

The Doctor Will See You Now

“You did not just say that!” Luke sighed, glaring at Marie.

“What?” Marie shrugged. “I just said it’s qui—”

“Don’t say it again!” Shae stammered. “I’m finally ahead on my paperwork and I will not have you curse our shift!”

“Is it really a curse to say it’s—uneventful?”

“That’s fine,” Luke said, “but when I worked in Emergency Vet the Q-Word was like saying MacBeth in the theatre!”

Carefield Animal Hospital was uneventful. Luke and Shae had only had a handful of appointments—mostly nail trims and vaccines that owners needed to catch up on. Luke had thoroughly cleaned all the cages and surgical tools for the following week and Shae was fully caught up on the endless stack of patient histories and prescription requests. With no doctors on staff, most Saturdays meant Marie was referring clients to other emergency hospitals or making appointments for the following week. Today, the phone had been noticeably silent and she was able to get ahead on her duties.

“It’s not that bad is it?” Marie asked.

“It’s worse. You’ve only been here for a month, but Shae and I have been here for years. Anytime someone says that word? Something buck wild happens and we’re drowning in anal gland expressions.”

“Things aren’t that dire are they?”

“You say that now, but wait until we’re elbow in an angry German Shepherd’s--”

“Excuse me?” A man at the door spoke up. “I’m so sorry, but are you open today?”

“Q-Word!” Luke sneered, glaring at Marie.

“We are, but only for technician appointments,” Shae said. Her professional mask replaced her previously casual air as she stepped out from behind the counter. She hadn’t seen the gentleman before. He was much older with a long, white beard and bony hands with different colored rings on each finger. “Are you a new client?”

“I’m new to the area,” the man said, brushing off his jacket to remove some snow. “Terribly sorry, but it’s a bit of an emergency. Won’t take more than a minute, if you have the time.”

“I’m sorry, but we can’t take on any clients today,” Shae explained. “Especially without a doctor here.”

“I’m just worried,” the man said. “Arwell hasn’t been acting himself. If I can just have a moment of your time?”

Shae swallowed a sigh and smiled. “We can only take a look, but you’ll have to see a doctor before we can prescribe anything.”

“I appreciate it!” the man grinned. “I just want to see what could be bothering him! Back in a minute!”

“Nice going, Marie,” Luke growled once the man left. “Now, we’re gonna be swamped for the rest of the day...”

“We’ll refer him to wherever he needs to go,” Shae said. “It’s not like we can legally do anything.”

“Come along, Arwell!” The old man said, opening the door with his back while holding a leash with both hands. “Stop making such a fuss about all this, you giant turkey!”

Shae was about to offer a hand when the animal at the end of the leash let out a shriek. Shae took a step back and her customer service smile faltered. The old man pulled Arwell into the animal hospital, but only the front claws stepped into the building. Arwell’s head looked like a giant eagle, with tufts of fur and feathers around the ears. As the clawed forelegs stepped in, the hindquarters of a giant feline stepped in with the wings tucked in close to its body. The feather and fur all blended into the same golden color and the bright green eyes darted hastily around the lobby.

“What is that?” Luke shouted, jumping up and staggering backward.

“Griffin,” the old man explained, “I never asked the specific breed, but I believe he’s native to Northern Africa. It’s a bit too chilly here for him, I’m afraid, so a friend is knitting a sweater for him. But I’m more concerned with this limp in his back leg, did you see?”

“I was...a little preoccupied with the front,” Shae said, finding her voice.

“Hmm? Ah yes, sorry. I should have warned you. But don’t worry he’s well-trained and has all of his shots. I brought his records with me...here.”

The old man presented a rolled scroll to Shae but kept a tight grip on Arwell’s leash. The

griffin narrowed its eyes a little and watched Shae carefully. Shae brought the records over to Marie but made sure to keep an eye on the griffin. The old man brought the griffin forward and Shae spared a glance at its back right leg, dipping slightly with each step. Her fear receded and she nodded as her mind dropped into analytical mode. “The back right?”

“Yes!” The old man said. “That’s it exactly. I don’t remember him hurting it recently, but I noticed it during a landing the other day.”

“Shae?” Luke asked. “Sidebar?”

Shae moved back behind the counter and followed Luke into the treatment area. Luke paced a little between rows of cages and looked furiously at Shae. “What are you doing?”

“What?”

“We’re not entertaining this lunatic and his sideshow attraction?”

“What is our first goal? In vet med, what are we trying to do?”

“Come on, don’t do this...”

“What is our goal?” Shae repeated, firmer.

“Do no harm...” Luke rolled his eyes. “But if this isn’t a specialization, I don’t know what is!”

“He’s not asking for surgery, he just wants to know if there’s anything wrong.”

“What’s wrong is his giant eagle has a lion’s ass!”

“We’re gonna help him, end of discussion. You can either help me or stay out of my way.”

“Dr. Han isn’t gonna like this.”

“You think he’s gonna believe us?” Shae asked. Without waiting for an answer, she opened the door and walked out into the lobby. Marie was petting Arwell’s neck with the old man close by.

“I think he’s quite taken by you, dear,” the old man smiled. “He does enjoy having his ears scratched.”

“Alright, Mr...”

“Excuse me, my dear! Beckett...Wilson Beckett.”

“Mr. Beckett,” Shae said. “While we can’t diagnose or prescribe anything, we can certainly take a look. Would you mind helping us with the exam? We haven’t worked with a griffin before,

so having your experience would be helpful.”

“Of course!” Mr. Beckett said. “However I can be of assistance...”

“Alright,” Shae sighed. “First, I’m gonna take a look at his leg. Can you hold his head? Luke, mind the front legs for me...”

“This is a bad idea...” Luke said, standing between Shae and the Arwell’s front claws. Shae gingerly reached down and picked up the griffin’s leg. There was a deep growl from the massive barrel chest, but Arwell settled after a harsh hiss from Mr. Beckett. Shae struggled with how to approach the situation but decided to treat the griffin’s leg as a cat’s. Testing the bend, Shae determined that the problem was in the hip joint. She set the lion leg down and approached the front of the griffin with Mr. Beckett.

“Without doing X-rays? It looks like he’s just very sore. As you said, he might have had a rough landing and the joint is sore. Is he still eating and drinking?”

“He’s doing well otherwise,” Mr. Beckett shrugged. “I just noticed it yesterday.”

“For now, I’m going to recommend bed rest,” Shae said. “Let’s give it until Monday and then we’ll talk to the doctor.”

“If he believes us,” Luke said.

“I’m going to put the history into our records,” Marie said. “We’ll have the doctors look it over when they come on Monday.”

“I don’t know if they’ll feel qualified to look him over,” Shae added, “but they also know vets in the surrounding area who might be able to help.”

“I can’t thank you all enough. Thank you for looking after Arwell for me,” Mr. Beckett reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of gold coins. “Here. One for each of you...for your trouble.”

Shae took the coins and slipped them into her pocket. “Like I said, bed rest once you get home. We look forward to seeing you and Arwell again.”

“Very good,” Mr. Beckett said. “I look forward to your call. Farewell!”

Arwell moved quickly, ready to leave at the first indication from his master that they were leaving. The creature walked outside on gawky legs and spread his wings in the sunlight. Shae watched from the door as the old man climbed onto the animal’s back. With a flap of the

powerful wings, Arwell bounded into the air and soared away over the treeline.

“See?” Luke said, looking at Marie. “This is why we don’t say that word on Saturdays!”