no food. Ash wondered if these strange creatures were trying to kill him slowly for their own enjoyment. Ash looked around at the faces pressed against the glass wall. There was a group of twenty or thirty of the smaller creatures with two adult females standing at the back of the crowd. Ash thought they might be a class of kits on a field trip. The small ones tapped against the glass and stared at him. Some seemed to be laughing. One kit stood against the glass and smiled at him when he looked.

The kit was female, or at least that's what he gathered from the way she was dressed. Ash looked at her for a few minutes then smiled back. He looked away from her when he saw something move out the corner of his eye. The door on the right wall opened and an arm reached in. The arm held a bowl of water, which it sat on the ground just inside the door. Ash watched as the door closed again. He stared down at the bowl of water. Ash looked back at the kits on

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the other side of the glass. The little female was still there smiling at him. Ash watched the kits for a while then noticed something was happening. The expression on the little kit's face changed, as the males around her became rowdy. Ash was not sure, but he thought that the males were taunting her.

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Four boys stood around the small girl. They were teasing her and calling her names. The teacher told them numerous times to quiet down. The door to the indoor exhibit opened and a man walked in. He was a doctor who worked for the zoo. He specialized in rare species. His name was Harry Richardson. He walked over to the teacher and the chaperone that stood near the far wall.

"Ms. Carter." he said.

"Dr. Richardson. Thank you for letting me bring my students." said Ms. Carter.

"Don't mention it," he began then under his breathe, "Really, don't mention it."

Snippets of a conversation between a few students drifted towards him. He heard the tiny voices of four boys and one girl. He turned to try to see where the words were coming from. He spotted them standing at the glass window. The boys were harassing the girl about something.

"Monster lover!" one boy said.

"I am not!" the girl protested.

"Caitlin's in love with a monster." another boy said.

"I am not in love with him," Caitlin began, "And, he is not a monster."

"You say!" a third boy exclaimed.

"Look at him. He's alone and scared." Caitlin stated.

"Well, boo hoo for him." the fourth boy sighed.

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“How would you like it if we stuck you in a glass box for everyone to look at?” Caitlin said, “You wouldn’t!”

This statement seemed to set the boys off. They started pushing Caitlin around a little bit. They continued calling her names as she cried for help. Dr. Richardson looked at Ms. Carter and the chaperone. He was appalled to see that they seemed less than interested that the poor little girl was being treated this way. Dr. Richardson was determined to put an end to it. Before he could turn back to stop the boys, there was a loud thud as the dish of water was thrown against the glass wall. He looked at the creature on display. It was rising to its feet and moving towards the glass window. Dr. Richardson could only imagine what it was going to do.

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Ash watched as the four males harassed the young female. He decided to do something to stop it. Reaching forward *Ash* grabbed the bowl of water and hurled it at the glass window. The glass did not break, but it created a loud enough thud that stopped the kits pestering of the female. *Ash* rose from the ground and walked towards the glass window. Something was wrong. His legs hurt so bad he almost collapsed for he reached the glass. The kits started laughing and pointing again. The little female looked helplessly up into *Ash*’s eyes. The males began teasing her again, now they also pulled on her hair. Anger rose up inside *Ash*. He clenched his paws into fists and began beating them against the glass wall. He screamed for the young female to be left alone. *Ash* punched the glass continuously. He punched it until blood ran from his knuckles.

The door in the wall opened behind him. *Ash* jerked his head around to look. One of those creatures, an adult male, strode into the cell. He carried a billy club in his right hand. *Ash* narrowed his eyes and glared at the creature before him. *Ash* turned back and looked down at

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the little female. She put her small, left hand to the glass in silent plea. Ash placed his right paw against the glass, leaving a bloodstain when he moved it. The male with the club came up behind him.

“Are you going to be good about this and do what I tell you, or are you gonna make me hurt you?” the male asked.

Ash lowered his head and smiled to himself. The male did not wait for a reply. He came up behind Ash and hit him on the side of his head with the club. He raised the club again, but did not get the chance to swing it another time. Ash stood up from where he had fallen and rushed the male. Ash planted his fist in the creature’s stomach. The creature swung at Ash with his right arm, but Ash ducked around behind him. The male pivoted on his left foot and brought his left arm around behind him. Ash grabbed the thing’s wrist with his left paw and hit him in the chest. Then Ash wrapped his right arm around the creature’s left, placing his paw under the thing’s chin. With a twist of his arm and a flick of his wrist, Ash sent the creature spiraling through the air.

