

Chapter 58

The balm is wearing off, finally. Sophia surreptitiously sampled the air of Mr. Nelson's history class. *What is that, two-and-a-half hours? I can't take being noseblind much longer.*

She could just barely detect a few fragrances from the personal products that their wearers had applied in excess. However, even the more objectionable ones were a welcome relief compared to the disquieting nothingness she had endured for the past few hours.

Hopefully, I'll have my nose back completely soon. Leaning forward, she took in the scent of the deodorant from the student in front of her. *Hmm, I think that's sage; hard to be sure.*

The boy abruptly started leaning forward while raising his hand toward the back of his neck, and Sophia jerked back in her chair. She looked down at her notebook and pretended to write as her classmate glanced behind him, a disgusted expression on his face.

Oops. Feeling chagrined, Sophia tried to shift her attention to Mr. Nelson's lecture.

Looking at the board, she was able to stay focused long enough to add a couple of lines to the page of more-or-less coherent notes already there.

Today has been quite a bit better so far; even Mr. Pindlewood didn't bother me much. She stopped writing to turn her head towards a pleasant lavender scent. *It's so much easier when I'm not trying to fight myself.*

After a few moments, she returned her attention to the board long enough to add another line.

I am getting really hungry, and I already ate the two hot dogs I brought for lunch. She paused her attempt at studiousness to oblige her instinctual need to check her surroundings. *No prey, of course, and two-legs would notice if I ate raw meat at lunch. At least the cafeteria always has burgers.* Her mouth watered as the phantom taste of blood appeared on her tongue. *I wonder if Shadow has caught anything today?*

Her thoughts shifted from food to her mate-to-be. A painful desire to be enveloped by her love's fur and powerful body appeared.

Oh, how I wish yesterday was every day. Her pen fell onto her notebook as her grip relaxed. *He's so strong, yet so gentle and caring.*

Warmth spread throughout her body as she recalled the feeling of his loving tongue against her face as he cleaned it. Tingling in her lips and cheeks reverberated down her neck and then her spine to the rest of her body. She squirmed and squeezed her thighs together as her thoughts turned to the memory of his tongue against her nethers when he had cleaned her.

I could use a bit of that right now... Faint contractions in her lower pelvis jolted her thoughts as her brain identified her own human-wolfish musk in the air. *And maybe something more...* The video of two wolves mating flashed through her mind, prompting a rush of giddy anxiety and she had the sudden urge to pee. *Not the time for this. Have to pretend to be human.*

Her eyes flitted around the room as she relaxed her legs, acutely aware of the definite wetness in the crutch of her panties.

Even if acting like a two-leg is getting easier, I don't belong here. I should be with my mate right now, marking our territory. Anger surged at the memory of the dog's scent from earlier. *I also really need to mark my locker somehow. But how am I going to mark that without the two-legs noticing? I can't exactly pee in it.*

Belatedly, she realized the sound of Mr. Nelson writing on the whiteboard had stopped, and he was speaking to the class, "- reminder to check your email tonight for instructions on your essays discussing the causes of the Great Depression."

I suppose Candice will want me to at least try to do schoolwork too.

The bell rang, and the class started packing up.

"Don't breathe on me, Wolfgirl," the boy in front of her muttered tersely, turning around. "I don't like dog breath."

Dog breath? Sophia's anger flared. *I am no dog!*

"Wolf," Sophia corrected indignantly and then bared her teeth.

She was rewarded with the other student recoiling.

"Freak," the boy said under his breath as he stood, picked up his things and rushed out of the room.

That felt good, but probably wasn't the best idea. Sophia started gathering up her own books, feeling jittery. *I hate needing to act human, but I promised Candice I'd try. And gym is next.* She stood and then paused thoughtfully. *If I go directly to gym, maybe I can get there before anyone else.*

After being unable to smell much all morning, the medley of odors that assaulted her as she stepped into the hall caught her off guard. She stumbled as her brain frantically tried to sort through the information overload. Sophia leaned against the wall as she breathed and gave her brain time to process.

