

## Chapter 61

*This whole trip was a mistake.* The dark cloud that had formed around Sophia made every step heavier than the last. *What does Carl know anyway? Anger flashed through her. Nothing more than wild beasts?!? Seriously!*

In the center of town, the stench of human civilization hung like a pall and steadily fed her souring mood.

*Candice said she understood!*

Her clothes rubbed against her skin as she walked, and, despite the cold, she wanted nothing more than to claw them all off and get on all fours.

*She even said I was more 'me' as a wolf! That I could do what I needed to around her!*

A red SUV screeched to a halt and honked as she stormed across an intersection without bothering to check for cars. Glowering at it, she snarled angrily, but didn't stop or even slow.

*And now she complains I weird two-legs out when I do? What does she expect from me??? She stewed as she cut across the Albertsons parking lot. It feels like she wants me to be something I'm not just to make her comfortable, no matter how much it sucks for me!*

The smell of food taunted her even as it mixed with that of asphalt and automotive fluids in the air.

*Of course, why would I ever expect anything different from a two-leg?*

Frustration welled up, and she kicked a large chunk of snow as she passed a tall pile of dirty snow left by the plow. She yelped as her foot exploded in pain as the chunk of snow turned out to be a lot icier than it looked. For a few seconds, she stood on her left foot and flexed her right toes as the pain peaked and then ebbed. As the ache subsided, so too did her anger.

*I just thought she would be there for me...* Her eyes started to tear up. *That I could share everything with her.*

Wiping tears from her eyes, she grudgingly continued across the parking lot to the adjoining street. A car went by, and she quickly dashed over the pile of snow lining the sidewalk and across the road. As she resumed on the other side, a breeze picked up, carrying the faintest hint of the distant mountain wilderness. Her mood lightened as she traced the scent to the snow-capped peaks.

*All I really need is my pack, and now I know for sure that I won't be stuck with the wrong body forever.*

After a moment, her gaze returned to the sidewalk in front of her, drawn to a specific place on the frozen sidewalk.

*You know, this is where I first met Shadow, or rather, where he found me.* Her gait slowed as she neared the spot where she had stood. *It feels so long ago now, but it's really only been a few months.*

She came to a halt and just stared at where Shadow had stood, the wind stinging her damp eyes.

*I always felt as though there was someone out... there... I was meant to be with, but never understood until these past few months.* Taking a breath, she looked at the hills and trees peaking above the neighborhood ahead of her. *Maybe I'm being too hard on Candice. If I didn't understand then, how would she now?*

After taking a last look at the fateful spot, she pushed on.

*How did Shadow's ancestors deal with it? They must have had two-legs in their lives that wanted them to stay. How did they convince them to let them go?* The first house past the field occluded the mountains, and she felt as though something was being torn from her. *Or did they? Perhaps they just had to trust and follow their hearts in the end.*

The afternoon sun hung low in the western sky, casting long shadows across the street. Forcing her gaze to the path in front of her, she sped up her pace.

*At least I have more time to spend with Shadow tonight.*

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The snow had compacted further during the day, and Sophia reached the tree line behind her house in record time. Her water bottle sloshed noisily in her much-lightened backpack with every step. The sun had set behind the mountains, covering the land in shadow under the reds, yellows, and blues of twilight.

After arriving at her house, she had scarcely done more than dump the contents of her backpack on her bed, grab her water bottle, and throw on her boots before taking off out the back door. The only countenance she had given her hunger was a few pieces of lunch meat grabbed from the fridge.

*I should be on all fours, using my nose to find my way.* Sweat was starting to percolate onto her skin as Woodbury disappeared from view behind her. *Behaving like a wolf is what drives the changes... but I just want to find Shadow. He's waiting for me; I can feel it.*

She quickly found her return trail from the day before and began retracing it. However, daylight was beginning to fade, and the tracks were getting harder to make out amidst the darkening shadows.

*I guess knowing that I have some control over the changes is something useful I learned.* Sophia replayed the conversation with Carl in her head as she made her way through the snow. *Still, it would have been a lot easier if he had said there was no way to stop changing.*

Vaguely, she registered the scent of a rodent of some type, but her usual curiosity was overridden by the ache of loneliness in her chest.

