

Chapter 48

Would anyone even be surprised if I did mark my locker? Sophia roughly swapped her Math text for her English book. I'm Wolfgirl, aren't I?

The lack of her 'claim' on it gnawed at her even more than it had in the morning. Having openly revealed "Wolfgirl", she was finding it even harder to suppress that part of her. It didn't help that her sensitive ears could readily pick out her name being whispered throughout the hall.

At least people are leaving me alone. Slamming her locker shut, she locked it and spun back around.

Several students who had been looking at her snapped their heads away, although she could still sense eyes on her. She knew her reprieve from her peers' attention was going to be short-lived though. Even without that, being surrounded by so much motion, sounds, scents and just people was quickly wearing her down. Every time someone moved, she instinctively tensed and trained her senses. Each report of a locker shutting set off her fight or flight response and her body's inability to properly move her ears or use her nose to 'see' the world just heightened Wolfgirl's alarm.

Finally, the warning bell rang as she entered her next class. Much more of that and I don't think I'd care how cold it was out.

Several students turned to stare at her as she walked in, but she ignored them. That is, all but one student.

Logan is looking at me like he's never seen me before. Sophia flinched inwardly even as she straightened her posture as she briefly met his eyes. *And something about him feels off.*

For a long second, she held his gaze, trying to work out her own seemingly inscrutable feelings. Then, it dawned on her and the recognition shook her to her core.

I don't feel anything towards him... Sophia broke eye contact and practically fell into her seat. *He's just another human.*

The bell rang, signaling the end of the period. Sophia looked up in surprise as the rest of the class started leaving. Her daydream of cuddling with Shadow abruptly faded away.

I sort of zoned out, she swiftly closed the almost entirely blank page in her notebook and got up to join the exodus.

The whispers and furtive glances started immediately but there was a wariness that hadn't been there before. A few students gave her a noticeably wider berth when they saw her coming. As she progressed towards her locker, that number steadily increased as others picked

up on it. When she reached her locker, her neighbor glanced at her and then hastily shut and locked his locker.

It's better than the alternative I guess, Sophia scowled as she opened her locker and put away her English books. *If I had known that's all it took to be left alone, I would have done it a long time ago.*

She fought down Wolfgirl's desperate need for her pack and the crushing sense of being trapped in an alien world as tears appeared. Gritting her teeth, she mentally focused on the parts of her that still made up her human identity. After wiping her eyes, she grabbed her history text and closed her locker.

Everything is so much harder today. She miserably tried to adjust her shirt and jeans in yet another vain effort to feel comfortable. *I don't know how much more I can take.*

A sudden flurry of movement drew her attention and she tensed in anticipation. Her nostrils flared as she tested the air while random muscles in her head tried to swivel her ears toward the stimulus.

Prey?

But it was only a student dropping a book. Her eyes followed it to the ground with mild disappointment.

Ugh, I guess I'm getting a little hungry. Her senses snapped to a locker in the process of getting slammed shut. *I'm surprised the pork isn't lasting me longer.*

She passed a tall boy in a letter jacket and turned her head hopefully as she picked up the faint scent of an animal amidst his cologne and deodorant.

I wonder what that's from. Saliva wetted her mouth. *And how it would taste.*

"Is she... sniffing?" A girl asked quizzically.

Blushing, Sophia snapped her head forward and sped up her pace.

I'm not going to be able to wait until lunch. At her locker after history, Sophia tried to surreptitiously open her lunch container. *I'll just have a little bit to take the edge off.*

The smell of pork greeted her and she reached in to grab several cuts. Sandwiching them on top of each other, she leaned over her backpack and wolfed it down. After swallowing, she licked her lips clean of the cold, salty grease. With some reluctance, she quickly closed the container and put it back in her backpack.

Not nearly as bad as just before a full moon at least. She licked her fingers and then wiped them against her snowsuit. *Now to get through gym and then I can eat the rest.*

Phew. Sophia relaxed as she stepped into the girls' locker room and the feared assault of chemical cleaners didn't come. *It actually smells kind of good.*

The chemicals were there to be sure, but they were almost entirely drowned out by the smells of human body odors and fluids. Each had a story to tell and she felt a strong urge to investigate every one of them - even if her instincts were uneasy with their human origin.

Can't do that here. Sophia stumbled noisily as she barely stopped herself from getting to all fours. *Act human.*

Several girls looked up as her footfalls echoed throughout the room.

"Hey Wolfgirl, heard you had a wild New Year's Eve!" Michelle taunted loudly as she pulled off her jeans. "Sweet prank!"

"It wasn't..." Sophia started to protest as the rest of the room turned to stare at her.

Savannah squinted and then asked, "Have you always had yellow eyes?"

"No, that's definitely different," Michelle commented as Sophia made her way to her locker. "Same terrible cheap clothes though."