I didn't realize how much I had gotten used to it all...

It felt like she was trying to read several books at once, each one written with words she only understood some of. While she had been steadily learning to just plow through the confusion, suppressing her sense of smell had seemingly erased any progress.

Maybe I should use the balm... Her mind rebelled at the idea. *I'm a wolf, I can handle this.*

Instead of trying to fight her wolf instincts, she kept the reins on her human-instilled worries and inhibitions. As she rode the ebbs and flows of the information coming from her nose, the tempest in her head steadily calmed until she thought she could move again.

"What is she doing?" A nearby girl asked quietly. "She looks kind of like a dog. Weird."

Wolf! Damn it. Sophia barely managed to keep a lid on her temper, instead funneling it into getting herself moving.

Walking down the school hallways surrounded by so many people still instinctively alarmed her, but the sensory overload had become far more manageable. Every sudden movement, noise or strong smell still demanded her attention, but she freely gave it until her wolfish curiosity was satisfied. It helped that the student body also seemed a lot less fascinated by her, although she still caught the occasional person doing a double-take or staring at her as she passed.

I guess people lost interest in me. Sophia pushed open the girls' locker room door. *It's almost kind of eerie.*

The locker room was silent as she stepped in, but the hairs on the back of her neck stood on end almost immediately. Alarmed, she paused and cautiously sniffed the air, tightly gripping her books. There was urine, body odor, cleaner and...

It's okay. Her body started to relax. *There are female scents in here, but not from wolves.*

"Uh, excuse me," an irritated voice came from behind her. "You're, like, in the door."

"Just! Wait!" Sophia snapped before she could stop herself.

"Excuse me?" the other girl huffed in disbelief.

Woah, where did that come from? Her face reddened as she immediately regretted her outburst, and she moved away from the entryway.

Thankfully, as she had hoped, no one else was in the locker room yet. Sophia hurried towards her own locker, fighting the desire to get down on all fours and explore. It came as a small relief when the other girl went to the row of lockers opposite hers.

Pretend to be human. Pretend to be human. Maybe I should have worn the balm after all.

None of the distinctly feminine scents in the air may have been from wolves, but they still put her on edge.

I should cover them with my own, just in case. She started to divert towards a spot on the bench near her locker where a particularly strong concentration was coming from. *No! Stay focused.*

Reaching her locker, she quickly unlocked it, threw her books in and grabbed her gym clothes.

Heh, I still haven't washed these. She didn't stop herself from bringing the intensely odiferous garments to her nose. *It doesn't bother me, but humans get weird about this stuff.*

She tore the clothes away from her face as she heard the locker room door squeak open. A group of students, Michelle among them, walked in. Several smirked or rolled their eyes when they noticed Sophia.

"I see Wolfgirl is back," Michelle announced loudly when she saw Sophia. "Aww, I was kind of expecting you to come back with fur or a tail."

Several other girls giggled.

Damn, I was hoping to avoid her. Sophia dropped her gym clothes on the bench and started taking off her regular clothes. *I took too long getting here.*

"She still have those yellow contacts?" Jill asked.

"Let's see your eyes, Wolfgirl!" Michelle jeered. "And your teeth! Come on now! Don't make me get a rolled-up newspaper!"

Is this two-leg threatening me? It was all Sophia could do to restrain herself from attacking the girl.

"Fine, be no fun," Michelle said, sounding disappointed.

"I just don't get why you'd do something like that if you didn't want people to see," Jill commented.

Why am I getting so angry? Sophia threw her day clothes in her locker and closed it. *Gah, I wish I could take the rest of my clothes off... And I really need to pee.*

"Ooh, Wolfgirl has new shoes!" someone observed excitedly as Sophia picked up her shoes and gym clothes.

