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This story is a fan fiction based on the web novel "Sabrina Online the Story" by Chris Yost, it is a work of speculation and must not be taken as canon.

Historical note: this story takes place during the events described in chapter 46 of Sabrina Online the Story by Chris Yost and starts three days after Sabrina has left Columbus.

Clarence & Cindy

Jumping to conclusions

By Styx
Chapter two

Sharon entered the emergency room and approached the counter. The nurse on duty greeted her, "Hello ma'am, how can I help you today?"

"My name is Sharon Skunk, my son Clarence was brought in earlier today."

The nurse started looking through the admission log. "Ah yes, here he is, he is still in surgery. I'm afraid I don't have anymore information than that. But we do need more information on him, if you could give us his medical history?" she asked, holding out a form to Sharon.

Taking the form, Sharon said, "I was told that someone from the police would be here to tell me what happened to my son."

"Yes ma'am, he was called away, but he will return shortly," the nurse stated.

Sharon sat down and started filling out the form. About forty minutes later, Sharon had just finished the form when someone called to her.

"Mrs. Skunk?"

She looked up to see a uniformed man. "Officer Brady ma'am, I was the arresting officer of your son's attacker," he said. Sharon nodded then got up and returned the medical form to the nurse.

"Thank you ma'am," the nurse said as she looked over the form. "You left the insurance section blank, Mrs. Skunk, does your son not have any?" she asked

"I don't know, he's a part time employee at a film studio, and he hasn't been working there very long, so I don't know if he qualifies for coverage yet," Sharon replied.

“I see, alright then, your son will be placed in the intensive care ward after he has recovered from surgery.”

“Has there been any word on my son?” she asked

“No I'm sorry, but he's still in surgery and they haven't given me any updates,” the nurse said sheepishly.

Sharon lowered her head, sighed with frustration and turned back to the officer. “Please tell me you can give me **some** information as to what the hell happened to my son,” she half demanded, half pleaded.

Officer Brady could see that the day's events were weighing heavily on the skunkette and that her composure was threadbare. “Perhaps it would be best if we discuss this in private, Mrs. Skunk,” he said, motioning to an unoccupied consultation room. They entered, he closed the door, and they sat down.

“Now Officer Brady, please why was my son attacked?” Sharon asked

Brady clasped his paws together on the table in front of him and looked at them. This was one of the few things about being a police officer he didn't like. Having to tell parents about the horrible things that happened to their children; this case was going to be a particularly bad experience. “Mrs. Skunk, your son was mauled by a lioness by the name of Susan Felin. According to the witnesses' statements your son met his assailant at the ice cream shop and even paid for her ice cream, so it seems that he knew her. The reports go on to say that your son and Ms. Felin spoke privately for several minutes when she suddenly stood, yelled at your son, and then mauled him twice. He then stumbled back, tripped on his chair, fell back and hit his head on a table behind him.”

“And did this Ms. Felin explain why she nearly killed my boy?”

“Yes, she did” he said, not really wanting to continue. This was what was really troubling him about this case. He definitely did not want to have to tell this poor femme what he must; she had already had the most horrid of days.

“WELL?” Sharon asked hotly.

Brady sighed heavily. “Mrs. Skunk, I sincerely wish I could avoid having to tell you this, but your son has been accused of a very serious crime,” the officer started.

“Crime, what crime?” Sharon asked indignantly.

Sighing again he continued “After Ms. Felin had been restrained from further attacking your son, she,” Officer Brady paused, looked nervously at Sharon, and went on. “She claimed that your son had raped a friend of hers,” he finished.

“**WHAT!?**” Sharon exclaimed in a yell that the officer was sure was heard as clearly on the street as it was in the room.

“Mrs. Skunk please,” the officer began.

“It's impossible,” she said insistently, “it has to be a mistake. My son wouldn't, he couldn't.” Sharon closed her eyes and shook her head. “Clarence just isn't capable of such a horrible thing,” she finished.

Brady bowed his head. “Mrs. Skunk, I too have a son and as a parent I to want to believe that he could never do anything like this, but as a police officer, it's been my experience that any male, any male is capable of such a horrible act,” he said.