"Tea is she got fangs now too!" Lidia announced excitedly. "Let's see those teeth, girl!"

I'm already Wolfgirl. Sophia took a steadying breath.

"Okay, sure," she relented and opened her mouth wide.

"Holy... I expected, like, big plastic teeth," Lidia said, sounding shocked. "Like vampire teeth from a costume shop or something. You went all out and got actual prosthetics!"

"Oooh, let me see!" Michelle demanded gleefully.

Deciding to embrace the attention, Sophia turned to show off her changed canines to the rest of the room. Girls in various states of dress crowded around to peer into her mouth. Gasps and murmurs rippled through the crowd of gawkers.

"Where'd you get that done?" someone asked. "Did it hurt?"

Sophia closed her mouth while trying not to visibly recoil from the myriad scents the girls had just applied. *Just make something up.*

"Over in, uh, Boise," she told them. "It hurt a little."

"Don't you think that's a little, uh, crazy?" a girl in a pink t-shirt asked.

"Oh, she's cooked for sure," Michelle said mockingly.

Feeling sassy, Sophia bared and clicked her teeth menacingly at the girl even while trying to move muscles in her lower back that didn't exist. Michelle visibly flinched but quickly recovered and rolled her eyes. The locker room fell briefly silent as the bell marking the start of the period sounded and the occupants hurried to finish changing.

“Are you, like, a furry?” a blonde-haired girl named Claire asked abruptly. “I mean, you’re Wolfgirl, but I thought that just meant you, you know, liked wolves.”

I guess? Sophia shrugged nervously and turned to her locker.

“What’s a furry?” A girl asked.

“I think it’s someone who fucks animals in a costume,” Lidia piped up from next to Sophia.

Sophia’s legs turned to jelly as she stared at her locker and fumbled with the lock.

“Eww,” several girls groaned.

“Makes sense then. No guy is going to want this crazy bitch,” Michelle jeered. “Dogs all Wolfgirl’s got.”

Sophia managed to get her locker open as she felt her face grow hot. A strong, mostly human with some wolf scent greeted her and she tried to focus on it.

I forgot to take my clothes home, she grabbed her gym clothes and discretely sniffed them. *My scent definitely had less wolf in it before break.*

She spared a glance to see if anyone was looking at her. Luckily, the conversation had moved away from her.

“It’s not someone who thinks they’re actually an animal?” someone asked. “That’s what I heard it was.”

“Nah, that’s a thespian or something,” Lidia replied.

“No, a thespian is an actor,” a girl corrected tentatively.

“Oooh, look at Ms. Smarty Pants over here,” Lidia retorted.

“Sorry,” the girl squeaked nervously and the room fell silent.

The sound of the locker room door opening broke the silence.

“Alright, ladies!” Their gym teacher yelled from the door. “Time for class!”

The rest of the girls started moving towards the door while Sophia just sat there holding her clothes. She breathed a sigh of relief when the last one left.

I’d rather face a mountain lion than go through that again. With her energy returning, she quickly changed into her shirt and shorts. *Damn it, even a shirt and shorts feel uncomfortable.* She squirmed and then gave up. *At least they smell okay.*

“Remember your shoes tomorrow,” Mr. Rindler chided Sophia as the class filed out of the gym. “Proper footwear is essential... and a class requirement.”

Shoes would definitely have been nice. Sophia grimaced as her feet screamed at her for the abuse she had just put them through. *Although, pads would have been even better.*

“Sorry,” Sophia apologized as she hobbled out of the gym. “I will.”

He studied her face for a moment but simply shrugged and walked towards the boy’s locker room. Unable to take it any longer, she bent down and took off her sandals. She splayed her toes and sighed in relief as the pressure ebbed.

I probably shouldn’t have tried running for as long as I did. She winced at a sharp pain in her big toe when she took a step. *I hope my feet don’t blister.*

Despite the pain in her toes, she was tempted to take a lap around the gym. After the taste of movement she had given it, her body felt like a loaded spring. She wanted nothing more than to get on all fours, run and explore all the interesting - if somewhat foreboding - odors left by sweaty humans. It had been a constant struggle with Wolfgirl to avoid doing that during gym.

You’re right, Wolfgirl. She sighed, picked up her sandals and headed for the locker room. *Running on two legs just wouldn’t scratch that itch.*

In the cafeteria, Sophia scanned for Candice. To her relief, the girl was already seated and engrossed in conversation. Crippling guilt and shame welled up in Sophia’s chest and she looked away before Candice noticed her.

I can’t... I can’t... Sophia suppressed the flurry of emotions and limped over to her usual spot.

The small gaming group that typically shared the table with her turned to stare as she sat down. Sophia felt a wave of indignation when they made eye contact and didn’t look away. Pressing her teeth together and straightening her back, she pulled her lips back to fully expose her teeth. The gamers looked away, grabbed their game supplies and hastily abandoned the table. Satisfied their challenge had been properly dealt with, Sophia turned her attention to her food.