"Huh, not bad," Michelle appraised. "Cheap, rather cheugy, but not completely awful either. Hope you don't chew these up too!"

I wonder what a two-leg would taste like? Mortified by the thought, Sophia held everything tightly and power walked towards the toilet stalls.

"What's up with her?" Sophia overheard a girl ask quietly. "She's gotten sooo much weirder lately. And she's always been weird."

"Maybe she's in heat," Michelle suggested sarcastically.

I'll just stay here until class starts. Sophia stepped into a stall and latched the door.

She started to sit on the toilet when several odors piqued her interest. Instead, she turned towards the toilet, squatted and sniffed at the seat.

Well, this definitely isn't normal two-leg behavior. She looked up to check if there was anyone in the neighboring stall. *Okay, good. They'd certainly find this weird and gross, but they just don't understand how much there is to learn!*

Turning back to the toilet, she resumed trying to separate out the tangle of bodily smells. She could vaguely tell they were from different individuals, but not much more than that.

Bleh, the cleaner really isn't helping. She set her gym clothes on the floor and lowered her underwear. *I'll just leave my claim real quick.*

Squatting, she aimed her crotch and sent a short stream at the base of the toilet. It hit the porcelain and slid down to form a tiny yellow puddle on the plate that fastened it to the floor. She leaned in to sniff at her new mark, muscles in her lower back twitching excitedly.

Much better. She got up, turned and sat down where she emptied her bladder the rest of the way. *That'll get cleaned up later, but at least it'll be there for a little while. Now, how am I going to do that with my locker?*

Bleh, I don't think the bun or fries are sitting well with me. Sophia grimaced as she sat down in her biology classroom. *But a tiny hamburger patty wasn't going to do anything for me.*

At lunch, Sophia had sat at her usual table by herself. The gaming group that previously sat at her table had evidently decided to permanently relocate to a different table after the previous week. When Candice had come in, she had started towards Sophia with the obvious intent to join her, but Sophia had shaken her head. Even the kids who had been harassing her the previous week had found something else to occupy themselves, leaving Sophia alone to focus on remembering not to eat directly off her tray.

At least they smelled sort of like food, unlike the broccoli. The omnipresent undertone of formaldehyde and other chemicals in the classroom was not helping her indigestion, and she cupped her hands over her face. *Maybe I should go back to my locker and get the balm.*

"Still not feeling the best?" Logan's voice startled her from behind.

She turned her head to look at him, registering the oily scent of hair gel and mint. As her eyes focused on him, her nose further picked up the scent of his fleece sweatshirt alongside the usual human odors. He was leaning forward, with one arm draped nonchalantly across the desk. Each time he exhaled, a fresh wave of mint filled the space between them.

"Gold works so well as an eye color for you..." He commented, smiling shyly. "It's mesmerizing."

Why did I find him attractive again? He smells like any other two-leg male.

"Uh, thanks," Sophia replied, watching him cautiously. "I'm not really feeling the best today. Lunch was a little rough on me."

Something to do with looks, I think? She studied his face for a moment and shrugged inwardly. *Got me; he looks like any other two-leg male, too.*

"Stomach bugs suck," Logan said sympathetically. "I caught one over winter break last year, and I didn't want to eat for a week after."

Just go along with it.

"Uh, yeah, I couldn't keep anything down Wednesday night or Thursday," Sophia lied. "It was really awful."

"Yuck," he replied, making a face. "Although if there was a time to be sick, it was those days. I wasn't able to get out for a run until yesterday."

"Yeah?" Sophia replied rotely, her attention drifting.

Logan continued enthusiastically, "Yeah, I like to do a two-mile jog through the recreation area when I'm not training for track. Right now, I have to stick to the roads, of course, but jog around the lake during the spring and summer."

I miss running through the snow with Shadow. That was magical. A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth. *Oh, he's waiting for me to say something.*

"That sounds nice," she said quickly.

"It makes for a good run," he told her and then grinned awkwardly. "You look like you've been working out yourself."

