The Animal Chronicles: Three Worlds

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Under the Direction of Direction of Jordyn Margolis and Written Out Loud Studios

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To our Families

The Animal Chronicles: Three Worlds

CHAPTER ONE: MEET THE MUNCHKIN CIRCUS

Frost was getting very sick with anticipation. Her head felt extremely painful, even though she had no injury.

She waited, trying to be polite and quiet. Inside, Frost felt impatient and loud.

She waited with anticipation, hearing the Ringmaster shouting names into the loudspeaker. Frost heard different names get called on the loudspeaker.

She tried to distract herself by playing with her circus friend Stripe, who was apparently paying attention to the names of the animals being called.

"Frost, I think our turns are next," he said, getting onto his paws.

Frost started getting nervous. This was the second-to-last show on the world tour of the circus, and if so much as one animal slipped one centimeter to the left, they would get less dinner. Ringmaster wanted this to be perfect, after all.

Frost waited, and then heard her name.

"Frost the athletic snow leopard!" Said a voice from the sky.

Frost steeled her nerves and stepped into the circus tent. Frost did an obstacle course and ran around the tent. Then she sat politely and listened to the voice in the sky, waiting for the voice to say how good she was.

Instead, the voice said, "This performance has a challenge, and our lucky winner is JENNIFER

MAKENTOSH!!!" Frost was confused and looked up at the large black boxes where the voice came from.

"And her challenge says," the voice paused for effect, "Make Frost go and eat humongous amounts of meat! Then put worms on its head! Oh.. that's kinda cruel," the voice whispered. "But this is one of the mayors of a famous place... Don't wanna get them on our bad side."

They rolled out a platter of meat, and she ate it, and they finished the show after odd, slimy creatures ruined her beautiful fur.

Frost was super full! She headed back to the train car and allowed Stripe to eat her dinner portion. She was too full after that act. Besides, she needed to get the slime off her fur.

Then, once Stripe went to sleep, she could think about her life with all these wonderful animals.

Like Stripe, the tiger, who she felt a certain happiness towards, Nightfall the old black panther, who was very kind towards Frost, Taco, who she loved like a brother, Burrito, which was Taco's brother, Moon, who was a dancing elephant, Flora, who was the wise and sensible hawk who always has Frost's back, Blaze, who just was Frost's friend and liked to chill, Noodle, the poodle who was just fine, and Chaniko the monkey who was very annoying and always tried to embarrass Frost.

Frost didn't feel much better until the train lurched forward and started to move, and then picked up speed and bumps and rumbles down the road as the setting sun shed colors across the sky.

CHAPTER TWO: MONSIEUR SPINEL

Once the rumbling stopped, Frost knew that it was time for the last show of the world tour tomorrow or something. So she practiced her act, even though by now she could probably do it in her sleep.

Stripe asked, “Hey, did you hear about our last show? They hired a magician to do magic on us! I don't know what kind of magic, though. Hope it's to get us fun toys!”

Frost knew that was too much to hope for. Usually, the magicians were complete failures or had weird spells, like pulling a bunny out of a hat.

She sighed and lay down on her hay-pile bed, hoping that tomorrow would be better than today.

She closed her eyes and fell asleep…

The soft morning light streamed in through the train-car window, showering golden light upon Frost and Stripe.

However, Stripe was still asleep when Frost awoke.

The golden light engulfed her fur, and she knew it was going to be a good day. The train was chugging along across the prairie now, with only yellow-greenish cornstalks to be seen.

Eventually, Stripe rose from his nest, his emerald green eyes glowing in the sunlight.

A few hours later, they came to a halt in a small town, with a sign at the entrance reading ‘’RangerVille.”

The Ringmaster set up the tent, and they did their acts. Moon, the dancing elephant, Nightfall, the darkness-disappearing black panther, Taco and Burrito, the ball-balancing chihuahuas, Blaze the lion who jumps through rings of fire, Chaniko the obstacle course monkey, Stripe the scary tiger, Noodle the fluffy circus poodle, Flora the aerial obstacle course hawk, and then her act…

The loudspeaker announced, "AND NOW FOR FROST, THE AGILE SNOW LEOPARD!" Frost stepped forward and completed the obstacle course that the humans had set up.

Then, the loudspeaker boomed, "NOW, IT'S TIME FOR OUR GRAND FINALE, WHERE MONSIEUR SPINEL WILL CREATE MAGICAL DOUBLES! ALL ANIMALS, PLEASE STEP ON STAGE!" Frost and the other animals stepped onstage.

Monsieur Spinel was a young man with jet-black hair and an odd smile on his face. His velvet cape shimmered in the thin sunlight filtering in from the small hole in the top of the circus tent. But there was one distinct feature about him-he had blood-red eyes that glistened in the sunlight like his cape. Like blood, too, thought Frost suspiciously. This magician looked like he wasn't a faker, either. No way he can duplicate us, thought Frost.

Then the magician raised an ivory wand and murmured a spell under his breath. A beam of light shot out of the tip, engulfing the group of animals.
Seconds later, Frost found herself brushing against a familiar coat. Her duplicate!

A round of applause came from the crowd.

Just then, the loudspeaker boomed, “OK, THANK YOU, THANK YOU! IT IS NOW TIME FOR MONSIEUR SPINEL TO GO! WELL, WE HOPE YOU LIKED OUR LAST WORLD TOUR SHOW! GOODBYE, EVERYONE!”
The duplicates crawled off the stage, into the shadows, as the curtain closed with a big whoosh.

Frost walked behind the curtains, back to her traincar, only to find a big surprise!
Stripe was attacking Stripe!
One must be a duplicate… but which one? Frost thought to herself.

Suddenly, one of the two Stripes whirled around, giving Frost a slight glance at his eye; it was blood-red instead of his usual emerald green eyes.
In a millisecond, Frost realized that that was probably the duplicate-Monsieur Spinel probably gave them red eyes like his.

So, she came to the real Stripe’s aid, slashing and biting at the double.
Once he was too hurt to carry on, he said, “I’ll be back,” and vanished into a cloud of red mist.

“Creepy,” Stripe said. “But how did you know I was the real me?” he asked.

Frost explained, “Your double had red eyes, a stark contrast to your beautiful emerald green ones.”
“Oh,” replied Stripe. “Well, I’m just happy that we're okay.”

They sat together for a long, long time. Then they went to their nests as the sun set along the horizon.

The next day, Frost gathered all the animals when the train stopped to get supplies. She explained

what had happened, and lots of animals shared a similar experience.

"The doubles keep on popping up all over!" reported Noodle.

"So, I have a plan," said Frost. "When the staff members are on their lunch break, we escape and have them believe the duplicated animals are us."

All the animals agreed, since there was no better plan.

Stripe pulled her away from the group when it was time to sleep. He touched noses with her and groomed her fur. "I know this is a scary time, but we will survive."

Frost hoped it was true.

CHAPTER THREE: ESCAPE FROM THE CIRCUS

The next day, Frost called all the animals together to review their plan.

"So it's settled. We escape during the staff members' lunchtime, and it will look like our duplicates are us," Frost confirmed. "Do we agree, everyone?"

All the animals nodded, while Chaniko called out, "Why does Frost get to make all the decisions around here? Why can't I be the leader?"

Stripe padded towards the annoying monkey and replied, "She has always done well for us and is the bravest animal I know. You are just a silly and annoying monkey!"

Frost looked into Stripe's emerald green eyes and saw kindness and warmth.

"I agree!" Nightfall shouted in defense of Frost.

"I second it!" Moon agreed.

The rest of the animals started chanting Frost's name in support of her role as leader.

"Okay, okay. Calm down, everyone," Frost called, but the animals would not stop chanting. "SILENCE!!!"

At that, all the animals hushed.

"Does anybody know a way out of here?" Frost questioned.

The circus animals looked at one another, and finally someone spoke up.

Burrito, Taco's littermate, stepped up and replied, "I know a way out!"

"Where is it? Moon inquired.

“Near the tank full of dolphins. You just have to make a left, then a right, and two more left after the tank of dolphins. Then, there will be some curtains where you can exit this huge circus tent,” Burrito explained.

“Thank you for the directions. You’ve helped us a lot, Burrito,” Frost said.

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When it was lunchtime for the staff members of the Munchkin Circus, Burrito led the animals out of the circus tent.

“Here we are! Freedom, ahoy!” Burrito yelped in joy.

Frost cautiously looked around and saw some movement near the curtains of the circus tent.

All of a sudden, the red-eyed evil duplicates of the animals turn up out of nowhere and attack the good animals.

“FIGHT!!!” Frost hollers.

The animals dueled until lunchtime was over for the workers.

The evil duplicates rush away, apparently trying to get attention so they can make the workers believe that they are the real animals.

“We have got to get out of here!” said Blaze.

“Follow me! We must head towards the woods!”

Frost takes the lead of the animals, and they all head out into the unknown.

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The next morning, the animals were restless and sat down for a break.

"I'm. So. HUNGRY!!!" Chaniko wails.

"So am I!" Taco complained. "I need food!"

Stripe shot them both with angry looks, meaning, We're all tired. Go hunt for yourselves! We aren't your servants!

So everyone went hunting.

When all the animals had their bellies full and they were well rested, they set off to continue their journey for freedom.

The woods were scary for animals like the Munchkin Circus animals.

At every noise, they'd jump and huddle closer together.

Sure, the animals knew how to fight, but that was because they learned to in the circus for their acts; they weren't used to fighting for their lives.

A few hours later, there was a rustling noise in the bushes. Red eyes appeared.

"It's the evil duplicates again! But, how did they follow us?" Noodle tilts her head in curiosity.

"We were following you around. Waiting for the right time to kill you guys, and now it is our chance!" the evil duplicate of Noodle replies.

"FIGHT!!!" Blaze commands.

"Ugh, again?!" Chaniko whines.

"Yes, AGAIN!" Flora scolds.

The animals fight, again.

Frost fights the evil duplicate of herself.

“You will never mate with Stripe. You will never be free. I will kill you, and you will be separated from your friends, forever!!!” Evil Frost says.

The real Frost takes a brief moment to say something wise and helpful to herself. She’s only trying to distract you and make you upset. Fight and stay alive.

“You cannot tell me how to live my life!” Frost yells.

She pushes her evil duplicate away but loses her balance, running away for who knows how long. Frost stumbled into a dark forest clearing and landed on some ferns. Frost hears another animal yelp in surprise.

It’s definitely not someone from our circus crew; they are behind me, and this voice is in front of me. So, it must be a loner animal! Frost thinks.

A small dog crawls out underneath the ferns, and a rabbit bounces next to him.

“Who are you?” The dog asks cautiously.

Frost looks warily at the dog. “I’m Frost.”

“Nice to meet you, I’m JJ.” The dog replies. “This rabbit is my friend, Kai.”

“Hi!” Kai says, joyfully.

“Let me say a little more about myself, but quickly. I’m really in a hurry!” Frost explains. “I’m a snow leopard, and I work for the Munchkin Circus. I am leading my friends away from the circus because we are in danger back there. I was just fighting an evil duplicate of myself.”

“Cool,” JJ responds curiously.

“Do you want to learn how to fight?” Frost asks. “So you can help my friends and me?”