“This, this can't be happening. This Felin furson has to be mistaken, this is all some mistake. I just know Clarence would never, could never do anything like that,” Sharon said.

Officer Brady nodded. “If it is I hope it is cleared up before your son recovers or he may face a criminal investigation,” he stated. “That's all the information I have for you, Mrs. Skunk. I wish I had more to tell you.”

“I want to speak to this Ms. Felin,” she said tightly.

“I'm sorry, but that won't be possible,” the officer stated.

“And why not?” she asked.

“Mrs. Skunk, surely you can appreciate the risk to Ms. Felin in that situation. Her rights must be protected,” said Brady.

“**HER RIGHTS?!?**” Sharon yelled, “**AND WHAT ABOUT MY SON'S RIGHTS? SHE TRIED TO KILL HIM!**”

The officer sighed. “Mrs. Skunk there is no doubt that she violated your son's rights. Because she used her claws in the attack and she had to be restrained from attacking him further Ms. Felin is charged with attempted murder,” he finished and got up to leave. “Mrs. Skunk, I do wish there was something I could say to make things better for you, I really do, and I hope your son comes through this ok,” he added sincerely, and was gone.

Sharon was beside herself. “Why is it they are so concerned with her rights when for all I know my Clarence is dying because of her,” she said through gritted teeth.

Dr. Fisk half walked half dragged himself out of the OR into the scrub room, pulled off his surgical mask and threw it into a bin, and then collapsed onto a bench,

feeling drained physically and emotionally. “God, I hate sessions like that,” he moaned. Having closed his eyes, he was leaning against the wall when a nurse popped her head through the door. “Dr. Fisk, your patient's mother is here. She is talking with the officer that arrested his attacker now,” she said, startling him. *Well I'm sure she's anxious to know her son's condition*, he thought, and got up, catching a glimpse of himself in a mirror. *Hmm, I suppose I should change, wouldn't want her to see me in these*, he thought as he changed out of his bloody scrubs and grabbed a clean set. He then washed out the blood that managed to spray into his fur, and then pulled on the clean scrubs and walked into the ER reception area. The nurse behind the counter indicated a room directly across from her station. Turning, he headed to the room she had pointed to. As he approached he saw an officer leaving the room. He entered and saw the back of the femme. “Mrs. Skunk?” he asked.

Sharon, who had been thinking about what she'd like to do to Susan Felin, jerked around at the sound of her name and saw the ferret in surgical garb at the door. “Are you?” she started to ask, but faltered, realizing that this fur may have very bad news.

“I am Dr. Fisk, Mrs. Skunk and yes, I am your son's doctor,” he said when he saw the look of worry and fear on her face. “Your son gave us quite a scare, I won't confuse you with the medical terms but your son's heart arrested due to loss of blood and shock. We had a hard time getting it going again,” he finished.

“HE'S ALIVE?!” Relief washed over Sharon's features. “HE'S GOING TO BE ALRIGHT?!” she cried.

The ferret sighed. “Mrs. Skunk,” he paused, trying to decide how best to tell her, and chose to take the direct path, “your son is alive, but he is far from being out of the woods. Aside from the lacerations and blood loss, your son suffered a head injury that on its own would not be life threatening. A bad concussion, but along with everything else, your son was clinically dead for three minutes,” he paused again then continued, “while stable, your son has slipped into a coma,” he finished.

“But, but he will come out of it won't he?” she asked, with renewed fear in her voice. “He'll be okay, right?”

Dr. Fisk looked down at the table. He was amazed at how no matter how many times he'd had to do it over the many years he had practiced medicine, giving parents disheartening news about their children never got any easier. “The brain is still very much a mystery to us. Your son may wake up with no ill effect, he may suffer mild to severe problems, there is also a chance that he may not wake up at all and his body could just give out.”

“You mean...” she paused, her lower lip and voice shaking, “Are you saying...that my Clarence may...die?” she finished, fighting back the tears.

God I hate this, Fisk thought, maybe I should go into teaching or research. At least then I wouldn't have to tell mothers that their child is dead or dying anymore. He took a deep breath and released it. "I'm afraid, Mrs. Skunk," he said, seeing worry and despair in her eyes but telling himself that she had to know, "that it is a very real possibility. I would say right now your son's chances are about 50-50. The next 48 hours will be critical. The longer he holds on, the better his chances will be," he finished.

