1. Midsummer 2

"Where have you been volunteering so far?" Erik asks Quince before she can take her next forkful.

"Piggy Paradise the first morning. I put sunscreen on the ears and snouts of pink pigs. They whined and scrunched up their faces like little kids."

He laughs because it's exactly like that.

"Then Cat World. Sixteen special needs cats. The area smelled bad, but they were sweet. Yesterday afternoon, I made up straw beds in Tupperware containers for desert tortoises." She adds swiftly as if he's going to interrupt, "And, of course, Dogtown."

He nods with appreciation. "You're getting to know the entire sanctuary. That's good. Where's your shift this afternoon?"

"Horse Haven," she tells him. "I'll be shoveling shit, I assume."

He laughs because she's right again. "You'll meet Speedy. He's a donkey who has the chest capacity of a dragon and shrieks like a parrot. You can hear his bray clear across the canyon. He's a breed commonly known as the *mammoth jack*. They're descended from donkeys brought in by General George Washington and bred to be a strong working mule." He flushes. He sounds like a textbook. Actually, he read it in a textbook. "Sorry. Lecturing."



"It's okay. I like history lessons. Who's Sherman?" she asks bluntly.

"One of my patients." He flattens his voice. "He died."

"I'm sorry," she says and adds softly, almost to herself, "It's hard to lose them, isn't it?" Then she focuses on him. "What happened?"

He spins the hummus bowl. "That's a long and complicated story."

"Okay, I understand." She's quiet for a moment. "And, of course, if it's a sad tale, it's best told in winter, not midsummer."

"That a Shakespeare quote?"

"Freely adapted," she admits. "As kids, we memorized them like Bible passages. I was very obnoxious as a teenager."

"Weren't we all?" He chuckles as snippets of his teenaged years flash by.