So glad I brought lunch. She opened up her lunch bag and pulled out the container inside. *Whatever is on the menu today smells disgusting.*

Flipping off the lid, she sniffed the pork intently before leaning down and grabbing a piece of pork with her teeth. Pulling back, she was a bit surprised when the entire piece of pork came with her head instead of just a small piece.

Oops, let Wolfgirl have too much control there. She set the container down and pulled on the cut, separating it from the piece in her mouth. *So good. It would be even better without the spices.*

She gobbled down the rest of the cut and grabbed several more cold slices. The stack soon followed the first to her stomach.

Oops, I forgot a fork. Sophia sniffed at her greasy hands and then licked them.

“Eep!” She let out a surprised sound as she felt something hit her shoulder and then fall.

Turning, she looked down to see a green bean lying on the floor. Anger flashed through her and she searched the nearby tables for her assailant. Her eyes soon fell on a table with a mix of boys and girls who kept glancing her way. She glared at them, but they pretended to ignore her.

Two legs! she fumed and went back to her lunch.

Midway through her last stack of pork, something bounced off the top of her head. This time, it was part of a french fry. Turning around, she caught the kids at the previously identified table snickering. Her eyes blazed as she opened her mouth wide and tried to growl. The kids at the table paused and then started laughing. Her fury intensified and she started methodically mapping out vulnerable anatomy.

Throat, stomach, thighs... She started to climb off her bench. *No! I can't do that! There are too many anyway.*

Frustrated, she stood and moved to the other side of the table. Tilting her head up slightly, she sniffed the air in the hopes of memorizing their scents. She could detect a couple dozen different foods and hygiene products but nothing useful.

Damn it, how am I going to recognize anyone when my nose is so weak? Feeling defeated, she sighed and stuffed the rest of the pork in her mouth.

For the rest of lunch, she kept a watchful eye on the other table, when she was looking out the window longingly. The kids didn't launch anything towards her again but shifted to mimicking canine behavior. When the bell rang, she stood but waited until she was certain they weren't coming towards her. Relaxing, she picked up her container and headed out of the cafeteria.

Faces! She missed a step as the thought hit her. *Why didn't it occur to me to look at their faces?*

Sophia recognized Patrick in the hall of the science wing a split second before he noticed her. His eyes narrowed behind his glasses and his mouth pulled into a frown. Before Sophia could think of anything to do, he turned abruptly and went into the school's computer science lab.

Everyone is mad at me. Depression and loneliness threatened to cripple her. *Everyone except Shadow and I'm stuck here.*

She managed to force herself the rest of the way to her biology class. Turning to look out the window, she watched the snow coming down. Her heart ached as she wondered what Shadow was doing and guilt over not being with her pack started to gnaw at her.

I really hope the snow stops before this evening.

“New contacts?” A familiar masculine voice pulled her from her reverie.

Blinking, Sophia jerked her head in the direction of the voice to see Logan sitting at the desk behind her. She started to sniff the air before remembering not to. Even so, he was close enough for her nose to pick up that distinct undertone she had come to recognize as human. It was a scent her lupine instincts told her to avoid and having it this close put every nerve in her body on edge.

“Hey,” she greeted him cautiously, trying not to betray the tension in her body. “Yeah, new contacts.”

Why is Logan talking to me now?

His body was as she remembered: handsome, well-toned and confident. Yet, she felt no thrill of excitement in looking at him or desire for him to touch her. His chiseled features didn't turn her mind to mush as she visually traced them.

“They look nice,” he complimented with a sheepish grin.

Is he... flirting with me?

“Uh, thanks,” Sophia responded politely.

“You doing okay?” He asked. “I heard about what happened and, well, you seem very different today.”

I've wanted him to talk to me for so long and now he is... Sophia shuffled her feet uncomfortably. And I no longer want him.

“Different... how?” She asked warily.

Because I'm no longer attracted to humans. The mental admission sent a chill through her.

“I don't really know how to describe it honestly,” he laughed nervously. “Just... different... like your... whole vibe has changed.” He panicked. “Not that that's a bad thing!”

Her fingers tightened as anxiety flooded through her. *I guess I'm not controlling Wolfgirl as well as I thought.*

“Huh, no, I'm the same crazy old wolf-girl,” she forced a laugh.

“Oh, ah, I don't think you're crazy,” Logan responded nervously and scratched the back of his head.

That's nice of him to say. Sophia smiled appreciatively. *I'm taken though.*

"I'm glad someone thinks so," she said with genuine gratitude.

"I actually kind of find the whole wolf thing kind of cool," he blurted out and then started blushing furiously.

What..? Sophia stared at him, dumbfounded.

Luckily, the bell rang, saving her from needing to respond.