"May...may I see him?" she asked.

The ferret shook his head. "Your son has been taken to the recovery room. As I said he is stable, so his life is not in immediate danger, but he is very vulnerable to infection so we can not allow visitors right now. He will be moved to the intensive care ward in a few hours. You'll be able to see him then. Now Mrs. Skunk, you have had a very rough day. I suggest you use the time your son spends in recovery to try and relax, eat, maybe have a shower and come back. I'm told we have your cell number, we'll call if there is any change in your son's condition."

Sharon nodded. "Thank you doctor, I'll be back then." Sharon doubted she'd ever be able to relax. She definitely knew she couldn't eat, but a shower sounded like a good idea.

Sharon opened the front door and entered. "Clarence I'm home!" she yelled out as always, but remembered that he wasn't there. She was haunted by the realization that she might never again come home to him. She tried not thinking about it, *he'll be okay, he'll be just fine I know he will*, but her mind kept returning to what the doctor had told her. *50-50 he said, he could die just when his life is starting to take shape.* Sharon thought for a moment at the cruel jokes fate plays on furs. Clarence's education was nearly finished. His marks would take him anywhere he wanted to go. *He's always made me so proud.* He has just found himself someone special. Though Sharon had not met this femme, she knew that Clarence was very much in love with her, even more so then that Sabrina girl he was so taken with up until a few months ago. To have it all taken from him now just because some hot headed femme was so stupid as to think that her son could ever. *I don't care what that police fur said Clarence just isn't capable of something that horrible. I swear if my son dies I'm going to make sure she pays.* Not liking the direction her thoughts were going in she decided to take her shower. Stepping into her bedroom, she undressed. As she always did on a regular basis she gave herself a once over making sure there were no lumps or tender areas. Although she never had the time for health spas or a gym, Sharon had always been determined not to let herself go to pot. She watched her diet, walked to the corner market rather than drive and if the floor she needed to get to was only a few floors up or down and she had the time she'd use the stairs. She did that and other things that ensured she got a good amount of exercise during the day, so that despite the fact that she was forty one years old she had the appearance of a femme barely pushing thirty. After finding everything in good condition she took a moment to stretch out the day's kinks, and then stepped into her bathroom.

Stepping out of her room into the den, she checked the answering machine out of habit. There were the normal telemarketing messages and a message from Clarence's work. "This is Marvin Badger at ZZ Studios; I am calling for Clarence Skunk. He didn't come in today and did not call in. Since this is not like him I assume this is due to some emergency. Clarence, I hope everything is okay and ask that you call in as soon as you can to let us know when you expect to be back. Zig's been worried all day. Again I hope everything is okay." Looking at the clock, the time was almost 6:30. Sharon figured they would still be open, so she looked up Clarence's work number.

Sitting at the studios front desk, Wanda, who often watched the phones when the receptionist was on break, was reading the latest issue of Vogue, but not really paying attention to what was on the pages. She was thinking more about a certain shy, good natured gofer. *Hmm, I wish Clarence would stop being so standoffish.* She stopped browsing the magazine and blinked. *Why does it bother me so much? It's not like I haven't been turned down by a guy before, she chuckles to herself, true, they're usually gay but not always, so why does Clarence playing hard to get bother me so much? I normally just move on to the next guy, so why?* Then she was hit with a surprising thought. *Could I be...in love with Clarence? He is cute, a gentlemur, he's honest he doesn't just say what he thinks you want to hear. He has all the qualities of an outstanding male, but me in love?* She was deeply considering this possibility when the phone rang. Picking up the handset, she answered, "Thank you for calling ZZ Studios; this is Wanda speaking how may I direct your call?"

"Marvin Badger please," the femme requested.

"I'm sorry ma'am, but Mr. Badger is in a meeting at the moment. May I take a message?" She asked as she picked up a pen.

"Yes, my name is Sharon Skunk and I'm returning his call about my son Clarence," she started, but Wanda interrupted.

"Oh yes Mrs. Skunk, everyone has been concerned why he didn't show up today without calling in. Is he okay?" she asked. Wanda heard Clarence's mother sigh heavily with a trembling voice and was hit with a sudden feeling of dread. "Uh, Mrs. Skunk is everything alright?"

