

*This is part 2 of 3 for FORESTDIM Chapter 1.*

Their behavior was always odd, different than the others who seemed to only come to visit. There were two of them, this one was the male. His large rounded shadow sat in the center aisle. Ophelia watched him peer in through the glass, his beady eyes positioned above an enormous mustache. Suddenly a beam of light flicked on. Her eyes winced. Ophelia had encountered these many times, flashlights. Ingenious! If only they weren't so large, Ophelia would love to have one. The beam meandered lazily over the shelves for only a few seconds before it was off again, and Ranger 1 returned to his rounds with a hoist of his belt and a grunt. She waited awhile, even after he was gone from sight, in her little corner. What if Ranger 1 came back? What if the female ranger came by as well? The little chipmunk shook with thoughts and worries until the spell was broken by a snap back to reality. She quieted herself and took the time to listen to the night. Her ears flicked this way and that, small though they may be. There is comfort to be found in the stillness. Ophelia took a deep breath, held it, then let it out slowly. She dashed on all fours past the rows of shelves, across the center aisle, and over to the left corner. It was back here that they housed the most priceless of their human possessions; books.

Their "library", as she had learned they called it, lay towards the back corner, slightly raised up from the rest. Ophelia, at a slow pace now, crept up to the base of the landing on which the library rested. For humans this would only be two steps up, or perhaps just one ambitious step. Something one would do in seconds. For Ophelia, this was a several-minute endeavor of leaping up a few times to catch the lip of the step, pulling herself up, and then repeating. Once at the top, she allowed her pack to sluff off her shoulders unto the floor. She stretched and arched her back. Finally, she could get to

the focus of her trip. Here at the library area were more shelves, only these were more compact, slender, and the aisles were closer together. It also wasn't nearly as expansive as the rest of the building, only having about 4 cases to look through. Despite this, it was the best source of books in the whole park. Ophelia picked up her bag by one strap and walked into the space. On each shelf lay stacks and rows of books, laid more aesthetically rather than practically amongst an assortment of other knick-knacks. It was hard to see the names of the books from the floor, for obvious reasons.

As Ophelia scanned the area for a way to get up she tapped her foot annoyed. Certain things were not where they ought to be. A few decorative items, a table, and even some barrels all now were in different places. She scrunched her nose.

*Why do they have to go and do this?* Ophelia fretted to herself. *It looked just fine before they rearranged it. What to do, what to do-*

Her eyes flicked back to one of the barrels, and the items inside them caught her eye. It was placed conveniently between two rows of bookshelves. For a moment she kicked herself for getting distracted from her mission, but then she read the word written on a little wooden sign hanging off the lip of the barrel. It was one word, a word that chilled her. She shivered and let her backpack drop to the floor. Ophelia glanced between the sign, the books, and back to the sign.

“Chipmunk”, it read, in black curvy lettering.

Ophelia found herself walking up to it, her curiosity getting the better of her. Soon she climbed up the side of the barrel's wooden surface, the texture and her claws made it easy. She steadied herself before leaning over on the lip of the barrel, facing its inhabitants. Ophelia thought about what these were called, as she could not recall. Children often played with them. They looked like animals but were obviously made of

plush material. Soft like fabric, and these ones had short fur and five black stripes running down their backs.

*They look like...*

Ophelia gingerly crawled over to get a closer look.

*Me.*

Yes, it was her. Well ok, not her specifically, but her supposed species. Whatever *she* was. These were larger than her, but they had her brown fur and her stripes, and her tail but- Ophelia stared into the eyes of it. In them was nothing but black, a beadiness that she could see her own reflection in. The white of her own eye stared back at her. She shuddered and looked at the tag on its foot. All things like this one had bits of paper attached to them with string, and Ophelia enjoyed reading about the creature it was meant to be. Printed on the back in brown was that word again. The word that humans categorized her as.

*Yup. That is what I'm supposed to be.*

It read, "The Eastern Chipmunk is the only living member of the genus *Tamias*. It is found across eastern North America. This furry friend wants to find a home! Consider supporting the park with your purchase".

Beneath the text was an outline of a pawprint. Ophelia slid her own paw over the tag, lining it up with the one printed on the paper. Somehow, she felt cold.

Ophelia let go of the toy, took a step back, and crawled following the lip of the barrel. She went back on task, looking for her route toward the books. Willfully squashing any additional thoughts, ignoring the chill pain in her chest, and unbothered by the sudden numbness she felt. At times it was like she wasn't truly present in her own head. She looked, but she didn't interpret anything. Only action occurred, and Ophelia

found herself jumping from the barrel to an adjacent table. This low table was placed by the wall of the library corner, right beneath several indented wall shelves. With anticipation making her whiskers twitch, she eagerly reached back around to take off her pack. Her paw motioned in empty air.