As the first creature landed with a crash, the door opened and a second creature entered. This one was female and also carried a club. She swung the club at Ash’s head. Ash dropped down and swung one of his legs out to trip her. The female also fell to the ground. The male rose to his hands and knees. Ash glanced out the glass window and saw a door at the far end of the corridor. Thinking fast, Ash grabbed the male by his lapels as he rose and spun him around. Carrying through on the motion, Ash released the male sending him through the glass window. Shards of glass rained down on the kits. Ash regretted having to do that, but he needed to escape. Ash jumped out onto the cold stone floor.

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The door on his right burst open. Two more armed males rushed in, but these carried guns instead of clubs. The closest leveled his gun at Ash's chest and pulled back the hammer. Ash turned and ran towards the far door. The corridor was longer than he had originally believed. A voice called from behind him then there was a gunshot. An excruciating pain shot through Ash's back as the speeding bullet entered his body. Ash stumbled and fell against the door. He slid down to his knees. Blood matted the fur on his back. Ash heard footsteps coming up behind him. There was the click of a gun being cocked. There was another voice, different than from before.

“Stop! You've already shot him once!” the voice said.

“Get up!” ordered the first voice.

Ash struggled to his feet and turned to face the creature with the gun. Ash gasped for air. There was a chance that the bullet had punctured his right lung. Ash stared down the barrel of the creature's handgun. The source of the second voice, a male wearing a short-sleeved khaki shirt, stood at the shooter's shoulder. Ash looked from one to the other then made his move. He took two quick steps towards the shooter but got no further. There was another shot and a second bullet ripped through Ash's left shoulder. Ash stumbled backwards. He heard what sounded like a kit crying. Ash ignored the sound and took a step forward. The shooter fired again. The third bullet entered Ash just to the left of his heart. Ash fell backwards against the door and collapsed to the floor. As the room began to spin, Ash decided to stay where he was. He had given up. For now.

“Calleigh...” he breathed.

* * *

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CALLEIGH'S eyes fluttered open. Jesses and Zach stood over her. She was lying on the couch with a blanket over her legs. She looked around confusedly. Micah was sitting in the chair furthest from the couch. He looked worried. Calleigh tried to sit up but the pain was too great. Suddenly she realized that she had no reason to be in pain. No fur had hit her that she remembered.

“What happened?” Calleigh asked rubbing her shoulder.

“We were kinda hoping you could tell us.” Zach said matter-of-factly.

“Sorry.” Calleigh muttered.

“You okay?” Cole asked as he entered the room.

“No,” Calleigh moaned, “But, I...”

“What is it?” Micah asked.

“Strange. The pains gone.” Calleigh said.

“Just like that?” Jesse said skeptically.

“Just like that.” responded Calleigh.

Jesse furrowed his brow at this perplexing revelation. Jesse stood and walked around to the other side of the coffee table. He sat down on the floor and crossed his legs. He closed his eyes and began to meditate. Calleigh looked around the room once more. She heard the sounds of Lilia working in the kitchen. Victor was nowhere to be seen, however. Calleigh sat upright now that the pain had disappeared. She raised her left arm and stretched the muscles in her shoulder. There was no pain. Before, the pain had made her lose consciousness, but now there was none. She did not understand it. There was a slight buzzing in her ear, as if somefur where whispering to her. She quieted her mind and listened. The words became clearer. The buzzing turned into a single word being whispered over and over again.

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Calleigh... Calleigh...

Calleigh took a short breath and held it. The voice in her ear was repeating her name. She concentrated on the voice to try and identify it. Calleigh closed her eyes and cleared her mind. She sought for the voice. Her mind raced from one fur to the next trying to match the voice with one from her past. She searched and she found. The voice belonged to Ash. Somewhere out in the cosmos, her love was calling out to her. Now, all she had to do was find him and save him. Calleigh glanced over at Micah. He sat in the chair and stared off into space. Calleigh looked at him. Except for his golden eyes, Micah looked just like his brother.

That thought brought a tear to Calleigh's eye. She sniffed softly, but not soft enough to escape the notice of probing fox ears. Micah turned his head and looked at Calleigh. The expression on his face was the same one Ash would give her when he was worried about her. Micah opened his mouth to speak, but no words would come. He was saved when the door burst open and Victor strode into the house. Victor walked over and knelt down beside Jesse and whispered something to him. Jesse's eyes shot opened. He turned his head and looked at Victor.

"Are they sure?" Jesse asked.

"What is it?" Calleigh interrupted.

"There's been another sighting of the monster that took Ash." Victor said.

"Where?" Micah said jumping to his feet.

"In the mountains west of here." Victor answered.

"Those mountains are a hundred miles away!" Zach exclaimed.

"Do we know where it is now?" Cole asked.

"No," said Victor, "It attacked a patrol then vanished. The council believes that it's planning something big. What that is exactly, they aren't sure."