"No, no it isn't," Sharon sniffed, the days events finally catching up with her emotionally, "my son was attacked today and had to have surgery. He's in the hospital."

"WHA-WHAT?!" Wanda said, shocked by Sharon's statement. "Oh my god is he going to be okay, what did they say?"

Sharon had not expected this reaction. Concern sure, but this femme seemed genuinely worried. *Maybe she's a friend*, she thought. "He's in a coma. He suffered a head injury and massive blood loss. They can't say what problems he may have if he recovers," she said in a shaking voice.

If?! "They don't know if he'll recover?" Wanda asked, even more shocked at the thought that Clarence could die.

Having reached her emotional limit, Sharon broke into tears, it was several minutes before she was able to speak clearly again. "His doctor has only given him a 50-50 chance," she said miserably and continued to sob.

"Mrs. Skunk... I am so sorry about this, Clarence is very well liked here and I know everyfur will be shocked when they hear. Um would it be alright if some of us came to visit him? What hospital is he in?" the vixen asked.

Again Sharon was surprised by this femme's concern. *Maybe I need to re-think my opinion about furs that do that kind of work*, she thought. She remembered that Wanda had asked her a question. "Uh sure it's all right; he's at Mercy General in the intensive care ward. They should allow visitors in another hour or so," she sniffed trying to get herself under control. "Thank you for your concern Wanda, it means a lot to me and I know Clarence will appreciate it too, goodnight."

"Goodnight Mrs. Skunk and I hope Clarence gets better soon," Wanda said and hung up the phone. She spent about two seconds thinking about what she should do before running down the hall towards Zig Zag's office.

In Zig Zag's office, she and Marvin were going over the studio's current productions. "I see you've pushed back the close up shots on Vixen Dreams to Monday. What happened to Friday?" asked Zig.

"Shoulder unit 3 went on the fritz. Rodney says he can fix most of the damage tonight but that he'll need to order a new power supply. He says he can't get it till late Friday and will install it over the weekend," Marvin said. "The other units are being used in other projects," he added quickly, guessing Zig's next question. Marvin grinned. "We could put VD back on track by using one of the other units over the weekend, if you want to authorize the overtime, that is," he suggested.

Zig frowned at the badger, not because of the suggestion of overtime. It was actually a good idea, but she never liked his referring to Vixen Dreams as 'VD' and he knew it, which is of course why he kept doing it. "Talk to the actors, see if they're willing to come in Saturday. And please, stop calling it th-

WHAM!!!

Her office door burst open and a wild-eyed Wanda came running in, startling the both of them. “Wanda!” Zig yelled. “What in the hell?” she started, but then saw the look on the vixen's face. “Wanda what's wrong?” she asked in a much softer voice.

But Wanda was all wound up and couldn't speak coherently. “PHONE CALL CLARENCE'S MOTHER ATTACKED HOSPITAL!!” She was breathing heavy, almost hyperventilating.

Zig got up and took hold of Wanda's arms. “WANDA!” she yelled, again trying to get the vixen to calm down, hoping she wouldn't have to slap her. Wanda locked eyes with Zig Zag and Zig spoke softly. “Now slow down Wanda, take long breaths and tell us what's wrong,” she finished.

Wanda had the face of a sad cub but she was no longer frantic. She took a deep breath like Zig said, and then started again. “Clarence's mother just called...she said that he was attacked earlier today and is in the hospital,” she finished.

“**WHAT!**” both Zig & Marvin said in unison. Marvin shot to his feet. Zig was the first to speak again. “What happened? Is he going to be okay?” she asked.

Wanda's eyes teared up and she started trembling. “Th-they don't know yet. His mother said that right now the doctor is only giving him a 50-50 chance, and if he does survive he may have...problems,” she sniffed trying to hold back the tears.

Zig's ears laid flat against her head as she looked down. Her eyes were starting to burn and she wasn't far from crying herself. Zig had, over the short time that Clarence had worked for her, placed a great deal of personal importance on him. He, much like Sabrina, had come to represent an innocence that had been taken from her far too early in life. Marvin shook his head and thought quietly. *Had to have been a mugger. No fur who knew him would do this.*

Again Zig Zag was first to find her voice. “What hospital is he in, can he have visitors?” she asked, trying unsuccessfully to keep the anguish from her voice.