“Of course!” Kai eagerly responds.

“Sure, why not?” JJ says.

For the next thirty minutes, Frost quickly teaches the two loner animals how to fight.

“Are you guys ready?” Frost questions.

“Yup!” JJ and Kai say in unison.

“Then let’s go!” Declares Frost.

I’m leading them into a vicious battle where they might die. Frost thinks. I don’t have a good feeling about this.

Kai then whispered something to JJ that Frost couldn’t hear. JJ whispered back. They look sympathetically at Frost. Soon their looks were determined and proud as they marched on forward, ready to fight. JJ’s mouth was trying to form a snarl, but he could not muster the meanness. He walked to a sad hideout, and saw many animals. A tiger, a lion, a poodle, a monkey, an elephant, a hawk, two sibling dogs that were a breed he could not identify, and a big black panther.

“I will take this dog I met and this bunny to train with me in the sandy hollow we saw on our way here. It has soft ground, and plenty of cobwebs for accidental injuries. I will meet you when we are done in the thistle bush grove, near that big maple tree.” Frost then finished, and led Kai and JJ away.

CHAPTER FOUR: JJ'S STORY

"Ow!" JJ was plopped into an alleyway.

Soon, JJ walked into the forest. He met some animals, and after a few weeks, JJ eventually learned the ways of the wild. He soon learned how to find animals but not to attack.

One day, a rabbit bounced up to him while he was thinking on a fallen tree.

"Hi! I am Kai!" said the bunny.

"I am JJ!" JJ said to the bunny.

"Do you want to be friends?"

"Yeah, I have a den. Everybody else calls it a house."

"Yeah, I can see that. They think you are wild. Wait, are you?"

"No! I am from New York City!"

"No wonder you smell like dogs."

JJ was so surprised at what Kai said that he just managed to stammer out a sentence.

"Umm, was that mean?"

"No. Okay, well, it is, but I said it as a compliment, so it is nice."

"Well, I also am a dog, so..."

"So what?"

"So, it just means... Okay, now I get your point if you say it like that. It's getting dark, we should go to my house!"

They walked over to JJ's den and with all JJ's speed, he built a part of the house for Kai in about a few weeks, and while JJ was constructing, Kai shared a den with him.

“Ooh, it is cozy here!” Kai cooed.

JJ now trusted Kai. He had no danger scent and was like a furry cotton ball with black spots here and there.

The next morning, JJ woke up with a really loud scream. “Ahhhhhhhhhh!”

Kai raced into the room and frantically said, “What happened?! Ahhhhh! Okay, now I know!” Kai said, trying to catch a breath.

A snow leopard knocked on the window. JJ peered out of the rock opening where the snow leopard was pawing around.

The snow leopard explained who she was and why she was here, and she did not mean to scare him.

“Cool, I’m JJ,” JJ says.

“Hi!” Kai said joyfully.

Frost looked curious about them and asked, “Do you want to learn how to fight, so you could help my friends and me.”

“Of course!” Kai eagerly responds.

“Sure, why not?” JJ says.

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For the next thirty minutes, Frost taught JJ and Kai how to fight.

JJ was sweaty and kept falling when swiping his paws. They started battling, and JJ got very scraped up and injured.

His sweat started to mix into his cuts, and they began stinging.

They would probably last for a while, and Frost looked guilty.

She was being as dangerous as a sheep, and yet she had won all the fake battles they had done.
Soon, JJ asked Frost and Kai, “Do you want to hear my story?”

“Uh… Sure…” Frost replied.

JJ sat down, and Kai rushed to push cobwebs into his wounds. Kai had escaped training unscathed, hoping away whenever frost lunged at him. JJ drank some of a delicious drink a nice dear gave him a couple days ago. She was closing her bar for the month so she could have a break. The drink was a blend of honey, some sweet flower nectars, maple tree sap,and berry juice. It was blended into a small tree branch that had been hollowed out with a lid. He finished it in one go and started speaking.

“Well, I had nice owners, Kate and Dean but Kate was dragged away by the police for the rest of her life for strangling 5 people, and crashing into a little girl. And she was just framed and died in prison before she could be found innocent. Dean then died because after Kate died, Dean started drinking lots of this weird stuff called alcohol, and one night he was driving with me and crashed. I escaped the crash alive and spent 2 years as a stray. Then this weird magician took me in, and did some experiments on me.

Then he called me worthless one day. A few days later, he plopped me in an alleyway, and I wandered into the forest, met Kai, and now I am here.”

“That is a bit sad,” Frost said.

When JJ and Kai seemed ready, Frost questioned, “Are you guys ready?”

“Yup!” JJ and Kai said in unison

“Then let’s go!” declared Frost.

Frost looked a little guilty after they took their first step.

“I wonder why she looks guilty,” Kai whispered into JJ’s ear.

“She might feel bad for leading us into a dangerous battle,” JJ inferred.

“That must be it,” Kai agreed.

The trio kept on marching forward, ready to find the circus animals and fight their duplicates.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE DUEL

The trio walked out onto the battlefield to find all the real animals struggling to fight the duplicates because while Frost was away, Evil Frost kept slashing the faces of all the good animals.

"They came here already!" Frost meowed in surprise at the sight.

She kept looking for another second, and then jolted back and took charge.

"That's it!" Frost meowed. "Okay, here's the plan. Kai, JJ, go help anyone in need. I'll go fight my duplicate."

This turned out to be an extraordinary idea, because Nightfall was having trouble handling her duplicate.

Frost watched as Kai jumped on Nightfall's duplicate's head, and JJ pawed Noodle's duplicate's face.

Suddenly, she saw Chaniko dart away into the trees, scared, and his duplicate headed towards her, screeching. She batted him away, and Kai and JJ headed for him to help.

Frost was jerked into another fight, as her duplicate pawed her face. She counterattacked, stabbing her duplicate's soft underbelly with her claws. But her duplicate circled her, stalking, as if she was prey.

Her glowing red eyes looked even more threatening as she hissed, "You are a failure. You can't even keep your group from quarreling. Eventually, they all will turn against you. Even Stripe hates you."

“No, he doesn't!” Frost roared.

She stood on her hind paws and scratched her duplicate across the muzzle. But the duplicate responded swiftly and made a bloody gash across Frost’s left leg.

Just then, abruptly, the battle ended, and all the duplicates vanished into clouds of red mist.

“Phew!” meowed Stripe.

Frost’s leg hurt more than ever, so she limped towards Nightfall, who must have some herb that could cure her wound.

CHAPTER SIX: CHOICES TO CHOOSE

All the animals were exhausted. Nightfall was gathering up some cobwebs that she could find to patch up all the wounds and stop the bleeding of all the wounds the animals had. All of the animals healed naturally according to plan, but Frost got infected badly.

"It stings so much!" Frost wailed.

"Will she be okay?" Stripe fretted.

Nightfall kept on using cobwebs and all the healing herbs she could find to heal Frost and said, "I'm doing the best that I can! Meanwhile, you're here, fretting like a baby when you should be helping your friends!"

Stripe looks sympathetically at Frost and then goes to where all the animals are complaining.

"You know, if you're wounded and you can't walk straight or fight, that means you have to choose a temporary leader," Nightfall reminded Frost.

"I know, but who should I choose?" Frost sighed.

"What about Stripe? He's always got your back and is always willing to help!"

"I know, but then Chaniko would yell, 'She's just choosing favorites!'"

Nightfall chuckled. "I get that, but you are still young, Frost. You have time to learn and grow and to understand more of the people around you."

"I hope you're right. I hope I get mature enough to nobly lead my friends in tough

situations," Frost sighed. "Nightfall, what would I do without your wisdom?"

"Lost. You would be lost," Nightfall decided. "Anyways, get some rest. Think about who you will choose for the temporary leader. Overall, have a good night."

Nightfall finished talking and lay down on her nest and fell asleep next to Frost.

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At sunrise, Frost woke up and limped across the forest clearing to a large sunny rock. Standing atop it, she declared, "It is time to choose a temporary leader!"

All the animals gathered, and Frost heard Chaniko whispering to himself, "Please be me! Please be me!"

"As you all know, I am in no condition to fight, so I must choose a temporary leader," Frost explained. "And I choose Nightfall!"

"I am honored to—" Nightfall started to say, but Chaniko cut her off.

"WHAT?!" Chaniko hollered, stomping his foot. "Why in the world did you choose that old dark panther? And she's a girl! Girls are weak and stupid!"

"Who are you calling weak?" Moon stomped towards Chaniko. "All of us girls are strong, and we will fight all the evil duplicates to help our friends, even if it means that we must die," she said, stomping her feet.

“That’s right!” Noodle yelled in support of Moon.

More protests against Chaniko and his beliefs came up and would not stop coming.

“SILENCE!” Frost got all the animals’ attention. “My decision is Nightfall, and that is final.”

All the animals, except Chaniko, who was being confronted by Blaze, were congratulating Nightfall that she got to be temporary leader. Stripe was padding towards Frost with his head down.

“I really thought that you would choose me as temporary leader,” Stripe sighed.

“Well then, it would seem that I was just choosing favorites, and Chaniko would really whine about that, like, ‘WHY DOES STRIPE GET TO BE LEADER?’” Frost informed. She made her voice very high-pitched.

“Oh,” Stripe said. “I understand. But your imitation of Chaniko was funny,” he looked like he was giggling.

Frost said, “Thank you for understanding. Now bring me some food. Let’s eat and then get some rest.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: HAPPINESS TO FIND

"JJ, are you okay?" Kai asked JJ.

"Yeah," JJ said, trying to hold in his secret. Soon, when no one was watching, JJ ran off, heading for the city near here, which is the city he used to live in. He went to his owner's apartment and looked in the window, and soon saw his owner's daughter and their daughter's husband, and JJ ran away. He was discouraged with fear. He looked again at the window and saw the group of dirty blondes.

His old mouse friend Gordon saw him and said hi.

"Hi Gordon! I haven't seen you in a while! I was in the wild, and I made so many friends, and... now I am here and well..." JJ said, growing less excited. "Ok, well, bye Gordon."

"Bye, JJ!" Gordon replied.

They had shared many adventures, and JJ remembered their fondest shared memory. They had stolen a bunch of food from a local bakery and didn't get in trouble because the owner had taken pity on them and let them take the food. JJ was a carefree stray back then.

JJ liked to hang out at the 42nd ST and 6th Avenue area. When heading towards that area, he saw his cousin, Harold.

"Hi, Harold!" JJ barked.

"Hi JJ!" Harold barked.

"The city has changed a bit, I mean, after going to the Upper East Side, I have not been here in a while, and now there is an M55 and an M5? Last

time I was here, there was an M6, and I am talking about the bus," JJ said.

Just then, an M5 passed by and skipped the stop. Then an M55 came and stopped at the stop.

"JJ, is that you?" JJ's cousin Harold said.

"Yes!" I remember you! You have the strangest scent."

"Bye, Harold!" JJ said to Harold.

"Bye, JJ!" Harold said to JJ.

JJ and his friend walked to Seventh Avenue and went into 23 ST Station, for a good walk from 34th ST, and waited for the 1 train.

