

Chapter 47

Well, this sucks. Sophia wrestled with her snowsuit. *At least I can take this off. What am I going to do for shoes? I can't wear my boots all day.*

Wolfgirl had strongly resisted putting on clothes and Sophia had delayed getting dressed as long as she could. When she finally did start getting dressed, the feeling of her underwear' against her skin had come close to inducing a panic attack. It had taken fifteen minutes before she had been able to even try to get the rest of her clothes on.

Even though Wolfgirl had finally calmed down, Sophia couldn't completely shake the irritation and anxiety having any amount of clothes on gave her. Even her relatively loose-fitting robe had felt confining.

At least I'm warm. She pulled the suit's arms on and squirmed as it compressed her sweatshirt against her skin. *And I can still smell Shadow on it.* She glanced at the clock. *I'm screwed every other way possible, so what if I get there late too?*

Standing, she zipped up the snowsuit and then sniffed the suit's arms. The wolf's scent still lingered on the suit and seemed to somewhat placate her mind's lupine side.

Tonight, I'll see him for sure, she promised Wolfgirl and blushed as she glanced at the wolf plush back on her nightstand. *Please don't make today any harder.*

The toy's furry underside was still noticeably matted and she pointedly tried to ignore the familiar not-quite-human scent coming from it. In her struggle to get dressed, she had neglected to clean the toy. Lifting her right hand, she sniffed it, attempting to distract herself with the much stronger smell of the leftover pork she had just eaten. She didn't drop her hand until she was in her closet, looking over her depleted collection of footwear.

I can wear sandals at school I guess, although they're going to be a bit small. Bending over, she grabbed her worn sandals. *I'll have to stop by Bruin's before work afterward. Good thing Dad gave me that money for Christmas.*

Bringing the sandals over to her desk, she managed to stuff them into her backpack next to her neglected assignments and textbooks. In the front pocket, she had put the lunch bag she had stuffed with leftover pork. The prior contents of the backpack had been haphazardly strewn across her bed.

Let's see, uncompleted homework, random outfit, restless Wolfgirl, leaving twenty minutes before school starts. Yep, that should be just about everything. A lump appeared in her throat and her chest tightened. *Let's get it over with.*

That smell-print was left recently. Sophia slowed and scanned the side of the sidewalk for the source of the mark in the air. *Ah, there it is!*

Her eyes spied a patch of yellow-stained patch of snow next to the stop sign at the corner of her street. It was recent enough that the light snow falling from the sky had not had time to cover it.

There's a strange wolf trying to claim my pack's territory! She stopped walking as curiosity turned to indignation. *I need to find out more about this wolf.*

She started to take off her heavy backpack and then paused.

I'm already late for school and sniffing pee isn't something normal people do. What if someone sees me? Now uncertain of what to do, she anxiously looked around. *Okay, I don't see anyone and it will just take a moment.*

Lifting a gloved hand, she pulled off a shoulder strap and then slid the backpack off the other shoulder. She carefully lowered it to the sidewalk before getting onto her hands and knees. Leaning in, she sniffed at the yellow-stained snow.

A female wolf! The recognition brought a flash of jealousy. *She better stay away from Shadow.* She narrowed her eyes in concentration. *Huh, it seems... different today - like it has more meaning than I remember.* Taking a strong whiff, she pondered it. *There's something weird about this wolf. Maybe it's sick?* Her instincts pointed away from illness, however.

Oh, duh, it's probably a dog. A twinge of embarrassment flashed through her for failing to realize the obvious sooner. *Dogs came from wolves, silly.*

To her frustration, she wasn't able to tell much more about the canine it came from. She sensed the information was there, but it was beyond her ability to interpret. It was also quite difficult to think 'dog' when Wolfgirl kept identifying the scent as a wolf's.

Well, maybe I'll recognize the wolf if I come across it. She sat back on her knees as a new urge appeared. *Of course, the wolf didn't know this territory belongs to my pack; I haven't marked it!*

Sophia started to get on all fours.

But I can't pee here! For a moment the two competing thoughts clashed. *How else am I supposed to tell other wolves it belongs to my pack though?* With some effort, she managed to overcome Wolfgirl. *If someone sees me, I could get in big trouble.*

Reluctantly, she forced herself away from the mark and stood. Picking up her backpack, she slipped it on and resumed walking. Even after the scent had faded, she felt a twinge of guilt over leaving it unanswered.

I really do need to mark Shadow's and my territory, but at least I kept Wolfgirl from doing anything people would find weird.

The bell signaling the start of class rang just as Sophia finished reaching the side of the street the high school was on. She broke into a run, trying to fight off the desire to drop to all fours. By the time she reached the front doors, she was breathing heavily.