“Mrs. Skunk said that they will allow visitors in an hour or so. He'll be in the intensive care ward at Mercy General,” Wanda answered.

“Well I guess we'll have to wait a little,” Zig started, but then the look of worry changed to anger as what she just heard Wanda say sank in. “WARD?! Why the hell are those idiots putting him in a ward? His coverage entitles him to a private room,” she ranted, enraged. “I'm going to call those morons and get things straitened out.” She moved for the phone but her paw was blocked by Marvin's. When she looked up at him he had a rather sheepish look on his face.

“Ah Zig, I don't think you want to do that, it's not their fault,” he said and when he saw her expression quickly continued. “He only just recently finished the probation period. We sent his paperwork in a few weeks ago and just got his benefits package yesterday. I was going to issue him his insurance card when he came in today,” he finished.

She took a deep breath and released it. “Okay, get his insurance papers. We're going to the hospital now,” she said, and then remembered something. “And tell Rodney I need to see him immediately,” she finished. Marvin gave Zig a quick questioning look, but didn't say anything as he left to carry out her instructions. Zig tuned to Wanda “Um Wanda? I'm sorry but I need to see Rodney in private.”

Wanda sniffed and wiped the tears from her eyes and nodded. “Sure thing Zig, um I just wanted to ask if it would be alright if I went with you and Marvin to the hospital.”

Zig looked at the vixen, seeing for the first time just how much this was affecting her, and gave a positive nod. “You better change then,” she said, pointing out that the vixen was only wearing a bath robe.

On her way out the door Wanda slipped past Rodney on his way in. Zig shut the door and gestured for the lop-eared buck to sit.

“Boss, I know what you're going to say but I can't get shoulder cam three up any sooner than I told Marvin. I was lucky just to find a replacement power supply. You might want to consider replacing those units before it becomes impossible to find any parts for them,” Rodney said.

“Thanks Rodney, I guess it is time to purchase new shoulder units. They are a bit old, but that's not why I called you in,” Zig stated.

“Oh?” the buck said as he sat upright. The only time Zig called him into her office was to discuss the equipment.

“First I wanted to confirm that you had told your family that you are working for me,” she half stated/ half asked.

“Yes, a few days ago,” Rodney replied, curious now. *What's going on and what do Ellen and Cindy have to do with it? Hmmm, Zig looks more upset then I've ever seen her.*

“Good,” Zig said, “that brings me to the main reason I brought you in here. I know your daughter is dating Clarence and well,” she stopped mid sentence. The rabbit considered her and thought he saw tears. “I thought it would be better if she heard this from you rather than another fur. Clarence was attacked today and severely injured. He's in the hospital. Wanda, Marvin and I are going over there now to straighten out an insurance matter. You of course have the rest of the day off,” she finished.

Rodney could hardly believe what he heard. Not only had he found Clarence acceptable as Cindy's boyfriend, but both he and his wife believed that Cindy couldn't choose a better male for a mate, especially considering what Cindy had told them about what had almost happened the last time they were together. Not to mention the fact that he really liked Clarence. In fact, at some point he had already started to care for him as a member of his family. "How bad is he?"

Zig's expression became sad as she said, "They, uh, can't say for sure if he'll survive."

Rodney's eyes widened at this news. *This is going to devastate Cindy. Hell it's hitting me hard. I really like the kid. His mother must be going through hell.* He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes in silent prayer, and then spoke. "Thank you Zig, for letting me know and for the time off. You're right, it'll be better if Cindy hears it from me. I just wish I didn't have to tell her," said the buck.

Zig nodded. Her intercom then buzzed and Marvin's voice filtered through. "Boss, I've got Clarence's insurance package together. Ready to go when you are."

"Okay Marv, Wanda will be coming with us. She's changing into some clothes now," she replied.

"Sure thing, anything else?"