A 1 train came into the station and blew wind straight into JJ's face. He got on the train and waited. He got off with his friend and waited for a 2 or 3 train.

A 1 train came and blew the wind, but not hard because he was on the other side of the platform. Then, on the 2 and 3 train side came a 2 train.

He was enjoying his trip but was also still feeling that pang of longing that he had when he had left for Harlem.

He needed to get back to the wild.

He had missed Harlem but his loyalties lie in the wild.

A lot of swirling thoughts came into his head, and he started crying. He wanted to stay in Harlem, but he belonged in the forest. He felt like he was being torn in two! He calmed down when he found his old toy that he had lost in Harlem last time he'd

been there. He picked it up and saw his name shining in blue, silver, red, and gold, JJ.

He slept at 8:00 pm. He woke up the next morning and smelled the city air. He went deeper into Harlem with his toy and headed to 116th st.

He had an energizing nap and went to 125th ST, looking at Harlem on Broadway and 125th Street. Then he walked to Amsterdam Avenue on 125th ST. Then, 2 buses passed, specifically the M101, which was turning, and the M125 going towards Broadway.

He still did not know what choice to make. But, he still did not know if he had choices.

He ended up thinking maybe he did not need to make a choice, if he even had one, thinking they had probably noticed he was gone and started coming out to save him. JJ walked with slowly growing fear and confusion. The fear quickly became confused, and now JJ was confused, not in a curious way. He slept, waiting.

"AAAAAAHHHHHH!!!!!!" JJ barked.

A cat was pawing at his face, and the cat pawed right on his eyelid. JJ barked. The cat scratched his paw. He barked at the cat, and it yowled at him again.

Then unexpectedly, it leaped up and lunged at him. He tried to dodge, but the cat turned midair and hit him, with more momentum and power than before, knocking JJ into a subway track. He jumped back up, but the cat was ready for that. It had a dirty, matted white coat with grey spots outlined with black. It had sharp cobalt blue eyes, and even though it was a small cat, it was dangerous. Or I'm just weak,

JJ thought. He hesitated to fight the cat. It reminded him of Frost. The cat kept clawing at him, but they didn't get through his fur. The cat seemed to realize it wasn't doing any damage, so it pushed JJ into a wall, then somehow got him into a trash can. JJ's fur got very dirty, and he quickly got out and was very sticky and dirty. He leaped on the cat, but it ducked and then JJ went crashing into a human. JJ quickly got back on his paws and turned around. The cat was sitting on its hind paws, and JJ started running towards it. It jumped over him and ran away.

JJ was drowsy and tired from his fight with the cat, so he decided to try to sleep.

He had to curl up on a pile of newspapers and cardboard. It was very uncomfortable, and JJ waited, just sleeping. He woke up the next day and found the scratch that had penetrated his fur stinging.

He wanted medicine, so he went to a nearby human and barked. It gave him a pat and poured some water on him. It was clear to see that JJ was thirsty and dirty. JJ scampered away. He licked his scratch until he felt better, and wanted to go to the forest.

He decided to go back. He went to a stop and waited. Then a human yelled at him, “Leave, disgusting stray!”

Then he was kicked down onto the railway. He saw that a train was coming. He leapt up and got up right when the train came, and it clipped part of his tail. He went down on the floor and experienced the worst agony of his life.

He finally hobbled off the station and made for the forest.

He breathed in the scents, then quickly repaired his bleeding tail. Then he scented Stripe. Then he took off running.

He saw Stripe chase him, so he ran faster. There were tears running down his face, but just because he was tired.

Is that even Stripe, though? Thought JJ.

Then the striped cat stopped and took JJ out of the city.

"Don't worry, it's me, Stripe," said the cat. "Everyone is worried about you. Let's head back to camp."

CHAPTER EIGHT: GOES AND COMES

Frost was very tired. Earlier, Stripe had come in and licked her injuries, then, at Frost's request, left to get some rest. Frost was tired and lonely. She wished that Stripe was still here. She wished for a lot of things. Right then, JJ's friend Kai walked in. He helped Nightfall sprinkle a little bit of forest herbs along the long, red cut that stained Frost's fur.

While he was putting on some slug slime, he said, "Frost, I have some bad news, JJ left!" Kai says in one huge breath.

"What!" roared Frost. "Why would that dog-breath corpse worm idiot leave!" Frost roared, even louder.

"What's going on?" asks Nightfall. Then Stripe saw Kai and said, "Ohh." Then he said, "Frost, I know you want to go look for JJ, and we found a method that will help you come with us." Then Nightfall helps carry Frost onto a log with a rope attached to it and a safety harness made with unstable-looking bark, and straps Frost to it.

"Frost, our great fearless leader, can't even walk!" screeched Chaniko.

"Frost was injured, fighting for the circus, while you were sleeping in the trees, since Frost was killing your evil replica!" Stripe shot back.

"What good leader can't even help search for a member?" Chiniko continued. "We should have chosen me for temporary leader, at least I can walk, plus I am the most human-like member, and humans are natural leaders." Chiniko finished.

“You want to say that?” said Flora. “Those humans locked us in those carts until we were wanted outside for their entertainment. We were lucky to escape that prison, and lucky to come here, where the forest food is full of wonderful tastes and smells, and the sky is always in view. We are lucky to be able to move wherever we want, when we want,” Flora states. “If you want to follow the crazed monkey that looks up to our prison wardens, go ahead. But if you want to follow me, Stripe, and the judgment of our original leader Frost, then come with us to help JJ,” Flora added to her original statement.

Flora took a second to catch her breath. “But before you head to leave, monkey, think about this: Who helped distribute all the food evenly when Chaniko wanted to have it all, even the meat he could not digest? Who always helped the injured? Who gave the people who made mistakes second chances? Frost did. So choose wisely,” finished Flora.

Everyone came to the side of Frost except for Chaniko.

“No fair!!!!!!” wailed Chaniko.

Then he leapt up into the trees and disappeared beneath the leaves, escaping the cover of the safe camp.

“Alright, let’s go find JJ. Flora, you scout in the sky, Burrito, Taco, and Moon go that way, everyone else come with me,” said Frost.

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Later, everybody had scoured almost every plot of land to find JJ and left to get some rest.

***

The next day, Frost heard a rustling sound from the bushes.

Have I slept late? Frost wondered. She woke up, and Stripe was gone.

Out of the bushes came Stripe. And who was that dog with him?

"JJ!" Frost exclaimed with joy.

"I was wandering around, and I stumbled upon the edge of a city. I saw a dog that looked exactly like JJ, and he was crying while sprinting," Stripe explained. "I sprinted after the dog, and that dog was JJ! I grabbed him and talked some sense into him."

"Well, thank you," Frost praised. "But exactly why did you do this in the middle of the night, all alone?"

"I wanted to impress you," Stripe said, blushing.

"And?" Frost inquired.

Stripe replied, "And, you know that we could never have found JJ with Chaniko."

"That's all right. I understand," Frost nodded. "However, Chaniko left."

Stripe was taken by surprise. "I knew he was a stupid head, but I never expected he'd leave us! I mean, safety in numbers and all that?"

"Anyways, go help yourself to some food!" Frost meowed. "I'll head to bed."

CHAPTER NINE: MEDICINE

Frost slept for a few more hours. As she woke up, she heard cheering sounds. She limped outside her den, weaved from twigs and moss, and saw everyone crowding around JJ. Nightfall was trying to check to see if JJ had any injuries.

"Oh dear!" Nightfall cried. "I was worried earlier that I wouldn't get to check on JJ if everyone is crowding around him!"

Frost looked into Nightfall's eyes and said, "You are the leader of us until I heal. Get the animals' attention! They have to listen to you."

"That's right!" Nightfall padded towards a high rock and climbed it, and then she hollered, "Can I have everyone's attention?!?!"

All the animals turned their heads towards Nightfall with wide eyes.

Nightfall continued speaking, "I can't check on JJ if you guys are hounding all over him! What if he has an infection? Then he could die! I'm the only one who has the most knowledge about healing."

"I have an idea!" Blaze shouted. "Maybe you could teach one of us to learn how to heal!"

"I think that's a splendid idea!" Flora called in support of Blaze. "All volunteers could try to learn, and if they don't like it and if they are not that good, they shall not do it!"

"Great! All volunteers can meet me in my den, and the first thing I am going to teach them is herbs," Nightfall decided, "after I heal JJ, of course."

All the animals who wanted to heal marched towards Nightfall's den. Noodle was bouncing with excitement as if she'd been waiting for this moment all her life. Nightfall looked tired but ready to teach her students about healing.

"Well, I'm off to teach! I'll be in my den, teaching, if you need me." Nightfall informed Frost and padded away, humming a strange tune.

CHAPTER TEN: CITY THINGS

Why is it always me who is sad, like, PLEASE GIVE ME A BREAK! JJ thought. And why always during nighttime, when I'm trying to sleep?

Kai was not asleep and saw JJ looking depressed.

"You know, I always underestimated Chaniko's dumbness," Kai said, which seemed to make JJ laugh.

JJ seemed to miss the city.

But he was not going again unless for trips.

He remembered the 6 train and the R train that he waited 20 whole minutes to take.

He remembered the M6, the M18, the M16, when he lived in Manhattan, and the Bx55, the first time he went to the Bronx, and where did they go? Yep. Retirement. Well, only the M6 and the M18, and the Bx55 and the M16. JJ thought.

Why can't I just tell my thoughts, brain? JJ thought.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: CONVERSATIONS

The next day, everyone was out and about. Some animals were off hunting while others were off gathering herbs for Nightfall.

Frost looked around. She limped towards Nightfall's den for her leg herbs.

She passed Stripe, who worriedly asked, "What are you going to do at Nightfall's den? Are you hurt? Did a sharp thorn poke you while you were sleeping? Did the evil Frost attack you in the middle of the night?"

"Don't worry, I'm fine. I'm just going for some herbs for my sore leg, no new serious injuries," explained Frost.

"Oh, good," Stripe sighed. "I'm just so paranoid right now, you know? With all the evil duplicates and escaping stuff… I just wish our life were simpler."

"I get it. Now, I'll see you soon," Frost ended their conversation and touched Stripe's nose gently before padding away.

Frost headed into the medicine den, where Nightfall awaited her.

She added new cobwebs, honey, marigolds, and dock to the wound, and gave Frost a poppy seed to eat to help the pain of the open wound and help her get some rest while she treated Burrito's rat bite that he got while he was out hunting.

Nightfall, grinding up some herbs for Burrito now, said, "Take it easy. This is one of the last bundles of herbs you'll receive for your leg; it'll be healed soon."

“Thank you so much,” Frost said. “You don’t know how much I appreciate it.”

“You're welcome,” Nightfall replied.

“Hey! I still have to be treated!” Burrito exclaimed as Frost headed back to her den to have dinner with Stripe.

Then, Frost headed to bed where JJ awaited her in their temporary shared den.

CHAPTER TWELVE: REINSTATEMENTS

Frost awoke with a start. She felt the spot next to her to see if JJ had returned, and it wasn't all a dream. JJ's soft body was safe and sound next to her, curled around his lovey.

"Phew," Frost quietly meowed, careful not to wake JJ, who was still softly snoring away next to her.