*Damn it, why did I have to mention Shadow to Candice?* She clenched her teeth as renewed frustration burned through her. *If she had only met him first...!*

She snarled angrily as a branch caught on her snowsuit, making her stumble. When she recovered, she quickly realized the trail she had been retracing was nowhere in sight. Looking behind her, she was rattled to discover she could only see her fresh boot tracks in the faintly glowing snow. Daylight had disappeared completely, and the moon had not yet risen, plunging the forest into a deep darkness. Even with her inhuman night vision, she could barely see more than the vague outline of the surrounding terrain.

*Oh wow, it's gotten dark.* She shivered as she looked around. *How long have I not been distracted...?*

She recognized Shadow's scent a split second before a heavy mass barreled into her from behind. Her legs buckled and she fell forward onto her hands with an 'oof.' Before she had even finished falling, she felt hot breath and sharp points against her neck.

*What the hell?!?* Instinctively, she pulled away from the threatening maw with her teeth bared, ready to fight.

Despite the dim light, she could see Shadow standing there, his stance oozing self-satisfaction. He chuffed in amusement and then made an admonishing-sounding series of growls. The chiding tone stoked Sophia's temper, and she lunged at his nose with a snarl. To her further humiliation, Shadow easily evaded, and her teeth clicked together uselessly.

"Did you have to sneak up on me now?" Sophia snapped peevishly, pushing herself back on all fours. "I've had a really rough day."

Shadow seemed to flinch at her rebuke but quickly regained his composure. He made another series of stern growls and rumbles.

*Okay, maybe I wasn't in the best headspace to be out here.* While she didn't precisely know what he said, she sensed his point and felt shame displace her anger. *That could have been a mountain lion, and I'd be dead right now.*

Her neck stung where his teeth had grazed her as tears started to roll down her cheeks. She averted her eyes downward and lowered her head submissively. The display didn't last long

before she felt Shadow's nose against her forehead, gently pushing it upward, and she understood his meaning immediately.

*Equals.*

A modicum of confidence returned in response to the gesture, and her stance straightened. His eyes seemed to glow faintly as Sophia brought her head up to look at him. He made a sequence of questioning whines and yips before giving her cheek a loving lick. Sophia leaned into the lick as his smell and presence started to calm her.

*My emotions are really all over the place; what is going on with me?*

"It's just... It's just silly human stuff," she told him aloud. "Nothing to be worried about." Turning her head, she gave him a reassuring lick-kiss across his nose.

Shadow let out a skeptical sounding 'hrph', and then rested his muzzle on her shoulder. For a few moments, she buried her nose into his fur, trying to wash away her loneliness and the pain of abandonment with his familiar scent.

*Hmm... Does he smell different today?* She inhaled deeply, his scent filling her world as she contemplated. *I don't think so? Perfect as always. Then why..? Oooh...*

The moment was interrupted by Shadow lifting his head and rumbling one of the Wolfish commands he had taught her the day before, 'stay here.'

*But we just found each other!*

He lurched away from her, and she watched the outline of his form dart away. Despite his command, she nearly followed after him just to keep his comforting scent close.

*I hope he isn't going far.*

To her surprise, his scent started to intensify almost as quickly as it had faded. Soon, a bulky form was moving out of the trees towards her.

*He has something...* Her brow furrowed as she tried to figure out what the new, but faint, fragrance was. *There's something familiar about it, too.*

Shadow stopped just in front of her, and she saw something large tumble into the snow in front of him. Bending down, she sniffed at whatever it was.

*Deer!* Her eyes lit up, and muscles in her backside twitched up as she recognized the odor. *Mmmm, I forgot how hungry I was.*

Her stomach suddenly felt painfully empty, the scant relief provided by the lunchmeat disappearing all at once.

"For me?" She asked gratefully, almost bursting into tears again. "How did you know..?"

*How does he always seem to know what I need?*

Shadow said something pleased in Wolfish and backed away slightly. Without another word or thought, she started in on the welcome meal.

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It turned out to be one of the rear legs and part of the flank of a deer. The leg had been cold, and some of it had already frozen, indicating Shadow had saved it for some time. She struggled to tear through the tough venison, but was hungry enough to persevere in stripping as much of the softer tissue as she could. A few times, Shadow helped her access some of the harder to reach edible parts and happily consumed anything her still mostly human mouth couldn't handle.