"Yes, Rodney is leaving early to tell his daughter about Clarence. See to it he is paid for the full day." She saw the rabbit open his mouth to say something, but she held up a paw, meaning that she would hear no argument on the matter. She then spoke again to the intercom. "I'll meet you and Wanda out front in a few minutes," she finished.

"You got it Zig," came Marvin's reply.

His eyes snapped open and he sat bolt upright with a yell of panic. Looking around, his heavy breathing coming under control, all he could see was blackness. Complete featureless pitch-blackness. Fearing he had gone blind, Clarence brought his paw up in front of his face. Relieved he could see it clearly, he wiggled his fingers. Remembering what had happened turned his relief to dread. He slowly looked down expecting to see his front torn open and bloody, but was surprised to see that he was perfectly fine. "What the?" he muttered. He stood up and gave himself the once over. *Everything seems okay, at least I can't feel any pain,* he thought to himself and looked around, *but where is this place, what is this place and how do I get out of here? I guess I should start walking, but in what direction?*

Then suddenly there was a whisper in his ear, "Go left."

Clarence snapped his head towards the voice and shouted, "WHO'S THERE?"

"Go left," the whisper persisted. "Trust me," it added.

Far from really trusting the disembodied whisper, but not having any better options, Clarence turned to his left and started walking.

Sharon walked up to the hospital's reception desk. "Um, my name is Sharon Skunk. I'm here to see my son Clarence, has his condition changed?" she asked.

"Let's see, what wing is he in?"

"Intensive care ward," Sharon replied.

"Okay I'll just....hmm that's odd, there's no Clarence Skunk listed in the IC ward," the nurse said.

"WHAT!" Sharon shouted, suddenly filled with fear. "I was told he was going to be put in the intensive care ward. What does this mean, he hasn't," she started to ask, but couldn't finish.

"Please stay calm Mrs. Skunk," the nurse requested. "I'm doing a general search for his name....Ah! Here we are, Clarence Skunk, yes he's in the ICU wing alright, but he's been put in a private room, room 304. Take the elevator to the third floor and go to your right," she finished.

A look of great relief came over Sharon's face, but it soon turned to confusion. "They told me he was going to be in the ward. Was there a mistake? I'm not going to be able to afford a private room."

"You won't need to. His insurance covers it all, hmm I wish the coverage I get working for the hospital was this good," the nurse replied.

"I don't understand. What insurance? He's a part timer at a film studio."

"I think I can clear things up for you, Mrs. Skunk," a voice said from behind her.

Sharon turned around and was dumb struck. Approaching her was what appeared to be a femme skunk like her self, but with the most peculiar fur pattern and a warm smile that slowly turned to a frown. Sharon realized she was staring. Blinking, she found her voice. "Please forgive me, I didn't mean to be rude, but your fur pattern is rather...striking," she said. "You said you could clear things up?"

“Yes, my name is Zig Zag,” Zig said, her smile returning, “and this is Marvin Badger and Wanda Vixen,” she added, indicating the fox and badger on either side of her. They all shook paws, and Zig began speaking again. “First, let me say how sorry we are that this has happened. I was horrified when Wanda told Marvin and me about your call into the studio. Then when I heard the hospital was going to put him in a ward because Clarence had not yet received his insurance card we came down to straighten it out. Don't worry about the medical bills, Mrs. Skunk, I'll see to it Clarence gets whatever help he needs, and if he needs anything the insurance won't cover, I'll take care of it.”

“That's very generous of you, thank you very much. You're Clarence's boss then? I had thought that Mr. Badger here was since he was the one who called,” Sharon said.

Zig smiled again. “Marvin is my right paw fur. He takes care of the day to day operations of the studio, freeing me to concentrate on things like approving scripts, advertising, business dealings, recruiting talent, and many other things I'd never have time for if I didn't have him.”

“Well, I want to thank you for all that you've already done for Clarence and for coming to see him tonight, but I would like to be alone with him first.”

“Oh, of course Mrs. Skunk, we understand completely. We'll stay in the third floor waiting room until you're ready,” Zig said as they all stepped into the elevator.