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Sorrow showed on Calleigh's face. Micah set his jaw and lowered his head. Calleigh looked at Micah. His paws curled in fists and began to shake. Calleigh watched him. He started to shake all over. Micah tried to speak again but the words stuck in his throat. Jesse and Victor turned their attention on Micah and waited for him to speak. He didn't. Micah jumped up from the chair and stormed out of the living room. Jesse rose from the floor and followed after him. Calleigh and the others heard Jesse call out Micah's name three times. Then they heard the back door open and close. Calleigh listened and heard Lilia speaking with Jesse. Calleigh couldn't make out what she was saying but the tone of her voice gave Calleigh an idea. Lilia was probably trying to convince Jesse to let Micah be alone for a while. Jesse walked back in the room and sat down in the now empty chair. He put his head in his paws and sighed.

"He's just like his brother." Jesse murmured.

* * *

HE opened his eyes. Ash found himself back in the glass display case. More of those creatures bustled back and forth around him and through the entire building. Ash sighed and looked around the little room to see if anything had changed. When he turned his head, pain shot through his neck. He reached up to rub it and found a metal band around his neck. These things had fit him with a collar after his first attempt at escape. Ash figured that the collar was electronically wired to something and would give him an electric shock should he try to escape. But, Ash was sure that he would not *try* to escape again. He would escape. He would get out of this box and find his way back to Calleigh and Micah.

Ash stared blankly out the glass wall across from himself for a few minutes. He watched as creatures of all shapes and sizes pressed their revolting faces to the glass. Ash looked away

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from the glass and saw a fresh bowl of water sitting on the ground beside him. He stared at the water for a moment then looked at the door in the wall. He wondered if any of those creatures out actually cared what happened to him. One, perhaps. The male in the coat that tried to keep him from being shot again. Though, that had not worked out the way the creature had intended it. Ash had been shot two more times after the first bullet penetrated his back.

Ash decided to get up and walk around as his legs were starting to fall asleep. He did not enjoy being on display like this for these strange creatures. However, he needed to stretch his legs so he rose from the ground and started pacing his cell. Ash folded his arms over his chest. Something tugged at the fur on his back and left shoulder. He looked and saw a piece of gauze held to his shoulder by medical tape. When he looked down, Ash saw another gauze pad on his left pectoral muscle. There was a bloodstain in the center of the pad. Ash reached around with his left paw and felt the pad on his back. His ear twitched as the medical tape on his shoulder pulled out more hairs. Ash lowered his arm and walked around some more. He tried not to look out the glass at the beings watching him from the other side.

The door in the wall opened. Ash stopped walking and looked at the creature standing in the doorway. It was a female he had not seen before. She had blonde hair and green eyes. She wore navy blue slacks and a beige shirt. Her hair hung in a long braid down her back. She wore latex gloves on her hands and carried a tray with some medical supplies on it. She knelt on the ground and looked up at Ash. Ash's ears twitched in suspicion. He walked over and sat down in front of her. She looked him in the eyes and adjusted the gloves. Ash looked down at the implements on the tray. There was a pair of small scissors and another roll of gauze and medical tape. She was here to change the bandages.

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“I’m Julie. I’m here to change the dressing on your wounds.” she said, “Do you understand me?”

Ash sat with his paws folded in his lap and waited. He looked into her eyes.

“Of course, you do. Now, for my next question. Do you trust me?”

Ash continued to look at her, but said nothing.

“Well, if you don’t, you should. You don’t know this, but I would rather not have you in the plexiglass prison. And, of course, there’s Dr. Richardson. He’s the doc that removed bullets. He saw something he thought was strange. The bullet that went in your back should have punctured your right lung.”

Julie paused and looked Ash in the face. A crooked smile appeared on her face as she shook her head in the negative.

“The bullet never touched the lung. You probably exhaled at the exact moment it happened and your lung contracted out of the way. Sounds weird, I know, but it was the best we could think of. Unless there’s something you can tell me?”

The female waited again. Ash looked away for a moment. A crowd had gathered outside the glass window. The female glanced in the direction Ash was looking then rose to her feet. She walked to the door and opened it. Reaching outside she pressed a button. The glass walls frosted over instantly. Julie came back in and closed the door. She smiled at Ash then sat down on the ground.

“How’s that? Better? Well, anyway. Just so you know; if Dr. Richardson had had his way, you wouldn’t be in here. Nope, he would have had you put up in the back room with a comfortable cot with sheets to sleep in. However, the Director threatened to get rid of the doc if he didn’t give in. Harry would have left, too, except there are a lot of animals here that he cares

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for. And, the guy that would have gotten his job is in it for the money, not the joy of working with the animals. Listen to me. I talk too much. I should change these bandages.”

Julie reached down and lifted the pair of scissors. She cut another piece of gauze and two pieces of medical tape. She reached up to remove the bandage on Ash’s shoulder. Ash’s right paw shot up and grabbed her wrist. Julie froze. She looked at Ash. His ears flopped to the sides.