Now that her leg had mostly healed, she could participate in more things and could sleep in the normal den. Still, everyone thought that they should give Frost a little more time to heal from her wound.

Suddenly, Nightfall called for a group meeting. Everyone went outside of JJ's den to listen.
Once everyone was gathered, they took attendance.

Flora had thought of it after JJ had come back, to make sure that everyone was here.

"All present!" Nightfall called out from the large rock that they had turned into the announcement rock. "And I have some important news: Frost will be back as leader very soon! I just have to do a few last rounds of healing herbs, and she'll be all better."

This was followed by a volley of cheering from everyone. Stripe cheered the loudest! Frost smiled. She was glad that everyone supported her leadership.

Suddenly, the evil duplicates came, sneaking out of the shadows. Evil Chaniko was still with them, and even though Frost's duplicate had a scratch across her muzzle, it was still her.

Kai and JJ got to work against Chaniko's duplicate, since Chaniko wasn't there. Frost headed for her duplicate.

They dueled in a battle that seemed to last for hours.

Evil Frost slashed Frost, but Frost stabbed back.

Frost looked over her shoulder to see Kai jumping on evil Chaniko's head, and JJ pawing at him.

Frost was jerked back into the present when evil Frost raked her back with her claws. Frost gave her duplicate a large bite on the arm, and the evil animals retreated into the shadows.

Frost gathered everyone together for a meeting as Nightfall healed everyone. Luckily, the back-scratch from her duplicate wasn't too severe.

"It'll heal in a few days," Nightfall reassured Frost.

Next, JJ added more space to the medicine den-there needed to be more space for after battles, or else there would be a humongous line of animals outside the medicine den!

After that, everyone ate some food Stripe and Blaze caught after the battle, many fresh berries from the bushes, and assorted birds, squirrels, and forest mice.

Nightfall added the very last bit of healing herbs to Frost's leg wound, and now Frost could be back as leader.

Then, everyone went to sleep as the setting sun left the sky, leaving a dusky twilight trail behind it, the trail holding promises of rest, peacefulness,

and a good tomorrow, Frost thought as she watched JJ's chest rise and fall.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: JJ IS BEING WEIRD

Frost woke up with a fear that JJ was going away or something had happened to JJ.

No, that won't happen again, he told me. Oh, wait, he did not tell me, thought Frost.

Frost checked outside, and JJ was there, weeping.

Frost tried to cheer JJ up by saying his two favorite things.

“Glitter on dog food!!!” Frost yelled. “Pop Purple Pigeon!!!” Frost yelled even louder.

Frost looked up with her eyes closed, and JJ crept away.

“OH COCONUTS!!!!!” Frost yelled so loud that it woke up everyone in the den and made them rush outside… including JJ.

Frost scowled and went to walk away to see what was wrong with her… or JJ?

Nightfall came over to Frost and asked, “What’s going on with JJ?”

JJ came over and was acting really, really, really, really, really unusual, clawing at the fall leaves on the ground. JJ was being weird, and it was that way for a week.

Frost got to the bottom of this.

“EVERYONE, GATHER!!!!!” Everybody rushed around Frost.

She asked JJ what was wrong with him… and it came out a little different than she wanted it to be…

“Ajfniskl,” JJ replied, slightly inaudible because he was stuffing ten berries into his mouth at the same time.

“Uh oh, something is going on!” Blaze cried.

“WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM, JJ!” Frost yelled.

JJ ran back into the den crying.

UHHHHHHHHH here we go again, and it is my fault this time! Frost thought.

She chased JJ into a clearing in the woods.

“Qwertyuiop!!!” JJ cried.

“JJ, what’re you saying?” Frost asked worriedly.

Nightfall ran into the clearing.

She approached JJ, but he made his fur stand up and growled.

Nightfall jumped back in alarm.

“Usually, slightly insane patients aren't this fussy…” she whispered to Frost.

“Wait… You’ve diagnosed him as slightly insane?!?” Frost cried. “He’s my friend!”

“I’m not saying we can't cure him; I’ve only told you what’s happening,” Nightfall meowed calmly.

JJ barked, “Zxcvbnm!”

“Gah!” Blaze meowed with surprise. She had snuck into the clearing too.

“Frost, handle him. I am going to fetch some herbs,” Nightfall told Frost. “Understood!” Frost meowed.

Nightfall hurried away.

“Qwerty!” JJ exclaimed.

“It’s getting worse…” Frost meowed under her breath.

“Quazwer!”

“Sdfjkl!”

“This is soooo irritating!” Blaze meowed angrily.

“Yuiop!”

Nightfall burst into the clearing, holding a bundle of herbs in her mouth.

“These are juniper berries, lotus petals, and yellowjade stems to feed JJ. They will return him to normal. Also, I brought mint,” Nightfall explained hurriedly.

She began feeding small bundles of the herbs to JJ. He was returning to normal! “Who-What-Where-” he stammered.

Nightfall, Blaze, and Frost took JJ back to camp.

“Mrarfldup… oh, hey… um… what wusa… I mean whap wuzu… UGH I mean what was I saying?” JJ said.

JJ just ended up walking away, and he thought about what happened. He went back to the den and deconstructed Chaniko’s room. They had no need for it anymore.

“ERRTYUIOPASDFGGHJKLZXCVBNMQWE!” JJ yelled muffled.

Soon, JJ got tired and lay down in bed.

He went to sleep with the sound of the wind coming from the window. He woke up the next morning and told everybody the truth.

Usually, Frost would say this, but JJ did because it was urgent. Well, at least for JJ… and maybe Frost.

“Gather ‘round, everybody.” Everybody stared at… something on JJ.

JJ looked at a broken piece of mirror and saw a red tuft of fur on his ear… Was that a mark of Monsieur Spinel? Monsieur Spinel was his old owner after all…

“SILENCE!!! Okay, JJ, go on to what you wanted to say.”

“Thanks, Frost. I am getting sad… and now CRAZY! Can you just help me with that?”

“Yeah, sure!” Everybody replied.

JJ was happy that everyone would help him.

Then he had to hear some bad news.

“Frost, I think JJ will need solitary confinement and therapy,” said Nightfall sadly.

JJ hated it. He was stuck in a cave all day long, and he had to talk about his feelings.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: SCHOOL OF THE FOREST

Frost was out hunting and was trying to find something good to kill and eat.

SWOOSH

Suddenly, a big brown grizzly bear jumped out in front of Frost.

"Hey! It's me, Tyler!" the bear said.

"Um, do I know you?" Frost wondered.

"Oh, so Kai hasn't mentioned anything about the school or me I'm about to recommend to you, eh?" Tyler the bear said.

"Nope, sorry," Frost replied.

"Kai!" the bear called, Tyler whined.

"Ok, ok," Kai said.

"Well, there's this school that teaches animals the ways of the wild. I thought you and your circus friends might like to come join!"

"Why? And how do you know that we are circus animals, and how do you know that we are a "we"?"

"As I said, Kai told me about you guys and your pressures that you have! Like, the evil circus animals duplicates! I shall bring my friends here, and we shall follow you to the school. We will only be there tomorrow from 8:15 am to 3:00 pm!" Tyler finished.

"Okay, but just so you know, 8:15 am is when class starts, so wake up early!" Tyler reminded Frost. "Also, if you will be there tomorrow, I will be waiting back here when the sun is halfway up, and I shall be waiting for you."

“Sure, but one last thing. How did you make the school?” Frost inquired.

“I didn’t make it, but the principal’s family did! Generation after generation. This school is made out of wood and stone, just saying, so the school is not very stable. That is why we have P.E. outside!”

“What is P.E.?”

“Oh, you’ll see,” Tyler says, and disappears into the shadows, saying one last thing, “Be back here when the sun is halfway up!”

***

The next morning, they headed to the school. There were two classrooms. Stripe, Frost, JJ, and Burrito were in class one, and Taco, Blaze, Moon, Flora, and Noodle were in class two. Nightfall was wise enough not to have to go to school.

There were other creatures in the classes, too!

Frost quickly ran into the class she was supposed to be in. Then, Stripe ran in.

Then he realized all the eyes in the room were on him, and he quickly sat down. Then Frost looked towards the front of the room and saw a large elk with gentle brown eyes staring kindly at her.

“Hello, new students. I am Mr. Mikly, and your seat is over there. You, Tiger, please sit next to her,” he said as he pointed to a seat.

Frost went and sat down, but someone pushed her, and she fell down on the dirt floor. She quickly got up and ran to her seat.

"It is a morning meeting, class," said Mr. Mikly. "We have new students who are staying for this day, so let's all introduce ourselves."

Then the animals started saying their names.

"Fiona," said a squirrel.

"Mary, but Mariam to you," a rather fat pig spat at them.

The mean yellow raccoon who had shoved Frost's name was Lemon, and Frost saw Chaniko in the back before he could say his name. Then, Frost and Stripe both said their names hurriedly.

They first learned hunting techniques.

They were shown a hunting technique called the bush walk, which was crouching down low so that your fur was barely touching the ground, and stalking behind things like bushes then leaping up, lunging, and trapping then killing prey with your paws.

"How many prey can I catch if I use the bush technique?" Mr. Milky questioned. Then they practiced, and came back with prey and answers.

Stripe caught six animals, Frost caught seven, and JJ caught the tail feather of a partridge. Everyone else caught nothing.

Then they had exercise class, play break, fighting technique class, food gathering class, and lastly, making shelter class.

During exercise class, Frost ran in front of the whole class, and the teacher, a nice rat named Ms. Lotus, said, "Look at how fast Frost is."

Then Marium, the fat pig, said, "Anyone can impress a flower."

“You have a Ph.D in stupidology,” Frost shot back.

“At least I have a degree,” Marium smirked.

“It was an insult, you dummy.” Then Frost lunged and swiped at Marium, just as the principal walked in.

After she made sure Marium was okay, the principal made Frost get stomped on by Marium the fat pig, (mentally, with roasts and stuff) and told Frost she would give her detention, with Stripe.

“Why does Stripe have detention?” asked Frost.

“Because he disrupted the class.” Then Frost saw Stripe growling at Marium, and half the class that wasn't looking at her was looking at him.

Then they went to lunch.

“Just take a bird or berry for your lunch, or hunt in the woods!” shouted a rabbit.

Frost took an eagle and wild carrot for JJ, who was sitting in a corner.

The next period was fighting. Frost volunteered for every example and chose Mary for her partner every single time.

“Don’t call me Mary," the pig sneered every time Frost called her that.

Soon, the fighting technique class came to an end.

The next class was a food collecting class.

“So, cherries are very delicious berries, but their pits, stems, and leaves are more deadly than yew, a common deathberry to animals. Do not eat them,” the fox instructor said.

The instructor explained more about which berries not to eat and which berries you can eat.

The period went on until it was time for shelter-making class.

“Shelter making?!” JJ squealed. “I’m an absolute pro at this!”

In the classroom, wood, stone, gluing material, and vines were spread out across the dirt-covered floor.

The instructor, who happened to be a beaver, said, “I want you, class, to grab some materials and make a shelter so I can see what you know so far.”

Everyone rushed to get everything they needed.

At the last ten minutes of the period, the instructor checked everyone’s shelter.