"Thanks," Sophia breathed quietly some time later, licking some fat and blood off her lower lip. "I really needed that."

*To think I would have settled for a hamburger earlier!*

Shadow rumbled something happy, and she moved back as he scavenged around for anything edible they had missed.

*I really have to figure out a way to keep my clothes clean.* Sophia brought her glove up to her mouth and started licking it. *There's no way I'll be able to get this all off.*

In the darkness, she had had to eat more by feel and smell, and, judging by how grimy her face felt, she had made quite a mess of it. Her glove smelled strongly of the deer, and no amount of licking or gnawing at it seemed to get it out entirely. Shadow came over, and she gladly offered her face for him to clean. Shadow offered his muzzle in turn, and she happily returned the favor.

*Wow, I'm tired all of a sudden.* She yawned as a wave of fatigue struck her after removing a small bit of gore on her love's cheek. *Feeling much better, though.*

Shadow nuzzled her face tenderly and growled something in Wolfish. He pulled away from her, and then there was a snowy eruption as he started digging.

*What is he..?* Her instincts quickly supplied an answer for her conscious confusion, and she felt compelled to aid him. *Shelter.*

Shadow's excavation slowed briefly as she crawled next to him and began awkwardly digging. Her gloved fingers clawed at the snow at a speed that matched her companion's but failed to produce the same stream of snow and debris created by his short, clawed digits. By the time she had managed to dig out a hole with a depth of a few inches large enough for her to kneel in, Shadow had created a depression nearly a foot down that was large enough for both of them.

‘Come,’ he rumbled, another of the wolfish instructions he had drilled into her the day before.

Sophia stopped her own lackluster attempt and looked over to see Shadow’s eyes glinting at her expectantly from the bottom of his hole. She sighed, a deep sense of embarrassed inadequacy gnawing at her.

*One day, I hope, I won’t be such a burden.*

As she pivoted to join him, Shadow settled onto his stomach and leaned against the side of the hole with his right leg up, invitingly. She rolled into the depression and lay down on her side next to him, drawing her legs in. Scooting over, she lay her body across his left limbs, careful not to put her weight on them.

Once she was in, Shadow wrapped himself around her torso as tightly as he could. He lay his head down in the space between her hat and the collar of her suit. She trembled as his body settled into hers, everything that had been weighing on her melting away. Thoughts of school, Candice, and trying to fit in a world that wasn’t hers faded as wisps in the wind. Her breathing slowed, and her body relaxed as her eyelids grew heavy.

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Sophia awoke a short time later with Shadow still holding her. She could hear his steady breathing as he continued to doze. As she basked in a deep sense of security and warmth, she could feel energy quickly returning throughout her body.

*My mate...* She gently bit down on her lower lip, trembling.

Her breathing sped up, and her lover’s strong scent filtered into her nose. Warmth gathered in her lower abdomen, and she subconsciously pressed her butt back against him. To her frustration, there was little sensation to satisfy her growing desires through the thick fabric of her clothes.

Shadow twitched beside her, and his breathing increased. He growled questioningly before lifting his muzzle off her neck and then yawned.

“I love you,” Sophia whispered giddily, removing her left glove and running her exposed hand along his foreleg.

Shadow nuzzled her neck with his nose and relaxed as she continued to run her hand through his fur. She couldn’t help noticing his musk was growing thicker as she did. Heat started to build throughout Sophia’s body until she was feeling unbearably warm. Withdrawing her hand, she roughly jerked her snowsuit’s zipper down in a desperate bid to relieve it. Once it was down as far as it would go, she spread her snowsuit open, welcoming the relief brought by the frigid air.

Her backside twitched as she heard several strong sniffs from Shadow as a feminine musk joined his. Careful not to hurt her companion's legs, she twisted her body so she was facing him. Tearing her right glove off, she tossed it behind her and then got as close as she could to his furry chest. Stretching her left arm out, she brought it beneath his neck and buried her hand in the fur there. With her right hand, she slowly stroked the fur along his back.

Shadow made a contented 'murr' beneath her touch.