“Wait.” he said.

“I knew it,” Julie muttered, “You can talk.”

“Yeah.”

“Well, what’s wrong? Do you not trust me?”

“I have no reason to. But, that’s not it.”

“Then, what?”

Ash sighed and released Julie. He reached up and grabbed the gauze bandage. Ash gritted his teeth and jerked the bandage off. Four little areas where fur had been ripped out were left. The flesh underneath the fur was red. What caught Julie’s eye was the fact that the scar from gunshot wound was gone. As she watched, the four patches of skin were instantly replaced with new hairs. The hairs grew to the length of the surrounding pelt and ceased. The color was the exact same one. Ash looked at Julie then pulled off the bandage on his chest. The bullet wound there was also gone. The fur re-grew and was as new. She stood and walked around behind Ash. Kneeling down she carefully removed the gauze pad taped to his back. The wound here was also gone.

Julie rose and walked back around to face Ash. She looked him in the eye. She opened her mouth to speak, but could not find words. She sat down on the ground and looked to one

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side. She chuckled and shook her head. Ash looked at her for a moment. He was slightly puzzled at her behavior.

“Are you alright?” Ash asked.

“Guess I should have known better, huh?” Julie murmured.

“How d’you mean?”

“Well, you are definitely not from around here. I mean it kinda figures that you would be special in some way, wouldn’t it?”

“There aren’t many like me where I come from. I might be one of a kind.”

“Wow. Rapid healing. That could really come in handy. Oh God!”

“What?”

“We can’t let the director find out. He’d try to find a way to mimic that ability in humans using your blood.”

“Humans?” Ash raised his left eyebrow, his left ear stood straight up while his right flopped over.

“Do you not have humans where you come from?”

“No. Where I come from all we have are furs.”

“Furs? Interesting. So, no humans?”

“No.”

There was a thud against the glass wall.

“The natives are restless.” Julie said, “Okay, about the healing thing. We can’t let the Director know, so here’s what we’re gonna do. I’m gonna replace the bandages. They’re just for show. You see where I’m headed with this?”

“I got you.”

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Julie replaced the bandages where Ash's wounds should have been. Ash did not say anything. He could not help but wonder if this female human had another motive behind her generosity. Ash rolled his eyes at that thought. He knew she was sincere; he had become quite good at reading furs. *But, she's not a fur*, Ash thought. He began to doubt his safety in the presence of these humans. Could he really ever come to trust any of them? Julie finished replacing the bandages then rose. She walked to the door and opened it. She stepped outside. She smiled back at Ash then reached to close the door. A large male walked up behind her. He seemed angry about something. The door slammed shut and the walls unfrosted. Ash was left sitting in the middle of the ground with numerous pairs of human eyes looking in on him. Ash closed his eyes and lowered his head. His mind began race until in focused on the image of his younger brother. In his mind, Micah was flying through the air with tears streaming from his eyes.

"Micah..." Ash murmured.

* * *

MICAH soared through the night sky. Golden energy streamed along behind him as he flew high above the ground. He was not sure where he was, but he had been gone a long time. Micah was definitely not thinking straight. He could not even figure out why he had stormed out of his house, let alone run from his father. It did not make any sense. Micah began to cry. He missed his brother terribly. And, the monster that had taken Ash from him was nowhere to be found. Micah looked below him. A mountain range had begun to streak past underneath him. Micah

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stopped and looked behind him. He knew where he was. He was over the same mountains that the monster had been spotted in. He turned and flew straight down into the mountains.

Micah touched down on the side of one of the smaller mountains. He looked around and wondered how he was going to find the monster that had separated him from his brother. Micah thought back to that day and remembered that he had hit the creature with an energy blast. Perhaps the creature would sense him and come looking. Micah decided to sit back and wait. He knew it was not the brightest of ideas, but it was the only thing he could think of. Micah removed his sword from its sheath. He looked down at the katana clutched in his paws. Ash had given him this sword as a present for his seventeenth birthday. That thought made Micah feel worse than he already did. He might never see his brother again.

“And, it’s all my fault.” Micah scolded himself.

A noise came from behind Micah. He spun around and leveled his sword. He waited for what had made the noise to show itself. Some bushes further up the mountain rustled as a cold, winter breeze blew through it. Micah sighed and lowered his sword. He felt like laughing at himself for being so fidgety. Micah turned back and looked down at the base of the mountain. There was something moving in the trees. Micah could not make out what it was; only that it had wings. He watched as the first shadow moved closer to a second shadowy figure. The second shadow bowed low before the first. The wings on the first stretched out a little revealing their leather nature. Micah watched in silence, as the two figures seemed to be discussing something.