“Outstanding,” he said as he walked past JJ’s structure.

Then he walked by Frost’s den.

“Wow,” she gasped as she looked at the shelter Frost built.

It was built of stone and fastened with a glue-like substance, with an entrance of thick green vines.

Frost even had enough time to fill the shelter with school supplies

Then, Frost looked at the creations of the other animals.

Stripe had made a mess, like the rest of the animals. Frost tossed him a berry from a nearby bush since he looked sad about his mess.

Then, the teacher gave them a homework assignment, which was making a shelter and then surviving a storm in it. It was due on the next full moon, and there was a storm coming around that time.

Then, the period ended, and so did the school day. Everyone except Stripe and Frost left the school and went back to their homes.

Frost and Stripe headed to the principal's office to get their detention started.

***

When detention was over, Stripe and Frost panted out of the school doors.

"That. Was. Horrible!" Stripe exclaimed.

"I know!" Frost agreed. "We had to scrape animal fur off the desks!"

"Disgusting!"

"We had to run twenty laps around the school!"

"Exausting!"

"We had to hunt for more food for the school!"

"Savage!"

"Lastly, we had to clean one stall in each bathroom!"

"Gross, right? I know it's one stall for each bathroom, but still, gross!" Stripe informed.

"I am so glad we aren't coming back!" Frost sighed.

“You have to admit, they do have good food and good lessons,” Stripe pointed out. “I had fun during class. Detention was the only bad thing.”

“I guess you’re right,” Frost said.

He left, and Frost was alone with Stripe.

And the two friends walked together back to camp as the sun set in the bright pink sky.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: RESOURCES

Frost headed over to the stump where the food pile was to grab a snack. But it was very small! There were only eight berry branches, one squirrel, a hawk, a mouse with dwarfism by the look of it, and three carrots.

She lept upon the meeting boulder.

"Everyone, gather!" Frost shouted from the boulder. "It has come to my attention that the food pile is small. Can someone explain why?"

Blaze replied, "We are running out of berries nearby, as well as edible plants. And all of the smaller animals we hunt now know to stay away. And we cannot hunt too far away from the camp, for safety reasons."

"I understand," Frost says. "Well, anyway, soon enough we will leave to fight Monsieur Spinel for the final battle. We don't need too much now. However, we will have to start rationing more carefully."

Then everyone left the meeting to go back to their duties.

Frost hopped down from the meeting rock and headed out hunting with Blaze.

Blaze was right, there wasn't much prey, but they should be safe and stick close to camp.

Suddenly, Frost saw three mice! Blaze spotted them, too.

They pounced and got the prey and headed over to the berry bush, where there were only a few ripe berries. Blaze plucked a few.

Suddenly, Frost spotted a small, scrawny eagle!

They tackled it and, with difficulty, caught it.

Next, they headed back to camp.

Frost and Blaze proudly showed off their catch, carefully placing it at the food stump.

There were now five berry branches with three berries on the side: a squirrel, three mice, a hawk, an eagle, and two carrots.

Frost went to check on Nightfall. She was pulling out a thorn that Moon had trodden on while going for a walk.

"Hello," Nightfall meowed.

She had sensed her without looking!

She heard me… Frost thought. Impressive.

"I'd really like some help sorting these herbs. Noodle collected them for me earlier," Nightfall said, pointing to a pile.

"There are three kinds that Flora collected: Dock, marigold, and lotus petals. You can define them by scent," Nightfall explained. She showed Frost the different scents of the herbs.

"Also, could you dip this moss in mouse bile? That'd be helpful."

Frost got to work.

The bile was smelly.

Once she finished, she headed out of the medicine den, where Stripe was waiting for her.

"Did you get hurt again?" he meowed, his voice filled with worry.

"Don't worry! I was just helping Nightfall sort herbs, no new injuries," Frost reassured Stripe.

"Oh phew," Stripe sighed with relief.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: DEATH MEMORIES

The wind was whooshing, and the birds were singing. It was a peaceful morning. Nightfall enjoyed it.

Then, Burrito burst into Nightfall's den screaming, “Help me! I was outside hunting, and I stepped on some thorns!”

Nightfall rolled her eyes and sighed.

“Okay, I’ll help,” Nightfall said. She got up and collected the herbs she needed for the wound.

“Thank you,” Burrito barked in gratitude.

Burrito lay down in a pile of moss as Nightfall carefully chewed some herbs into a poultice and then carefully placed the poultice on Burrito.

“Hey, you look sad,” Burrito points out.

“I was just enjoying the peace and quiet and thinking about memories until you came in…”

“Whoops, sorry about that!”

“Eh, it’s okay. It is my job to heal anyone who is hurt.”

When Burrito was in good shape, he left the den, and Nightfall had some peace and quiet time again.

Time to think. She thought. What should I think about? I know! Good family time memories! Though I don’t remember much about my parents.

Though Nightfall remembered the death of her parents. Suddenly, the painful memory of her father’s death rushed towards her.

It had been a sunny day.

Nightfall and her family were having a walk and were spending some quality time together.

Then, a hunter marched into the grassy clearing through the bracken. He was carrying a rifle, as the humans called it. The black panther family hid in the bushes. Nightfall's mother, Dawn, had put her paw on her eye, but Nightfall pushed it away. She had to see this rifle in action!

The hunter moved closer towards Nightfall and her family's hiding spot.

"Oh, panthers! I see you!" The hunter had snickered.

"Oh dear!" Her mother had meowed with worry.

The bullet from the rifle fired, and Nightfall realized it was not a fun toy.

It was a death machine.

As soon as the bullet was about to hit Nightfall and her mother, Nightfall's father, Swiftshadow, leaped in front of the bullet, taking the killing blow.

"I would have done it a thousand times to save you, my darlings," he had croaked out before collapsing on the rough ground.

And then he died, his life ebbing away there on the ground.

The hunter huffed at Nightfall and her mother, saying, "This panther is huge! I don't need to kill anymore today."

Nightfall and her mother cried.

"Mommy, where is daddy?" Nightfall had asked. "Is he dead?"

“Yes, but don’t worry, Nightfall,” Nightfall’s mother had replied. “Everything else will be okay.”

Nightfall weeped. Such a depressing memory! But the death of her mother had been much worse.

It was a sunny afternoon, and Nightfall and her mother were passing through a gorge in search of a new home.

It had been two years since her father had died, and they were still grieving.

Suddenly, a rumbling sound shook the surface. Rocks began to tumble down against the hard stone walls. They were big, like large balls of doom, similar to the sun, but it was black, cold stone instead of fire.

Nightfall would have preferred the sun.

The rocks almost hit Nightfall, but her mother pushed her out of the way, saying, “Run! Live! I will always love you no matter what!” and she got shoved by the boulder, and got smooshed to death.

“No! Mommy, oh no, where is mommy?” Nightfall had wailed.

The rockslide had stopped, and Nightfall searched for her mother. Her mother’s body was buried underneath a pile of shattered rock pieces.

“Mommy!?” Nightfall cried. “Wake up!”

Soon, Nightfall’s mother had opened her eyes one final time and said, “I’ll miss you more than ever, darling.”

“Rest in peace, mommy,” Nightfall sobbed.

Nightfall’s mother closed her eyes, and her breathing had stopped.

Nightfall rested her paws on her mother’s flank and looked up to the sky, saying, “As an honor

for what you have done for me, Dawn, my beloved mother, you shall now be known as Dawnwing, for how you flew like you had wings to save me from getting smooshed by the big boulders."

Nightfall sobbed and sobbed. The death of her parents was so depressing!

"What's all that noise?" JJ bursted into Nightfall's den. "Is everything okay?"

"Yes, everything is fine," Nightfall replies, wiping her tears.

"Okay then. I hope you are feeling fine, though. Have a good rest of your day!" JJ barks and leaves the den.

Nightfall ran out of tears and then headed to her nest to sleep and forgot all about her bad memories.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE PLAN

Frost was nervous. She had just packed the last few berries and was about to lead a trip to scavenge the human nests for more food.

"Stripe, I'm nervous," said Frost.

"Don't worry," said Stripe, nuzzling her.

Then a deer bounded up to them and said, "Hi, I'm Olivia, here's some traveling herbs, but please don't remember me, Kai sent me!" she said quickly while handing Frost a large satchel of traveling herbs for the entire circus.

Frost sighed. There was a lot of cargo, and they didn't have much room left. All the animals had to share one log, except Nightfall, who got one log to herself because she had all the medical things.
Then, they had one log filled with a couple of stumps filled with water and some room for food they would scavenge.

"Come on, Dummy!" Chaniko suddenly shouted.

Then Frost saw all the animals waiting for her, so she bounded up to the highway and faced the animals.

"This is a thunderpath, and we are crossing it!" Frost shouted.

"What's a thunderpath?" asked Chaniko.

"The thing right behind me, idiot!" replied Frost. "We will go into the closing supermarket across the street, break the doors, and fill our tree stumps with food," Frost finished.

Everyone held up their tree stumps, which were hollowed out like all the stumps they used. Then, silent as the wind, they ran across the road to the closing store. Frost grabbed all the raw meat she could find, also stocking up on berries, raw fish, and loaded up on a human candy called Starburst.

She ate one whole pack before grabbing everything else in sight.

Then everyone gathered in front of the fruit section.

"You took all the bananas!" yelled Chaniko.

"Shut up!" Stripe told him.

"We are going back to RangerVille, where Monsieur Spinel has set up his magic facility, and we will walk to Spinel's facility!" Frost announced.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: THE JOURNEY

Frost awoke with a start. Everyone was resting on the last day in their camp. She bounded up to the announcement rock.

"Everyone, gather!" she yowled. "As many of you know, today is the day. We are leaving our camp after packing up yesterday. Kai will stay here. He is leaving us, for he says that he must stay. We are headed to RangerVille, where Monsieur Spinel's stronghold is near. Alright, load up! Let's go!"

Abruptly, the meeting ended as everyone grabbed their things.

They organized themselves into an organized bunch and headed out.

Without the train, it was a long journey. It took five days. Five long, hard, and scary days.

On the last day, everyone was tired. But eventually, in the late afternoon, they had done it! They were at RangerVille!

"Look!" Moon called, pointing to a red tent. "I think that Monsieur Spinel is starting his own circus!"

"It doesn't matter," Blaze replied. "So long as you've found Monsieur Spinel's base!"

Frost led everyone to the tent where there was a bright neon sign saying: Come to Monsieur Spinel's circus! It's the best in the world! Buy tickets today. And then there was a QR code below it.

And so they watched as the sun set, making way for a cold night, appropriate for the upcoming battle.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: THE FACILITY

The night was cold, freezing, to be exact! The wind was howling super loud, like a lone, rogue wolf who had just been set free from a cage.

“Brrr, it’s so cold!” someone wailed.

Frost didn't feel much of any cold. But she was a snow leopard, which probably meant that she handled the cold better than most of the other animals in their group.

The animals kept on walking, and soon a big, shadowy structure loomed over them.

Frost’s fur swished and whipped in the wind, with all the other animals clinging to her.

“What in the world is that!?” Taco exclaimed.

“I don’t know, dude,” Burrito replied.