*Why was I so upset earlier? Seems silly now.*

"I have wonderful news," she giggled and gave Shadow a quick lick-kiss on his nose. "I'm going to be a wolf for sure!"

Shadow returned the gesture and "said" something that sounded excited.

"There was a man that knew more of the story - the human version of it at least," she explained and then leaned back to look at the dark silhouette of his head. "About your ancestors. He told us how they became wolves. Although he made it sound like it's a bad thing," she scoffed. "He said they gave in and became 'nothing more than wild beasts.' Can you believe that?"

Shadow chuffed and then gave her a lick-kiss across her mouth, sending an electric thrill through her.

*Ooooo, I can't take it!* The feeling of fabric rubbing against her body almost seemed to hurt.

"I was so mad!" She laughed even as she squirmed. "It was so hard not to tell him I knew one of their descendants and he's a wolf, but not a stupid beast! I should have told him *he* was a stupid beast!"

Sophia lifted her head as Shadow affectionately nuzzled her. Her hand reflexively tightened its grip on his mane.

"You'll always be my beast, though," she said coyly, her eyelids half closed as he gave her a slow lick from the top of her neck, across her cheek, and stopping at the rim of her hat. "My handsome beast."

Playfully, she nipped at his nose with her small fangs. He chuffed and took the opportunity to lick her teeth. She accepted, and soon their tongues were dancing around each other's mouths as she pushed her lower body against him as best she could. The scent of decay in his mouth was sweet in her nose as she ran her tongue across the jagged peaks of his teeth. Through her sweatshirt, she could feel something stiff against her stomach where it was pushed against his lower abdomen, and a hollow sensation appeared between her legs.

“And I’m going to be your beast, no matter how long it takes,” she told him lasciviously and made a nervous chuff.

*Ohhhh, I’m going to be the envy of every wolfess...!*

Pulling her torso back, she pulled her right arm through her suit’s sleeve before reaching down and undoing her jeans button and zipper. Sitting up, she worked the left sleeve off her arm and let the top part of her suit fall behind her before flipping onto her hands and knees. Her bare hands sank into the freezing snow, but the sting of cold barely registered next to the blazing inferno inside her.

*So hard to think!*

To her surprise, Shadow stood up next to her, the lighter sections of his fur glinting briefly in the moonlight. Instinctively, Sophia raised herself up on the toes of her boots. Shadow began slowly sniffing down the length of her body. A soft whine escaped her throat when he paused to lick the exposed skin on her torso in the gap between her sweatshirt and jeans. Withdrawing, he nudged her hip with his nose and made a lustful growl. The briefest glimmer of uncertainty caused her to hesitate, but it was swiftly subsumed by the ache in her loins.

*Why not...? He’s my mate...*

She answered with a shy chuff and pushed herself onto her knees. Quickly, she pulled her pants and panties partway down her legs, fully baring herself to the cold... and Shadow. Fully liberated, the full force of her own not-quite-lupine musk drove her libido to new heights.

*I wonder if he can get me pregnant yet?*

Sophia fell back down onto her hands and playfully wiggled her butt. She squeaked as Shadow’s warm breath caressed her damp nethers, and he sniffed her for several agonizing seconds.

*Come on, come on, I need this soooo much...*

Sophia’s eyes widened in surprise, and she gasped as she felt Shadow’s tongue roll across her lower entrance. Her fingers curled down into the snow as she strained against the resistance of her clothes in an effort to widen her stance further.

*Holy...! That felt incredible!*

Muscles in her back strained unnecessarily to move an appendage she didn’t yet have, as a feeling of warmth from her crotch presaged an aroma of musky urine. Her invitation was rewarded with the feathery sensation of Shadow’s tongue returning to her folds. Its tip brushed her engorged clit, and her own tongue slipped from between her lips as she licked at the air. As his tongue continued its journey through her valley, she quivered violently.



Her fingers created furrows in the snow as his tongue slid over her womb's entrance and then withdrew. Quickly, his tongue returned to its starting position, and she moaned in ever-building ecstasy. Over and over he repeated the motion until, finally, the most intense orgasm she had ever experienced blossomed within her. Fluid flowed freely across her vulva as her inner walls convulsed violently. Vaguely, she felt her arms give out beneath her, and her face came to rest in the snow.