Micah looked around to see if there was an easy way for him to get closer without being spotted. His golden eyes landed on a boulder a ways down the mountain. There was nothing close to ensure that he was completely hidden the whole way down. He glanced back down

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towards the talking shadows. Their backs were turned towards him, so he decided to risk it. Micah started moving down the mountain. He tried to stay low. His luck had changed. The moon passed behind the clouds plunging the mountain into darkness. Now, Micah picked up his pace. He stumbled, but did not fall over or slide down the mountain. Micah froze when his ears picked up the sound of rolling rocks. Micah glanced in the direction of the shadows. A single pair of red eyes were glaring up in his direction. The clouds moved from in front of the moon.

Micah felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. He spun around and swung his sword. One of four scaly hands seized his wrist and twisted the sword from his grip. Micah looked up into the eyes of the monster that had taken his brother. One of the other hands shot out and wrapped around Micah's throat. Micah tried to struggle against the massive claws clutching his neck. The more he fought the tighter the grip became. Micah felt himself slipping away into unconsciousness. The monster grinned down at him.

“What have we here?” the monster said. “What should I do with you, little one?”

“Ash...” Micah muttered as he lost consciousness.

“Wait! Don't kill him. I have a better idea,” the first shadow said.

* * *

“*MICAH*,” Ash muttered in his sleep.

A violent image of his brother being brutally murdered flashed through his mind. Ash was wide-awake in a second. He sat up and looked around him. The walls were frosted over once again. Ash wondered what was going to happen next. He heard something outside fidgeting with the latch on the door. The door opened and a human male entered the room. He

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wore the same beige shirt and blue pants combination that Julie had. The male had short brown hair. In his arms, he carried a small four-legged creature. Ash looked and saw that it was a fox. The man sat the fox on the ground and it ran over and looked up at Ash. The fox's ears stood straight up and its tongue lolled out of its mouth. Ash smiled at the small animal.

"He seems to like you," the man said.

Ash just smiled and nodded his head. The man walked closer and sat down beside Ash. He removed a bag from his shoulder and placed it between Ash and himself. Ash looked down at the bag then back at the man. The man sat with his arms extended in front of him and his palms facing upwards. Ash took this as a sign that the man was not trying to trick him. Or, at least, that the man *wanted* Ash to think that. The man reached over and pulled back the flap and opened the bag for Ash to look in. The bag contained only a pair of jeans. Ash looked up at the man in surprise. The man smiled and reached into the bag. He pulled out the jeans and handed them to Ash.

"These are yours, I believe," the man said, "I'm Dr. Harry Richardson."

"Julie told me."

"Ah. She said you and her talked for a while. Well, there's something I need to tell you."

"What?"

"The Director of the zoo wants to put you on the news. They've already started getting ready for it. During the night, they put up curtains around outside the glass. He's called in a few reporters and camera crews and he's gonna show you to the world."

"Joy. So, what's with the fox?"

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“It was the Director’s idea. Not really sure what his point is. But, the fox likes you. You like him. So, it works out.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“I was hoping that I could convince you to do something to make the Director look bad. It might convince him to let you go.”

“Oh, I see. Well, maybe I’ll think of something.”

“Well, you better think quick. The press conference is tonight.”

“Okay.”

“Well, I should go. Is there anything I can get you?”

“A bowl of water.”

“I’ll bring one you two can share.”

“Even better.”

Dr. Richardson rose from the floor and left the room. He returned shortly with a bowl of water. The bowl itself was larger than the others Ash had been given. Ash thanked Dr. Richardson. Richardson nodded his head and left. Ash looked down at the fox in his arms. The fox looked back at him with its large innocent, golden eyes. The fox’s eyes reminded him of Micah. He put the fox on the ground. The fox trotted over to the bowl and drank a little. After its drink, the fox sat on the ground and looked at Ash. Ash smiled at the small animal as he stood up. Ash picked up the pair of jeans and unfolded them. They were indeed his own jeans. He could tell because on the back there was a loop for his tail to go through.

Ash stepped into the jeans and pulled them up over his naked legs. He zipped them up in the front and buttoned them. He frowned when he noticed that the jeans did not fit as they should have. He had lost some weight during his captivity. He shrugged and reached around in

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back. He pulled the piece of denim over his tail and buttoned it. He swished his tail around to make sure he had not caught any of the hairs in the button. He turned and looked at the fox. The fox opened its mouth and gave a joyful bark. Ash got down and stretched out on his belly and looked the little fox in the eyes. It walked closer and licked Ash on the nose. Ash smiled at the fox and scratched it behind his ear. Ash looked at the water bowl. An idea popped in his head.

“I have a plan. Will you help me?”

The little fox emitted an affirmative yip.