Moon rolled her eyes and said, “First of all, do not say the word 'dude' again. Second of all, if you wondered what that structure is, you would go and check it out.”

“Then let’s do that!” agreed Blaze and led the way inside the building.

***

Inside was cold and dusty. Nightfall wheezed.

“Are you feeling good?” Flora questioned her.

“I’m fine,” Nightfall coughed some more.

Flora looked concerned and said, “You don’t look fine.”

Nightfall shook her head and continued to walk deeper into the building.

A few minutes after walking through a dark hallway, a door turned up with different colored lights coming from the room to surround it.

"Huh, I wonder what's in there," JJ wondered out loud.

"Let's go check it out!" Noodle bounced with excitement as she said that.

Blaze reached up a bit and jingled the doorknob. The door creaked open.

Inside the room was Monsieur Spinel, who was wearing black-rimmed safety goggles and a long black lab coat, with a black turtleneck shirt and black wool pants.

"Does everything that guy wears is black?" Flora whispered.

"I don't know," Burrito whispered back. "But if it is a new trend, someone should've told me about it!"

CHAPTER TWENTY: MONSIEUR SPINEL'S MINDSPACE

JJ's life flashed before his eyes.

Suddenly, he realized that everything bad that had happened in his life, Monsieur Spinel had been there.

When his owner had been arrested, Monsieur Spinel was in an alleyway nearby.

When JJ's other owner died, Monsieur Spinel was there too!

It was Monsieur Spinel's fault that his owner had crashed into the car because he was in the car in front. He had also been at the trial for Kate's.

JJ's brain was zooming in on these details, things he hadn't seen.

He froze, going backwards. The next thing he knew, he was knocked out by an unseen force.

He went through the swirling thoughts in his head and wondered what had happened.

What am I realizing? He thought.

He heard voices coming from... Monsieur Spinel?

"Hah, now you are in my mindspace. Now I can talk to you without being heard by anyone else," he said.

"What's going on?" JJ asked.

"Ah, you are knocked out, and I can crawl into your thoughts," Monsieur Spinel said.

"Creepy," JJ replied.

"Hmm... I guess it is," Monsieur Spinel replied.

Wait, am I socializing with the bad guy? JJ thought.

JJ heard even fainter voices that seemed like… memories that were not memories… Monsieur Spinel's thoughts!

Suddenly, JJ saw a memory in the mindspace.

A young Spinel, killing small animals with his magic.

He was wearing a brown shirt and pants, in hiking boots. He had scrambled away from his parents and was high up on a mountain. He waved a polished stick of wood into the air, the wind whipping his black hair. He said one simple word: "Mors.", and then pointed the stick at a rabbit. The rabbit went still, and then it collapsed to the ground.

JJ saw another memory.

Spinel was a teenager, years from the previous memory, when Spinel was a young child. He was on the mountain again and was silent. He threw his stick up into the air, and it elongated and turned to ivory.

JJ went back into the mindspace as Monsieur Spinel closed his memories

Wow. You are so easily distracted, said Monsieur Spinel. What JJ does not know is that I am evil…This is the perfect time… to get him… For betraying me…

"NO!" JJ yelled, unaffectedly.

Monsieur Spinel continued, saying:

For betraying me!

By making his friends all insane…

No…

Him insane…

No…

ALL OF THEM INSANE!

“No!” JJ cried. But it did nothing to stop the voice.

Now… Perhaps… Let me mess with you… FOR PAYBACK!

JJ returned to the waking world with a start. He didn’t feel like himself.

“Grah!” He cried. He thrashed around and ran over to his friends.

“GUYS, MONSIEUR SPINEL IS PLANNING TO DRIVE US INSANE!” he cried.

“Huh?” asked Blaze.

JJ explained the whole telepathy thing.

Then without warning, JJ fell into a trap and almost died, but instead, he got knocked out again…

“JJ, you are under my force now…” said Monsieur Spinel.

“NO! I AM MY OWN SELF YOU HALFWIT! ACTUALLY QUARTERWIT!” barked JJ.

“Oh really…,” replied Monsieur Spinel. “Then you are going to be in big trouble, JJ…
BIG trouble…

Now… Now…

Let your end begin!”

“Ugh, really, you are so overdramatic, Monsieur Spinel,” JJ said, rolling his eyes.

“I…

Don’t…

CARE!

Now…

Have a good time… IF YOU WILL LIVE TO REMEMBER IT! HA!” Monsieur Spinel shouted.

“Well… I WILL!” JJ replied.

“Oh, will you though?” Monsieur Spinel questioned.

“YES, I WILL, AND THAT IS THAT!” JJ replied.

JJ frantically woke up.

“JJ, are you okay? You keep getting knocked out!” meowed Frost, worried.

“Yeah, um JJ… AHHH!” Kai screamed. “That red strand on your ear is glowing!”

“Uh, no, silly, it's orange! When it’s not glowing, it’s red!”

“I did not mention the glowing, did I? Plus, it's red all the time!”

“Ah, I’m so itchy!!! Oh, it stopped glowing. Guys, there's trouble ahead!”

They frantically hid, then crawled out into the light of the tent. But Monsieur Spinel noticed them first!

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: THE BATTLE CONTINUES

Frost watched as Monsieur Spinel called his duplicates… But there was also a JJ one!
His eyes glowed red as he snarled at the real JJ.

"Hah!" Monsieur Spinel scoffed. "And to think my little pet would have grown so soft," he taunted JJ. "You sided with them, didn't you? You little weakling!"

JJ whimpered, cowering, his ears flattened.

"Don't listen to him!" Frost cried. "He's only trying to unnerve you!"

JJ pricked up his ears and stood more bravely.

Suddenly, the battle began.

Frost began slashing at her double, but she knew she had to get to Monsieur Spinel and end this. She took her opportunity when Stripe almost killed his duplicate, and so Monsieur Spinel recalled Stripe's duplicate.

"Stripe! Over here!" she cried.
Stripe understood and went to attack Frost's duplicate as Frost strode through the battle, reassuring everyone as she headed to Monsieur Spinel.

"Oh, the little snow leopard!" he sang. "It's about ti-ime!"

Frost growled. Nobody could try and kill her and her friends.

She launched into battle, dodging Monsieur Spinel's spells and attacking when she could get a blow in. Then, what happened next nobody could have expected.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: DEATH

Frost paused as Monsieur Spinel recalled all his duplicates, raising his fist, ready to blast something really painful…

"It's a death spell!" someone cried.

Frost thought it might have been Blaze or Moon.

Monsieur Spinel chanted, "Mors tibi, numquam reverterisa!"

The red light in his hand grew larger with every word.

Everyone was extremely scared. Frost could see JJ shivering.

Suddenly, Monsieur Spinel cackled, "You will die now! Muahahahahaha!"

"Everybody, take cover! He's launching his death spell!" Noodle hollered.

All the animals tried to hide, but Monsieur Spinel removed the hiding places with more spells.
The spell hurtled towards them. There was no stopping it now.

But Nightfall leapt gracefully in front of the blow, saving all the animals.

Frost saw it in slow motion, Nightfall getting her haunches ready to leap, Flora realizing first, crying, "No, Nightfall!" and then a bout of confusion, everyone not realizing what Flora had been saying, Nightfall leaping, and back to the now…

"No! Nightfall!" cried Frost.
"It is okay. Now is my time," she replied, before the spell hit.

It shoved her to the ground, and Frost stood over her.

"No… Nightfall…" she uttered. But it was too late.

Her body was still.

Nightfall was dead.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: THE FUR

JJ noticed something…

He stepped off the battlefield because whenever Monsieur Spinel was there, his strand was glowing. He was so itchy, and he almost scratched off his skin.

Since Kai had left them once they left the forest, he had been a little agitated. But that didn't matter. He had to investigate the laboratory. JJ crept around the tent and saw the lab. He headed in. Monsieur Spinel wasn't there.

“Where is that magician?” JJ murmured to himself.

Soon, footsteps came up to JJ. It was Monsieur Spinel…

“I see your strand glowing,” Monsieur Spinel cackled. “See, the brighter it glows red, the more you are meant to be with me.”

“No, it doesn’t mean that, and even if it does, I would never join someone as horrible as you,” JJ yowled.

“I thought that you were my friend in the beginning. But you weren’t. I hate you now, and I always will.”

“Well,” JJ added, “you were the one who left me, so that is your fault, quarterwit!”

“Aww, so cute,” Monsieur Spinel snickered. “Your piddly attempts to stop me won't change anything!!! And, you are a quarterwit.”

“You are the quarterwit, stupid! You do not know how to spell my name, and it is only two letters, and you were my owner,” JJ replied.

“Yeah, I do, you spell it GG.”

“WRONG, you quarterwit!” cried JJ. “You spell it like JJ.”

“Whoops!” said Monsieur Spinel, and JJ knew Monsieur Spinel had misspelled his name to make him angry.

Monsieur Spinel yelled to the evil duplicate of JJ. He came racing over, snarling in anger.

“Kill him,” Monsieur Spinel ordered.

Evil duplicate JJ launched himself at the real JJ, and they started to fight to the death.

“That’ll teach him that I am more powerful, and I always will be. If he doesn’t join my side, he will die,” smirked Monsieur Spinel. He cackled evilly.

The duplicate of JJ lunged at the real JJ and slashed his neck. Blood rushed and poured out of the wound, and JJ thought that he might die. Then he had the most stupid idea ever: This blood looks like the ketchup my old owners, Kate and Dean, dipped fries into. “Um, I have been through this before. I was in a subway attack. Luckily, Dean and I survived,” pointed out JJ to Monsieur Spinel.

“Your owners are dead, don't you know?” mocked Monsieur Spinel. “I used my magic to make Bean drink, and even gave him some pure alcohol and mixed it in with every drink he had. He never knew. And I was the one who murdered all 67 people that Kat was found guilty of, and I made her get lung and breast cancer.

“You KILLED them?” JJ shouted in surprise.

“With all my power.”

“Boy, do I love killing people with diseases-I think I tortured a few with a small cold that turned into COVID-19 and then cancer!”

JJ decided to scream, “LIAR, LIAR, LIAR! STUPID QUARTERWIT IN MY FACE! POLICE WHERE ARE YOU! POLICE KILL THIS GUY! YARRR!” cried JJ, launching himself at Monsieur Spinel, pawing at his face.

He missed Kate and Dean so much. He wished they would be looking over him, for luck. He thought they were. How else would he survive a wounded neck?

So he ran away, out of the room…

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: THE ATTACK

Frost saw JJ walk into the room of the laboratory where the battle wasn't happening. She could not care less, and was starting to get annoyed at the dog.

He could not fight. He was sometimes very weird. They constantly had to groom his fur full of ticks and fleas. And he had once made everyone worried to the point of pure exhaustion when he left because of his mental issues.

But now was not the time for these angers.

She was still shocked from the death of Nightfall, but she knew what she had to do. It was not being angry at JJ.

She knew that Nightfall, the mighty, wise panther that had suffered much loss, but still fought to defeat Monsieur Spinel, would not have wanted them to lose.

Frost knew one thing: they had to win, or all die trying.

They would not give up, and Frost would make sure that every last member of the Munchkin circus would fight until they died.