Meanwhile, Rodney had called home to see if Cindy was there or still at work, and had told Ellen about Clarence. Ellen, after getting over her shock, had suggested he pick her up before seeing Cindy so she could drive Cindy's car. She didn't want Cindy driving after she heard the news. The rabbit turned into the parking lot and pulled into the closest spot he could find to the door. Looking through the large front windows he could see his daughter taking orders, looking so cheerful. Still gripping the wheel with both paws even though he had turned off the engine, he leaned forward and rested his head on top of the wheel. “Oh Lord, please give me the strength to do this,” he prayed. He felt Ellen's paw on his shoulder and he looked over to her.

“You want me to tell her?” she offered.

Rodney smiled wanly at his wife, took her paw from his shoulder and kissed it gently. “Thank you darling but no, I couldn't ask you to face something for me that I was too afraid to face myself,” he said.

Cindy had just finished passing out several plates of food at one of her tables when the manager came up and tapped her on the shoulder. “Cindy you have a visitor. He's in the break room,” she whispered into the doe's ear. “Ok, thanks,” she replied and then got the other waitress's attention and made like she was breaking something in two. The other waitress, an orange tabby cat, nodded as she continued taking a customer's

order without missing a beat. *Oh I hope it's Clarence. I haven't been able to reach him all day. I wonder why he didn't go to work,* she thought as she made her way back to the break room. She was surprised to find her father waiting for her. "Oh, Daddy why-" she began, and then noticed the drawn expression. "What's wrong Daddy?" Her eyes widened and she rushed up to him. "Has something happened to momma?!" she asked in a worried tone.

"No sweetheart, your mother is fine," he said, taking her paws in his. "Sit down, honey," he added as he himself sat in a nearby chair.

Cindy, now very worried, sat in the chair next to her father's. *Daddy wouldn't have come here if something really bad hadn't happened, but if Mom is okay then what is it?* she wondered.

Rodney looked into his daughter's eyes and saw how scared she was, and his heart was breaking. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath. "Cindy, Clarence was hurt today. He's in the hospital unconscious and...they don't know if he'll survive," Rodney finished. He didn't know how many times he had rehearsed it but it didn't make it any easier. He felt her start to tremble and pulled her into a hug.

"**NOOOO!!!** It's not true. Please Daddy tell me it's not true," she cried as tears flowed down her cheeks. She buried her head into her father's shoulder and continued to cry.

Hearing Cindy's outcry, her manager came running into the break room. "Cindy what?" but she stopped short when she saw that the doe was crying, unabashedly held by her father. She looked to the buck. "What's wrong?" she asked in a concerned voice.

"I had to tell her that her boyfriend was hurt today and is in the hospital," Rodney said sadly.

"Oh no! Is he going to be okay?"

Rodney looked even sadder as he shook his head slightly. "They....don't know if he'll live," he said, rubbing a paw up & down Cindy's back as she started sobbing with renewed strength at hearing of Clarence's condition again.

The manager kneeled before them and laid a paw on Cindy's shoulder. "Oh God Cindy, I'm so sorry. Look, take off early and take the rest of the week off. Call me Sunday if you need more time, okay?" she said.

Cindy just nodded and tried to say something but her sobs made what ever it was impossible to understand. "Thank you," Rodney said, guessing what his daughter had tried to say. "That's very kind of you," he added.

“Oh it's not a problem. Cindy, I hope everything turns out okay,” she said and gave Cindy's shoulder a squeeze, and was gone.

After the manager left Rodney looked down to his crying daughter. “Cindy, sweetheart, we should go down to the hospital to see him,” he said softly.

Cindy stopped crying. “Yes,” she sniffed. “Yes I need to see him,” she said and headed for her locker. She grabbed her purse and fished out her car keys and promptly dropped them. She bent to pick them up, but found her father's paw closing around them. She gave him a questioning look as they straightened back up.

“No, your mother and I do not want you driving right now,” Rodney said, answering Cindy's unasked question.

“But Daddy I-,” Cindy broke in.

Rodney continued on calmly despite his daughter's attempt to interrupt. “Your mother will take your car. She's waiting out front. I will drive you to the hospital,” he finished.

Cindy saw the look on her father's face, and although it held no anger, it still told her that there would be no argument on the matter. She nodded. “Okay Dad, I'll clock out and we can go,” she said and turned to the time clock. *Please be okay Clarence, please.*

END OF CHAPTER TWO