‡ ‡ ‡

Harry stood behind the Director as he prepared to debut the “fox-man” to the world. The Director had decided on what to call him despite the fact that the creature had a wallet on him when he was found. Inside the wallet they had found a driver’s license that said the creature’s name was Ash Reynolds. The Director did not care. To him, the helpless fox was just another mindless beast that the people needed to see. *Harry* glanced to his left and saw *Julie* standing with her arms crossed. She was as upset about this whole mess as *Harry* was. *Julie*, however, had not tried to undermine this. *Julie* had told *Harry* that the Director had confronted her about something earlier in the week. He had threatened her position at the zoo.

Harry had not told her about his plan to get the fox to do something to ruin this for the overzealous Director. The Director stood talking with the reporters. They were discussing where to position the cameras and the lightning to get the best view of the fox. *Harry* looked around the room at all those gathered. There were reporters and cameramen. There was a group of civilians milling about hoping to get a look at the creature. *Harry* could only hope that the fox had thought of something good. Something that people might never forget. The Director finished talking with the reporters and moved to stand in front of the curtain. He nodded to

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Harry and Julie. The two moved to their positions. Their task was to pull the curtain down on the Director's cue. They waited. A technician gave the signal and the press conference began.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I have asked you here to share with you a very important discovery. A new species. It is unlike anything we have ever seen, except in our imaginations. What you are about to see may shock you, but do not be alarmed.”

“What about the reports that the creature recently broke out and attacked two guards? Has anything been done to ensure it won't try again?”

“The reports of the breakout are true. We have had to resort to a rather unsavory means of keeping the creature under control. As you will see, there is a metal collar around its neck. If he tries anything, all I have to do is push a button and he'll calm right down. But, please hold your questions until after. Harry. Julie. If you'd please.”

Harry and Julie grabbed their respective ends of the curtain and pulled. The latches gave way easily and the curtain began to drop. Harry suddenly had a feeling of intense dread. The curtain fell. The glass windows were covered with words written in blood. The words formed a single message:

LET ME GO!

The fox sat against the wall and stared out at the gathered people. He looked at them with utter contempt. Harry looked around the room and saw the small fox he had carried in there earlier. The fox lay on the ground with its back towards the glass. It was completely motionless. Harry looked at the creature against the far wall. He raised his fists and beat them against the glass.

“Why?” he cried.

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The small fox on the ground sat up and looked around. It was alive. The fox looked at Harry then turned and trotted over to the creature. The creature lifted the fox from the ground and held it to his chest. Harry heaved a sigh of relief. He looked over and saw Julie standing with her hand over her heart. She had suffered a similar scare Harry had. It was not unusual, as Julie had found and cared for the fox. The Director grabbed Harry by the arm and pulled him to the side.

“Get that monster out of my zoo! Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes sir.” Harry said.

The Director stalked away to try and calm down the press. Harry looked over at Julie then through the glass at the fox-man within. Harry smiled at him and gave him a discrete thumbs-up in approval. Harry left the building and walked around to the side. He pressed the button to cause the glass windows to frost over. Harry opened the door on the side and looked in at the two foxes. He glanced around and saw the bowl he had brought earlier. There was no water in it. There was, however, a small quantity of blood in the bottom of the bowl. The fox jumped out of the creature’s arms and ran over to Harry. There was not a scratch on the little animal. The fox-man rose from the ground and walked over to the door.

“Am I free to go?”

“Yeah. C’mon, we’ll go get you the rest of your clothes.”

“I’d like to take a shower, if it’s not too much trouble.”

“It’s not. There’s a shower at the lab building. So, you know where you’re going?”

“Yes, but I don’t know how to get there.”

“Well, how did you get here?”

“You wouldn’t believe it.”

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“I wouldn’t have believed that something like you existed either, but we see how wrong I was. So, tell me.”

“A demon threw me through a dimensional portal and I ended up here.”

“A demon, huh?”

“Told you, you wouldn’t believe me.”

“I didn’t say I didn’t believe you. Here we are. The shower’s back there. You’re clothes will be right here when you’re ready.”

“Thank you.”

“I’ll excuse myself. I think I’ll give an couple old friends a call.”

Harry left the room and shut the door behind him. Ash walked over and looked in the box the contained his clothes. Everything was in there, including the felt case with the necklace he had bought for Calleigh. He lifted the case from the box and opened it. The necklace was still inside. He sighed in relief and put the case back in the box. Ash removed his jeans and folded them up neatly. He grabbed a towel that was sitting on the table and into the bathroom. Ash looked at himself in the mirror. He looked sick, as if he had come down with a cold. Ash chalked how he felt up to being starved for a week or more. Ash stepped into the shower and turned on the water.