Frost then ran, leapt up, and landed on her clone.

Frost wanted to help Stripe fight himself, but she had to take care of her evil self first. She landed on the hard floor of the room. Then she pounced again, and with one fatal blow to the neck, she killed the evil replica. Then, one piercing shriek almost shattered the sky, and the evil leopard dissolved into the air as Monsieur Spinel recalled her.

Then Frost ran towards Stripe, but he yelled at her, “Don’t worry, I’ve got this. Go get Spinel and stop him. He has a plan, and it can't be good.”

Frost nodded and leaped over the fight and into the entryway of the next room and charged through.

She looked around and saw Spinel standing in the room, brewing something while murmuring an incantation and waving his ivory wand.

Frost growled an unorthodox word at Spinel, and he turned around. “What did you say? I can’t understand your stupid animal language. I use a connection with my animals. You had no connection with your ringleader. He would barely pay for your circus fees. If you surrender, I can kill him and bring you to your family.”

Frost froze. This was a tempting offer. She knew the correct answer was no, but it was so tempting. The thought of meeting her family again…

Just then, Stripe came barreling in and pinned Monsieur Spinel to the floor.

Frost stared in gratitude at Stripe.

“Thank you,” she meowed, filled with happiness to see her savior at just the right moment. Everyone burst into the room, eager to see the evil magician pinned down.

“But where are the duplicates?" asked Stripe. “Won’t they come?”

“No, the duplicates disappeared. That’s how we knew you’d accomplished something in there!” replied Taco.

“So we all hurried in here,” finished Burrito.

“Let’s cheer for our victory!” exclaimed Blaze.

“Hooray!” Everyone cried. “Monsieur Spinel has been captured!”

“Let’s leave this wretched place!” shouted Flora.

Then they all sprinted towards the tent exit.

“JJ, aren't you coming?” asked Noodle.

“I want to investigate more,” he replied

“Ok!” Noodle replied. “Just be back to our old forest camp as soon as you can.” Everyone left the tent.

They walked along and chatted as the sun set.

Suddenly, Monsieur Spinel wriggled free of Blaze’s paws and ran away into the dusky twilight, looking for JJ.

“Oh no!” cried Moon.

“It’s okay. We’ll set a trap,” replied Blaze, a gleam in her eye.

“What trap? We don’t have one!” stated Taco.

“The one we will make with our own paws, claws, and… um… what kind of feet do elephants have?” Frost replied.

“Okay!” replied the group.

So they began to dig a hole, and weaved willow branches to make a cover.

“There!” said Frost. “Now we just need fifteen more of these!”

“Fifteen!?” exclaimed Moon.

“Yeah, that’s a lot,” agreed Burrito.

“Well, we’re going to need a lot,” stated Frost.

“Agreed,” said Flora. “And if Nightfall were here, she’d agree too.

There was a great silence in the group, a mourning, at the mention of Nightfall’s name.

Then, everyone slowly got back to work on the traps.

They weaved plant fiber into covers and dug holes until the point where everyone had to sleep because the animals, in their state of drowsiness, would start to leave big holes in the covers.

Everyone then finished the next day.

“Finally, we are done! I like, made all the nets, gods, you all were so lazy," said Chaniko.

“Shut up, Chaniko, you only made one trap, then left for the rest of the time because you said you were retired and sneaked into the next town on a snack run to get something only for yourself!” hissed Frost.

“Hey, I found a yummy stick that I will eat in the forest to impress those hot woodpeckers near

that one birch tree. I've been working on my bird vocab, like, "I bet you 10 strawberries that you don't know what a beak is," said Chaniko proudly.

"Give me 10 strawberries then, since a beak is the mouth of a bird," said Frost.

Chaniko sadly gave Frost 10 strawberries that she happily ate while planning out the way they would trick Monsieur Spinel.

JJ would sneak into the facility and lure out Monsieur Spinel. He would fall into a hole and be stuck. Then they would cover him with a net.

Only Frost knew the rest. They didn't know if they could do it.

But they would somehow trick Spinel and stop him.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX: IN ACTION

Monsieur Spinel was about to put JJ into a fire pit after he found him wandering through the hallways. JJ pawed at his face as he tried to. Soon, JJ escaped his hands.

"Come back here, you mangy mutt!" Monsieur Spinel demands. "Traitor!"

"No, idiot! Like I said yesterday, you are so overdramatic!" JJ complained.

Monsieur Spinel kept chasing JJ all around the building. They ran through the laboratory, through the kitchen, through the oversized living room, and back to the main lobby.

JJ exited the building, leading Monsieur Spinel to a cave in the forest that Blaze told him to meet the other animals at. He ran, and he ran, he couldn't feel his legs!

Almost there. JJ urged himself. Keep going, JJ!

JJ looked behind his shoulder to see if Monsieur Spinel was still following him. He was.

Such an idiot. JJ thought. He was running on his weak two legs for about fifteen minutes!

Soon, JJ arrived at the cave, and all the animals were standing in a straight line.

A split second later, Monsieur Spinel arrived and stumbled into one of the traps, a hole covered by vines!

"Grah!" he screeched as he fell into the deep pit. He stood up and tried to climb the hole, but it was too smooth.

“Now I know why you had us make these pits so deep and smooth,” said Blaze.

“Yeah, they are for traps!” Noodle barked.

“Noodle, it is a trap,” Moon replied.

“Oopsies!” Noodle barked. “Well, at least Blaze knows.”

Then Frost threw the net she had secretly been working on at Monsieur Spinel, and made sure he was bound tightly before hoisting him up and out of the hole that he was in.

Then Frost ran back to the camp and grabbed the magic crystal that a mysterious mage had given her.

No one knew who the mage was or what animal they were because it was part of the concealing spell the mage had told Frost she had.

Frost hadn't told anybody about the crystal. Not even Stripe.

She had kept it a secret because people might get suspicious.

She hadn't even thought about it in a while because it didn't seem realistic that they would capture Monsieur Spinel and be able to take away his magic. But this crystal could steal magic! And now this was the time. Their chance.

Her chance to defeat Monsieur Spinel and help JJ.

She was thankful that he could help them defeat the owner who had caused him so much pain.

She could avenge Nightfall’s death.

She could help everybody.

Make a difference.

She grabbed the crystal and raced towards the trapped Spinel.

She threw down the crystal and started saying the spell that had popped into her head.

“You, Monsieur Shakhuni Halenki Spinel, are not worthy of the gift of magic that can be achieved in many ways. It is not intended to be used to cause death, harm, or pain. You have broken the rules made for those with the gift of magic way before you. These rules were: Never cause harm, never use it for the benefit of only one individual, never pass the gift of magic to others, it may only pass by genes, and never make clones or use the death spell.” Frost took a breath. “You have acquired magic from the DNA of your father, who used the blood of innocents to make a potion of magic. He was beheaded after reproducing with your mother. She was also beheaded for not telling the leader of your homeland about your father's gift. The leader decided to let you live. Once you grew, you killed him. You are not worthy of this gift. It shall be removed from your blood and cast into a random being worthy of the gift, unlike you. I, Frost the snow leopard, who has been affected by your murder of Nightfall, remove this magic with the power of the Mages.”

Then the crystal began to glow and spin. It rose into the sky above Spinel and shot down a blue beam of light and him.

He let out a scream of pain, and the beam turned red. Then, the crystal fell out of the sky, and Spinel fainted.

“What should we do now?” asked JJ.

“Return to the circus,” Frost replied. “But first, let’s have a feast!"

“Hey guys, wasn't the beam red then blue? If I am wrong, then I am definitely colorblind,” Kai said.

"Well," said Taco, “it was blue then red, so yes, you are colorblind.”

“So that’s why I sometimes see grass as, and I will be specific, the color magahony!” Kai exclaimed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN: THE FEAST

Frost stood on the announcement rock.

"As you all know, Monsieur Spinel is defeated, and so we will have a feast!" she announced.

"Yeah!!!" everybody cheered.

Frost laid out the berries and squirrels, mice and voles, and a few fish with an eagle in the middle and lettuce and carrots for Kai.

Everyone dove in like they hadn't eaten in days, and Frost leapt down from the announcement rock. She took a large bite out of the eagle.

Stripe made everyone laugh by trying to say, "This is delicious" with a mouthful of food, but it came out like, "Mrbleglrph mmph mmphrl."

It seemed like everyone was having a fun time! Kai gulped down his lettuce and carrots. Blaze took a hungry bite out of a squirrel. Flora was eating a mouse. Moon was eating berries. JJ ate a fish. Noodle was making her way over, and Taco and Burrito were taking turns taking bites out of a vole.

Then, Blaze brought out dessert: a cake they had stolen from the humans with some berries on top!

"Yum!" Everyone cheered. They each had some.

"I sort of wish it were carrot cake," Kai said.

Then, everyone headed back to their dens.

Frost was stuffed from the feast. She silently lay down on her comfy bed of leaves and closed her eyes, slowly drifting into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT: RETURN TO LEAVE

Frost woke up from her bout of unconsciousness.

She opened her eyes to the warm light of dawn in the forest of many colors.

The colors of the forest were beautiful, and Frost could now fully appreciate the beauty of summer.

The greens, reds, pinks, and browns of the forest were now seen and loved by Frost. She could now see them without the stress of a duplicate leaping out to attack.

The huge stress of Monsieur Spinel had been lifted off her shoulders like magic, and she felt like she could finally breathe.

She got out of bed and padded into the forest.

She sprinted around, not caring that she was probably waking up everyone.

She decided to hunt for food and was surprised by how many animals she found.

There was much more prey now than when the forest was like when they had found JJ, and the animals were fatter.

She brought the animals back to the temporary camp they had set up and found Stripe.

"We need to go back to the circus where we were performing! What if something happened?" Taco said.

"Fine, but I like it here; however, we can go back," Frost said. "There is a truck full of food that is going to the last known place of the circus, The

Emerald City. I hear they have lots of plays, like that movie, Wicked," replied Stripe.

So they loaded the animals into the truck and headed on a 5 week journey.

As the truck quietly parked near the Munchkin Circus tent, they slipped out of the truck at night and left the driver wondering why all the meat and bananas were gone the next morning.

Then they saw a big sign hung up across the street.

It read:

News

!Munchkin Circus Got Shut Down!

Because of the escape of the talented animals of the Munchkin Circus, the circus has been shut down!!!

This will be official next week, on 6/7/24

To learn more, visit https.munchkincircus.com

"Wow! Yay, the circus is closed, and we can go back to the forest!" said Frost.

"Yay!" cheered the other animals.

They decided that they had to rest before the trek home, so they ran into the truck that they had come in quickly.

They ran out as fast as possible, into the welcoming forest. There were many cheers, but Frost

pulled Stripe away. “Stripe, I love you,” Frost said quickly, blushing.

“I love you too,” Stripe replied, looking a little rosy-cheeked himself.

“Frost, will you mate with me?” said Stripe.

“Yes!” roared Frost.

“About time!” said Kai.

All the animals burst in, cheering, “Hurray for Frost and Stripe!

“Come here,” said Noodle, ushering everyone away. “I need to see if my suspicions are correct.”
Then she stuck her hands in some unflattering places and announced the best news ever.