Great, now I'm late, out of breath and sweaty. She pulled on a door handle and was unsurprised to find it locked. *With luck, they'll give me detention for first period. Maybe the whole day.*

Keying the intercom, she waited for a response. As she waited, another late student came up behind her, also breathing heavily. The chubby boy nodded to her, his face flushed.

Hey, at least I'm not alone. She snapped her head back to the door as she suppressed an amused smile. *Maybe he's a werewolf too.*

"Front office," came a feminine voice from the intercom.

"Hi, *pant* it's Sophia Jones. I'm *pant* running late." Sophia answered.

She was answered by a buzz and the sound of the door unlocking. While opening it, she was surprised to detect a faint floral scent. Glancing behind her, she discovered a third student had joined them.

"Forgot to turn on my alarm," the mousy girl in glasses explained sheepishly.

Sophia forced a laugh and headed through the door. The school's entryway smelled primarily of road salt, mud and rubber although Sophia could pick up traces of various shampoos and body sprays still in the air. A middle-aged woman that smelled strongly of moisturizing lotion was standing there with a clipboard and pen. She regarded the late arrivals as they walked in with a flat expression. However, Sophia did not miss the double-take the woman gave her.

It's going to be a long day. Sophia felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach while she pressed her lips tightly together. *Please don't ask...*

"Names and first classes?" the woman asked instead, sounding bored.

"I've never been late before!" the mousey girl piped up, sounding like she was about to burst into tears. "Will it affect our grades?"

"For the first time it's a warning and your parents will be notified," the woman told her flatly.

Great, something else to get chewed out for.

“Names and classes?” the woman asked again, sounding annoyed that she had to repeat herself.

Sophia and the others quickly told her and she filled out a hall pass for each. Two more students came through the front door behind them and the woman turned her attention to them. Sophia took the chance and hastily headed towards her locker, her boots echoing in the empty halls. Like the entrance, the remnants of body odor, soaps and other fragrances permeated the halls, sometimes irritating her nasal passages. At her locker, she opened it carefully, half expecting a pile of dog treats to fall out, but there was nothing.

A sense of hope flickered. *Maybe everyone has forgotten about me.*

Quickly, she stripped off her boots and snowsuit and pulled out her sandals. As she had feared, her sandals were on the small side and the strap dug into the top of her foot while her toes went slightly past the end. She sighed, stood and grabbed her math materials out of her backpack. After confirming she had everything, she was about to shut the locker when she narrowed her eyes, sniffing.

It's my locker but doesn't smell like it belongs to me. She slowly closed the door as the absence of her claim on it gnawed at her. *How am I going to fix that? I can't exactly pee in it.*

Ignoring Wolfgirl's urge to do exactly that, she quickly locked it and headed for her first class.

“Nice of you to join us, Ms. Jones,” Mr. Pindlewood stopped writing on the chalkboard as Sophia walked in. “Winter break ended fifteen minutes ago though.”

Ugh. I forgot how smelly school was. Sophia grimaced at the all-too-familiar heavy mix of fragrances and odors present in the room. *And how bad people are at rinsing off soap.*

Realizing he had addressed her, she took a breath and then quickly mumbled, “Sorry.”

Several of her classmates smirked, but the teacher simply turned back to the chalkboard and resumed his lesson. Sophia took the opening and quietly opened up her notebook to a new page.

Okay, that went better than expected. She pulled at one of her sandals, trying to relieve the pressure from the strap. *Ugh, I should have taken my socks off. How am I going to do gym?*

Finally, she just slipped off one sandal and then the other. One problem resolved, she hastily started copying what was on the chalkboard, trying to ignore the heavy cloud of perfume that seemed to constantly surround Susan sitting to her left. Keeping her head down, Sophia tried to be as unassuming as possible for the rest of the period.

“For class, tomorrow, do the first ten problems of chapter six, section one,” Mr. Pindlewood said at last but then added. “Ms. Jones and Mr. Landers.”

Panic gripped her at the sound of her name and she reflexively looked up at the teacher. His eyes met hers and his head noticeably jerked back in surprise, his eyes narrowing. A pit formed in Sophia’s stomach and she felt the skin around her ears twitch as she futilely tried to lower them.

“Please see me after class,” he finished flatly.

So much for not getting noticed. She quickly averted her eyes and bent down to slip her sandals back on.

The bell rang and the rest of the class emptied out as Sophia and her classmate with decidedly metallic-smelling perspirant went to the front of the room. Sophia did her best not to meet Mr. Pindlewood’s eyes while keeping her mouth firmly shut.

“Please be on time for my class,” Mr. Pindlewood admonished them tersely. “I know it’s hard to come back after break, but it’s very disruptive. You can put your homework on my desk.”