After his shower, Ash shook off excess water and wrung out his tail. He walked back into the room to get dressed. He put on his long sleeve shirt and rolled up the sleeves. He put all his rings on the proper fingers and lip on his bracelets and watch. Ash picked his necklace up from the table and looked at it. He turned it over and looked on the back. He ran one padded finger over the names of his father and brother. He wondered how they were both holding up.

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There was a knock at the door then it opened. Julie stuck her head in the door. It seemed like she was trying not to look at Ash.

“Are you decent?” the woman asked.

“Yes.” Ash said smirking.

“I brought you some food.”

“Thanks.”

“You alright?”

“I’m just tired.”

“Maybe you should get some rest.”

“After I eat.”

Julie just nodded. She set the tray of food down in front of Ash. Julie moved around and sat across from Ash and watched him as he ate. He glanced up at her occasionally to see what she was thinking. Ash finished eating and pushed the tray of food out of the way. He folded his paws together on the table and looked Julie in the eye. Julie smiled back at him. Ash’s right paw began to tingle. He looked at the marking on his palm for a moment. *Something’s wrong*, Ash thought. Suddenly, his head started hurting. He felt as if there was a hammer pounding away at his brain. He lost his concentration for a moment, but one moment was all it took. His tail glowed and separated into nine tails. The throbbing in his head stopped. Julie was now standing beside Ash staring down at the eight new tails swishing back and forth.

The door opened and Harry walked in. His eyes widened when he saw the nine tails flopping against one another. Ash put his paws on either side of his head and cringed. His ears folded back against his head in a show of pain. His head pounded. He could not understand what was happening. His eyes burned so badly Ash could not see a thing. He squeezed his eyes

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shut and fought against the pain. Ash suddenly felt as if the room was spinning all around him. Every muscle in his body was on fire. Ash jerked backwards and fell to the floor with the stool he was sitting on. He hit the floor hard and rolled on to his side. With one paw on the floor, Ash struggled to his knees. The pain began to subside. A drop of blood fell from Ash's nose and splattered on the floor.

The pain was suddenly gone. Ash rolled over onto his back and began to breathe rapidly. He reached over with his left paw and wiped blood from around his nose. He sat up without any pain. Julie bent down with a small towel to wipe up the blood from the floor. Harry walked over and knelt beside Ash. He pulled a small flashlight from his pocket and shone the light in Ash's eyes. The light hurt his eyes at first, but Ash gradually became used to the light. Harry seemed satisfied at what he either saw or did not see. Ash blinked for a little after the light had been removed. He rubbed the back of his head where he hit the floor. Harry stood up and extended his right arm to help Ash up off the floor. Ash reached up and took the outstretched hand in his right paw. Together, they pulled Ash to his hindpaws.

“What was that?” Harry asked.

“I have no idea.” Ash answered.

* * *

LILIA was now the one pacing back and forth across the living room floor. Cole and Zach sat on the floor looking up at her each time she passed by. Calleigh sat huddled on the couch with her head resting on her knees. Jesse sat in one of the two chairs and watched his wife walk across the room. Lilia was worried about Micah. There had been no word from him since he had stormed out of the house the day before. A strong snow storm had rolled in since Micah's

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disappearance, as well. Everyfur was very worried about what had become of the young foxboy. Jesse shifted in his chair as he reached into his pants pocket for something. He pulled out a small silver ring with a polished tiger's eye gemstone set in the center. He rose from his chair and walked over to his wife. He put his arms around her and drew her close.

“I'm going to go look for him,” he whispered.

Lilia just nodded and squeezed her husband with both arms. They let go of one another. Jesse placed the ring on his finger. Orange energy flowed from the gemstone and coursed over his entire body. His clothing changed into the battle gear worn by all high-ranking members of the Order of Chowa. Calleigh got to her feet and placed her ring on. A purple haze surrounded her and her clothes changed as well. Calleigh walked around the coffee table and over to Jesse.

“I'm coming with you.” Calleigh stated.

“Okay. Zach, you and Cole stay here and wait for word from Victor.” Jesse said.

“Will do.” Cole said.

“Let's go.” Jesse said to Calleigh.

The two, canid warriors walked out of the back door of the house and soared into the air. The energy flowing around them gave off enough heat to keep them warm as they flew against the snowstorm. They flew east of the Reynolds' residence. They flew for a while, searching high and low for the distraught kit. The two even went to Micah's girlfriend's home. Cassie, his girlfriend, answered the door, but had not seen Micah since the day before Ash's disappearance. Jesse requested that she call his cell-phone if she saw Micah. The two canids walked away from the house. Once Cassie had closed the door to the house, Jesse and Calleigh kicked off and flew back towards their point of origin. They flew slower than they had before.