“Frost, in about two weeks, you will have kits!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE: THE SECRET

Frost squealed with delight about something.

JJ went in to congratulate her on whatever it was, but heard Noodle whispering to Frost, “You have been pregnant for about forty-eight days without anyone else noticing!”

“You have about sixteen more days until you give birth.”

JJ got curious and peeked inside.

“Hi Frost!” he said. “What’s going on?”

“Umm…” Frost replied.

That was unusual. Usually, Frost would tell him!

Something is going on… JJ thought.

“JJ, this is personal, please leave," said Kai. Then he stuck his hand on Frost and made her eat Callowberries, which were good for birth but tasted like hell.

JJ barked in sympathy.

“Leave!” snapped Frost. Her eyes looked disgusted.

JJ gave Frost a sad look, then headed out of the den.

Suddenly, Frost said to Noodle, “Oh no. Why did I lash out at him? Maybe his feelings were hurt.”

“Hey,” reassured Noodle. “It’s okay for females to have a spiky temper while they’re pregnant.”

Wait, Frost was PREGNANT?!?! JJ exclaimed in his head. That’s why she’s being so secretive, he realized.

“Heyyyyyyy!” JJ said angrily. “I… heard… THAT!”

“Hey, JJ? Can I order a JEEZ PIZZA AND A CHILL PILL!” Frost yelled.

JJ ran to his den and threw rocks and moss across his doorway for a barrier so nobody could get in through the entrance.

Ok, just leave JJ alone… I guess. Frost thought.

While JJ was in his room, he thought mean, criticizing thoughts about Frost’s cubs. Why did everyone value them more than him? He was more thoughtful. They should be paying attention to him instead of the cubs.

He walked away like he had no friends and took away the rocks so Frost might come.

Unsurprisingly, Frost did not come.

CHAPTER THIRTY: SPECIALTIES

It had been about six to seven moons since the former circus animals had arrived at their forest home, and Frost figured out that she was having cubs!

Every morning since the big cub-having news, Stripe had been fretting over Frost as if she were a cub herself.

“Stripe, Stripe, calm down!” Frost groaned. “It’s not like I’m a nuclear bomb about to explode or something.”

“I know,” Stripe replied, “It’s just… I’m stressed out, finding out I’m going to be a father and all that.”

“I know it’s a lot, Stripe,” Frost reassured him. “But it’s all going to be okay. Just take deep breaths.”

“Thanks,” Stripe meowed. He padded out of the den, leaving Frost to sleep in peace.

A few weeks later, in the middle of a peaceful, starry, full-mooned night, Frost cried, "I think I’m having my cubs!”

Noodle hurried over.

She ushered Frost into the healing den, and everyone followed.

“Only Stripe can come in. They are his cubs!” said Noodle.

Frost was feeling sick. The pain was too much, even for her.

Noodle brought a stick and dropped it in front of Frost.

“Bite down on this. It will help you whenever you feel pain,” Noodle explained.

Before biting down on the stick, Frost had quickly murmured, “Nightfall taught you well.”

Noodle nodded, and then she started pressing onto Frost’s belly.

“Push!” commanded Noodle. “Push out the cubs! And, push through the spasms!

Frost gasped as she did what she was told by the poodle.

The first cub had come out. Then a second. Then a third. After that, no more cubs were out.

“Oh, are our cubs okay?” Stripe fretted. “They look gooey.”

Noodle rolled her eyes and said, “They are in some gooey sack. Lick the cubs so they can breathe and then cuddle with them to keep them warm!”

Frost had looked in awe at her kits. They were just so adorable! It was a miracle that they were born!

Soon, when all the cubs were warm and nongooey, Noodle had felt their hearts to see if they were beating.

“It’s not beating!” Noodle exclaimed. “The cubs are… Unfortunately, dead.”

At that sentence, JJ stormed into the room saying, “I told you it wouldn’t work! They are hybrids, and hybrids like these have never been given birth to for all we know!”

“And, I was more important anyway!” JJ finished.

Frost knew that since she would have no cubs, JJ expected her to keep paying attention to him, and he would be pampered.

Frost sobbed at the sound of this. All she ever wanted was to mate with such a brave and caring cat like Stripe.

Frost looked over at Stripe, who was also crying. It was as if he had an ocean full of tears around him.

Then, Frost remembered that she had stolen Monsieur Spinel's powers! She could use the powers she stole from him to bring her cubs back alive.

"Let me try to use the magic that I stole from Monsieur Spinel!" said Frost.

"That seems a little risky..." Noodle pointed out.

"I don't care, as long as they're alive is what matters," Stripe replied to Noodle's statement. "Go ahead, Frost. Do a spell."

"Reducta animalia ex morto, reviviscite!" Frost chanted.

Blue and purple mist swirled around the cubs, and then, they were alive!

"Thank the gods that these cubs are alive!" Noodle gasped. "All hail the Magna Mater."

Frost was frozen in shock. The spell had just come out of her. She didn't know a single meaning of the words she had chanted.

Though it hadn't mattered, the cubs were alive!

"They're alive!" cried Noodle.

JJ was walking back to his den when he heard their outburst, and he just walked to his den with a quick bark that sounded like "Be quiet!"

Frost couldn't hear him because the roar of her excitement overshadowed JJ's depressed bark. Stripe looked as if he would faint because of his joy.

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It had been about a few minutes since the cubs were born, so it was very early in the morning. Frost and Stripe took this quiet time to name their cubs.

While the cubs were suckling the milk out of Frost, Stripe suggested names for them.

"What about Flame?" Stripe asked, nodding towards the orange tom-cub with black spots and ice-blue eyes.

"I think that's perfect," Frost purred. "Flame it is."

Suddenly, Frost felt a really hard pull in her body and looked down to see a cub who was white with black stripes and had emerald green eyes just like Stripe did. The cub was a tom and walked all across Frost's belly, pushing the other cubs, trying to get the best milk.

"We should name him Tornado!" Frost declared. "Because he acts like one! He runs so fast already with his little tiny legs."

"Perfect!" Stripe asked.

"That's such a great name!" Noodle walked into Stripe and Frost's den, startling them.

Stripe walked up to Noodle and wondered out loud, "Hey Noodle, do you have any name suggestions for that little she-cub?"

“Of course I do! She is black with glorious white spots like the stars and little hints of orange, like the color of her father’s pelt,” Noodle replied. “In my opinion, she should be called Starlight. Named after Nightfall, because of the beautiful light in the stars at night.”

“Wonderful!” Stripe agreed. “The she-cub will now be known as Starlight!”

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The next morning, Frost and Stripe introduced their cubs to the rest of the animals.

“They’re so cute!” Flora exclaimed.

Moon and Kai teared up with joy.

JJ also came into the clearing and smiled. He felt sorry for trying to kill Frost and Stripes’ cubs.

“Wonderful cubs you have there,” JJ complimented.

Stripe winked at the dog, saying, “Thanks, they are pretty precious, aren’t they? And they would be more precious if they had been born alive, but the past is the past.”

“Indeed, they would,” Frost padded next to Stripe, cuddling all her cubs as they turned their heads to Starlight, meowing.
The sound warmed Frost’s heart.

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The days had passed, on and on, and all the animals were happily living a normal life all together.

EPILOGUE

About two years had passed since the Monsieur Spinel chaos, and all the animals needed a long break before their next adventure. It was the middle of the night and all the animals were in a deep sleep. The wind was howling, or was it just the wind?

Frost had woken up in the middle of the night to get a snack, but as she got up, she heard a familiar voice.

She looked around in the dark and saw Starlight, standing alone on the announcement rock, looking up at the stars. Her eyes were white, glazed over, as she mumbled some words that Frost couldn't catch.

"Starlight?" asked Frost.

Starlight didn't respond. Frost shivered and ran back into her den and got Stripe and showed him Starlight.

"Woah," Stripe stared up to Starlight.

Frost and Stripe leaned closer to Starlight and heard what she had been saying.

"Domus dēlēta erit, spēs omnis perdita. Nisi trēs herōēs potentes iter faciant ut id servent."

"What does it mean?" Stripe wondered.

"Our home."

Then Starlight fell, and was knocked out cold.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ari Klasfeld is 8 years old turning 9 (2026) and lives in Manhattan, New York City. Even though he is a boy, he loves animals and most of his friends are girls, and he loves what he is learning in 3rd grade. He loves all of his family but sadly, he can only see them during breaks because they live in Florida. He still can see his best friend (who is a boy) because he lives 6 floors away from him (Ari is on 11 and his best friend is on 5) in the same building. He likes to write and draw and play on his iPad.

Emma Hackett is currently (in 2026) a nine year old girl who loves 67. She also likes being in Minnesota with her wonderful grandparents, reading fantasy books, and drinking bubble tea. She LOOOOVVVEES drinking honeydew flavored bubble tea from Boba Whale, the best bubble tea place ever. Emma also likes heavy metal and rock 'n roll, something she learned from her dad. Some of her favorite bands are Guns N' Roses and Black Sabbath. She loves to watch Youtube, and her favorite book series is the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan. She hates Wit + Wisdom, and wishes the cheese touch never existed because it annoys her. She currently is living in Manhattan NYC, and goes to school at Lower Lab PS 77.

Maysa Gumus is currently a fourth grader nine year old girl. She loves reading, writing, music, hanging out with her best friends, and playing on her iPad.

Two of her favorite music groups are BlackPink and Katseye. Her favorite subjects in school are Wit + Wisdom, Reading, and Social Studies. She also loves all of her family but she only sees them in the summer because they live far in Turkey.

Maysa currently lives in Manhattan, New York.

Rita Mouat is a 9 year old fourth grader (as of 2026). She enjoys reading, writing, drinking boba tea, and having fun with her friends. Her favorite subjects are DEAR and Social Studies, and her favorite special is Music. Her favorite animals are cats. She really hopes that you enjoy this book!

A Message from

Written Out Loud

CEO Josh Shelov

When I was in elementary school, I was a creative kid who felt, deep down, that I didn't have a creative place to play. The activities that were open to me were, basically, sports. Sports were where the peers and parents went, after school every day, delivering the kind of validation that only transpires when an entire community mobilizes around an activity.

After a 25-year career making films in Hollywood, I created Written Out Loud to give creative kids the exact same team- and community-oriented validation that young athletes receive. Written Out Loud delivers elite instruction, mentorship, and fellowship - combining Hollywood storytelling techniques with Ivy League-caliber instruction and Silicon Valley-engineered program delivery. Our unique group-storytelling approach is revolutionizing how kids learn to write, transforming even reluctant readers into joyful writers — and, yes, published authors. Not only does Written Out Loud develop kids' storytelling skills, but it also provides them with

a safe and inspiring space to grow their courage, empathy, and self-confidence.

Following our appearance on Good Morning America, Written Out Loud is now partnering with schools, districts, families, homeschools, and organizations nationwide. We've successfully delivered our program as an afterschool program, an in-school ELA partner, and as a summer and spring break day camp, depending on your needs.

"At Written Out Loud," said one of our students, "I'm more myself than anywhere I've ever been." We would be thrilled and honored to provide this same outcome for the children of your community: to create the kind of space that so many creative kids need deep down.

Joshua Shelov
Founder & CEO