Shit, now he’ll see I didn’t complete it. Sophia swallowed and shuffled her feet.

“It won’t happen again,” the metallic-smelling boy stammered an apology and darted back to his desk.

Mr. Pindlewood picked up on Sophia’s hesitation, “You had time to get yellow contacts but not complete your schoolwork, Ms. Jones?”

He thinks they’re contacts, thank God, Sophia felt a surge of relief.

“Sorry,” she responded, trying to sound contrite. “I sort of forgot about it.”

“I’m disappointed Sophia,” Mr. Pindlewood told her disapprovingly. “Tardy and you didn’t do the assignment despite having almost two weeks. I truly hope you reconsider your priorities.”

I have. Sophia remained silent but felt a twinge of defiance.

Mr. Pindlewood sighed, “Just get it to me by tomorrow and I won’t deduct any points.”

“I’ll try,” Sophia replied carefully, taking care not to reveal her teeth.

The teacher gave her a penetrating look but said nothing as she turned away from him.

I doubt I’ll have time tonight. Not with my real priority. She gathered up her class materials and hurried from the room. *Ugh... how did I forget about this?*

A wave of scents she had blissfully been free of the last two weeks brutally slammed into her as she stepped into the hall. She gagged and nearly went back into the classroom before regaining her composure.

Just breathe and don’t think about it. Sophia started in the direction of her locker.

“Hey, it’s Wolfgirl!” a boy in the hall called out suddenly. “The girl that went cray-cray on New Year’s Eve!”

Sophia froze, her mouth falling open. *How did..?*

Several students in the small circle that had formed around her gasped and her heart started to beat rapidly.

“Daaamn! Check out her teeth!” Called out an acne-covered boy that smelled faintly of sulfur.

“Are those... like, fangs? Like a vampire?” Asked a girl with perfume Sophia found to be particularly horrid.

Oh no, Sophia slammed her mouth shut as panic started to rise. *Shit*.

“Like a wolf-girl?” Sulfur-boy asked.

“Whatevs.” Horrid-perfume girl replied. “Still weird.”

“Wasn’t it a full moon the other night?” Asked a girl with citrusy hairspray.

“Wow, she’s really getting into it. Even her eyes are kind of like a wolf’s.” Sulfur-boy said as he whipped out a phone and raised it to point at Sophia.

The crowd around her was growing larger as more students stopped to see what was going on.

“Damn Wolfgirl, you a werewolf or something?” Someone asked from the small crowd.

“I...” Sophia started, trying to think of something that would get them to leave her alone even as the urge to growl grew.

“Don’t be ‘tarded. There’s no such thing as werewolves,” the boy who initiated it all said. “She’s just....” He circled his finger around his ear and whistled.

“Awoo!” someone mock howled to laughter.

Escape! In a burst of panic, Sophia darted forward, pushing through the small crowd.

“Why would she wear fangs and yellow contacts if she didn’t want people to see them?” Someone asked behind her.

“You know, I’d know I’d totally smash her if she wasn’t so crazy.” A boy commented disdainfully.

Sophia spied the girls’ restroom and headed for it. Flinging the door open, she nearly ran into a girl on the other side. Keeping her head down, she maneuvered around the other girl. As she entered the bathroom proper, her nose immediately started burning as it registered the intense scent of cleaners.

It’s not fair! Coughing once, she put her hand over her nose, turned and rushed back out of the bathroom, nearly running over a different girl.

Back in the hall, she made it a dozen steps before someone recognized her.

“Let’s see those teeth, Wolfgirl!” a boy called.

“I had heard she was into wolves, but... wow...” A girl said to her friends as Sophia went past.

“She’s always been weird, but that’s just extra.” Another girl said.

A paper ball bounced off Sophia’s shoulder as someone called out, “Hey, fetch!”

Sophia nearly lost control of Wolfgirl and snapped at the students behind her. Her whole body was trembling in fear now.

“Careful, she’ll probably flip out and bite you.”

“Why are they letting an animal in the school anyway?”

They’re right, I am an animal. Her anger flared. And I’m happy to be one. Why am I trying to hide it?

Seeing her locker, she started for it. Without warning, a hand appeared in her peripheral vision and started swinging toward her books. She reacted immediately, twisting away and just the hand’s fingers managed to brush her books.

They want Wolfgirl? Her blood boiled as she traced the hand to its owner. *Fine.*

Sophia opened her mouth in a snarl, fully revealing her canines. The boy who had swatted at her books along with several next to him took a step back in surprise. Fixing the boy’s eyes with her own, she glared at him and was satisfied to see him flinch. The hall went deathly silent.

No going back now. She felt all eyes in the hallway on her as she stalked off.