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Jesse gave a sigh. Calleigh suddenly had a thought and stopped in midair. Jesse stopped and looked back at her.

“I have an idea where he is!” she exclaimed.

“Where?” Jesse asked.

“The mountains. That’s where Victor said the monster was last spotted. He went to find it.”

“We have to hurry.”

With that, Jesse and Calleigh turned and shot off towards the mountains in the west. They flew as fast as they could. It took them a few hours to make it to the mountains. They began flying low enough to see into the trees and along the mountains. Jesse flew lower than Calleigh did. They scanned the landscape as they passed overhead. Calleigh spotted something stuck in the snow on the side of one of the mountains. She flew in and landed beside it. The thing was a sword that had been driven into the ground. Calleigh did not recognize the sword at first. She pulled it out of the ground and examined the blade. There was an inscription on the blade. Her eyes widened as she read it. The inscription read:

A fur's strength lies in his heart and his mind

Calleigh remembered the inscription as the one Ash had carved on the sword he gave to Micah on his seventeenth birthday. Calleigh flagged Jesse to the ground just as the storm picked up.

The canids began walking along the side of the mountain. The wind blew in more and more snow every minute. Any clues they might have found were being destroyed every moment. Calleigh and Jesse maintained a field of energy around themselves to keep them warm. Calleigh separated from Jesse and walked off by herself. Jesse trudged up the side of the

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mountain. He carried Micah's sword in one paw and held the other in front of his eyes. He reached a row of snow-covered bushes and turned around. Jesse looked down the mountain and saw Calleigh searching closer to the forest. He watched her trudge through the snow. With a sigh, Jesse turned his back on Calleigh and started up the side of the mountain. Calleigh walked through the deepening snow. She caught her ankle on something and fell forward.

Calleigh sat up and brushed snow out of the fur on her face. He reached forward to see what had caught hold of her leg. It was a paw. It was the paw of a fox. Calleigh quickly began pushing snow out of the way. She could feel her paws becoming numb as she dug them into the snow. She found the rest of the arm the paw belonged to. Calleigh recognized the leather bracer on the lower arm. She had found Micah. She grabbed his arm and started pulling. Slowly, Micah began to emerge from under nearly a foot of snow. Calleigh's eyes widened in horror when she saw the bloodstained snow underneath Micah's head. He did not seem to be breathing. Calleigh looked up and searched the side of the mountain for Jesse. She spotted him kneeling down in the snow. She tried shouting to him but the howling of the wind drowned her out. She charged a purple energy ball and hurled it up at Jesse. The blast struck him on his left shoulder. Jesse turned and saw Calleigh holding something large in her arms. Jesse flew down to her and saw that Calleigh was holding Micah.

"We have to get him to the hospital!" Calleigh yelled over the wind.

Jesse nodded to her and took his youngest son from her. He flew into the air and Calleigh followed. Jesse began to pick up speed. Calleigh was too cold to keep up with him, but she did her best. They flew into downtown Furrstown within an hour. The two touched down right in front of the entrance to the hospital. Ignoring the stairs, Jesse walked into the hospital

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and demanded to see a doctor. A middle-aged gorilla in blue scrubs and a lab coat walked over to him and looked at Micah.

“Bring him in here.” the doctor said.

Jesse carried Micah into the indicated room. The doctor asked him to wait outside while he examined him. Jesse walked back into the hall. Calleigh waited for him, still holding Micah’s sword. The bare blade drew worried stares from the staff and patients of the hospital. Jesse sat down in a chair against the wall and moved to put his head in his paws. He stopped before he could. Calleigh moved over and sat down beside him. She put her paw on his shoulder and looked down at his paws. They were covered in blood. Calleigh looked helplessly at the closed door that Micah was behind. Jesse began to cry as blood dripped from his paws and pooled on the floor. A nurse walked over to the pair. She carried a some rags and a spray bottle. She bent down and cleaned up the blood with one rag and handed the other to Jesse to wipe off his hands.

“Could you stay with him for a while?” Calleigh asked the nurse.

“Sure.” she replied.

“I’m gonna go get Lilia.” Calleigh said to Jesse.

Jesse only nodded. Calleigh looked at the nurse’s smiling face. The nurse was a young, slender chipmunk with large brown eyes. The chipmunk placed a paw on Calleigh’s knee to reassure her. Calleigh smiled at her then rose from her chair. Calleigh ran out of the hospital doors and took off down the street. She ran into an alley and looked around. There did not seem to be any furs watching her. Calleigh kicked off from the ground and soared into the cold winter’s night air. She flew in the direction of the Reynolds house. She mulled over how she

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would break the news to Lilia. Her eldest son was lost in another dimension. Her youngest lie dying in a hospital bed.

“Ash, where are you?” Calleigh murmured.

END PART 1