Her whiskers now stood on end. It was one of those brief moments of panic. Everyone has them. The sudden confusion of something not being how it ought to be, when you were so certain it should be there, only to have your stomach lurch. Ophelia twisted around, looking for where it had gone. But as quickly as she had begun to fret she remembered her action of leaving the bag behind. Her ears and whiskers drooped. Slowly she turned her head towards the stairs. Glaring back at the edge of the landing she saw her abandoned backpack. Ophelia scrunched her face in her paws. How could she have left it behind? She took in a heavy sigh. It didn't really matter anyways, she knew the title she was looking for. Her mind could at least remember that much, she'd just have to pick up the bag on her way out.

Ophelia started at the corner and worked her way out. Each book she scanned over the words on its spine. Book by book, title by title. Some of them seemed interesting.

“Jasper Park Bird Guide”

“Peaks, Valleys, and Rivers; Jasper Trail Maps”

“What Mushrooms Should I Eat?”

“101 Tales of Stupidity, Visitor Disasters”

“Small Mammals in Jasper”

The last one caught her attention, but only for a moment. Ophelia recognized it because she had read it already. Nearly every book here she knew already, and soon

enough her anticipation began to wane. While new books came in periodically, it was never guaranteed they'd get exactly what Ophelia was looking for. It didn't help that large gaps in the shelves were occupied by random goods for sale. Ophelia finished with one shelf and trudged on to the next.

*Come on Simon, where are you?* She thought.

As she walked along the table she noticed another change to the displays. One whole shelf in the center of the wall was now missing.

*All that wall space! Now used for what, more posters?*

She side-eyed whatever thing they put in place of her needed book space. The darkness made it hard to make out, but something about the tall framed image on the wall looked familiar. She took the moment to get a closer look at this poster, and once adjusted her eyes fell on a fantastical image. The framed artwork on the wall seemed to be some sort of advertisement for the park. Big yellow bubble letters proudly displayed the park's name, and with it was a blurb that read, "The great owl of Jasper Park!". A blackened forest scene blended into the dark feathers of a winged beast. Ophelia smiled at it.

*They made her eyes menacing enough, she thought, but they got her stripes wrong.*

Making a mental note to mention the poster when next Ophelia saw the great owl, she carried on. There were plenty of more shelves to check. The night seemed to flow past like a blur. Time really wasn't on her mind, even as the stars began to fade. As her eyes burned from weariness. She pushed yet another book over to the side and finally spotted her prize. Ophelia whispered excitedly, "There you are friend!"

It was a sandy-colored tome, fake cross stitching went up the spine to give it the appearance of being leather bound, and on the front was an assortment of animals drawn in pose. Not wasting any more time Ophelia quickly pulled out the book and slid it off the edge of the shelf. She winced at it thunking onto the table, but when no one came looking to investigate the sound she climbed down after it. When she reached the bottom she looked around for a light. Nearby on the table was a lamp, and with a push of a button at its base, the room was now filled with soft yellow. Moving around to catch the light, Ophelia made room on the table to open the book. Her paws gripped the edge of the cover, and she lifted it slightly before stopping. Ophelia squeezed her eyes shut in a silent prayer to herself, then snapped the hardcover over. She pushed over pages hurriedly to the table of contents. Ophelia muttered as she read, "Introduction, overview, cervidae, carnivores, more carnivores, rodentia-"

There, that's what she wanted. Down the list were beavers, muskrats, and various squirrels, but finally she spotted that word again. It was a struggle to lift up so many pages at once, but Ophelia managed. The paper fell with a thwap to the side as she combed for the right page. What she wanted was the section about herself. Or what she hoped was herself. The turning paper revealed a photograph neatly printed at the center. Bold text spelled out, "Eastern Chipmunk" just above the picture. Beneath it were several paragraphs about the creature, and Ophelia studied every word. She read on and on, about preferred habitats and food types, the warrens that family groups would create, and the hibernation patterns. Reading it slowly began to grow a lump in her chest. Pictures accompanied the text, showing chipmunks playing with one another or sleeping together in a hollow log. One picture depicted a female chipmunk with a nest full of tiny pink newborns. With dread she flipped the paper over to continue, but found

the section ended with this last page. The last few words were about conservation efforts to maintain something. She didn't read them. She didn't care. The lump got bigger, and that numbness returned. The page became blurry, or was it her vision?