I do? Sophia blinked in surprise.

"Oh," she managed, her ears trying to fold down in embarrassment.

Just then, the bell rang and she gladly took the chance to turn away from him.

Wait, was he hitting on me?

Here it is, the class I've been dreading most. Sophia's heart pounded as she approached Ms. Taylor's classroom. *Maybe I should just skip it? I made it through six classes, that's good enough, right?*

Her gait slowed, and her nose twitched as she anxiously tried to watch and sniff every direction at once. Every instinct told her to run, to put as much distance between the school and herself.

And then what? Skip the last two classes every day until summer?

Someone slammed their locker shut, and she whirled towards the sound, her teeth bared threateningly. The student responsible stopped in his tracks and stared at Sophia even as she shut her mouth and hurried past.

No, I should just get it over with. She swallowed and forced herself into the classroom before she could change her mind.

Ms. Taylor was at the front of the classroom, poring over a book that seemed to contain more colorful sticky notes than pages when Sophia entered. The teacher glanced up, went back to studying her book and then looked up again with a surprised look on her face. She stared at Sophia for a moment before closing the book and setting it aside. Getting up from her tall stool, she headed towards Sophia before gesturing to a small walk-in storage closet.

In there? Sophia hesitated and then changed direction towards it. *Why there?*

"Sophia!" Ms. Taylor said when they reached it. "I'm so glad to see you here today!"

The teacher started to close the door, and Sophia felt panic rising.

"Could you... leave it open?" she asked in a strained voice.

"Oh, certainly," Ms. Taylor let go of the door.

"About last week..." Sophia started, keeping her eyes fixated on the teacher as though the woman would attack her at any moment.

The teacher smelled strongly of floral skin lotion, and it filled the small space. Beneath the lotion's fragrance, Sophia could still make out Ms. Taylor's very human scent, which amplified her unease.

"I was really worried when I saw you were out on Thursday and Friday," Ms. Taylor told her quickly, staring at Sophia's eyes. "The office told me your dad had called you out sick, but after Wednesday... and seeing you now... Sophia, what is going on?"

Okay, skipping class every day might have been the better option after all.

"What do you mean?" Sophia asked, her voice wavering.

She knows, doesn't she?

Ms. Taylor studied her and then shook her head fractionally before replying, "I guess I don't know what I mean..." She inhaled sharply. "You just seem so... different lately. Even before Winter Break... And now..."

Sophia's mind spun, and she jumped to saying the only thing she could think of, "At the New Year's Party... It was all my fault! I messed up the day and, and I didn't know what to do and ran out. I'm sorry to have scared everyone!"

Oh no. Icy fear ran through Sophia's veins. *I shouldn't have said that...*

Ms. Taylor blinked at her, apparently caught off guard by the outburst.

"I think it was allergies or something!" Sophia amended desperately. "I wanted to tell them what happened, but I was so embarrassed and just couldn't." Sophia's voice quavered as she started to cry. "They think I pulled a prank, and now everyone hates me."

The teacher's expression softened. "Oh, Sophia, I didn't realize..." She smiled comfortingly. "I can see how that would have been a really difficult situation! Would it help if I talked to the club?"

"Would you?" Sophia asked earnestly, tears running down her face.

"Of course I can!" Ms. Taylor assured her. "It was just a misunderstanding. No need for everyone to stay angry." She paused as the two-minute warning bell sounded. "Here, take a few minutes in here and come into class when you're ready, alright?"

Sophia wiped her cheek, "I'm sorry; I didn't mean to make a scene."

"No need to apologize, dear," Ms. Taylor told her. "I'll put the books you left behind last week on your desk for you."

"Thanks," Sophia smiled appreciatively, still feeling a bit weak.

Ms. Taylor gave her a last reassuring look and left the small room.

Sophia watched her go, an uneasy feeling settling over her. *She's still bothered about something; I can smell it.*