

Chapter 37

Adrenaline surged through Sophia as she stood triumphantly in the snow with her first kill. The only remaining signs of life in her prey were the occasional involuntary muscle spasm as its nerves released their last impulses.

I did it! I caught it! Flavorful blood from where Sophia's long canines had penetrated the small animal's neck trickled down her teeth and onto her tongue, further stoking her elation. *Shadow would be so impressed!*

She paused for a moment, instinctively checking her surroundings with all of her senses for any would-be thieves. When none were to be found, she carried the rabbit on all fours towards a partially fallen tree. Her short tail stood proudly as she trotted. Under the cover of the brush, she checked for opportunists one last time before dropping her prize from her short muzzle. She tilted her head down to inspect the bunny's limp form. Its neck was bent back at an unnatural angle and its unblinking eyes were half shut. Some sickly yellow blood was still oozing from its neck and staining the snow where it lay.

Poor bunny, Sophia couldn't help feeling a twinge of pity at the sight of the dead rabbit. *A wolf's got to eat though.*

Lowering her head, she sniffed the carcass curiously, the promise of all the nutrients a wolf needed making her salivate. Then, she placed one hand-paw on its neck and the other on a leg. She next tried to bend her jaws to her waiting meal but found she couldn't lower her head far enough and remain on all fours.

Damn human neck. With an annoyed hrrmph, she let herself sink to her knees and elbows. *This'll have to do.*

Bending her modest muzzle towards the bunny's stomach, she opened her jaw to envelop as much of it as she could. Ignoring the thick fur tickling the roof of her mouth and tongue, she snapped her mouth closed. Her sharp teeth easily tore through the rabbit's hide and soft tissue. Once she had a firm grip on its midsection, she pulled her head back while keeping the carcass firmly pinned with her forearms. Blood and other bodily fluids ran down her elongated chin and dripped into the snow as she used her sharpened back teeth to tear apart the chunk of skin, fur and fat. Once she had reduced it to small enough chunks, she tilted her head back and swallowed.

So much easier with the right teeth. She licked her lips and then curled her tongue around the bottom of her furry chin to lap up some of the juices clinging there. *That bit was... okay. A bit furry.*

Sophia looked back down at the carcass. A sizable section of the rabbit's hide was now missing, exposing its innards. From the wound, a length of intestines bulged while steam drifted up as the warm internal fluids met the chilly night air. Curious, she paused and studied the gory mess.

Strange that nothing about this bothers me. A weak echo of her earlier unease at how much she had changed and her desire to go even further bubbled up. *I just killed an animal with my own teeth and now I'm staring at its guts. And I'm happy about it... and hungry.* She sniffed the exposed insides, exploring the dizzying array of tantalizing smells. *It smells amazing.*

Bending her head back down, she eagerly took a large mouthful of intestines and tore it out.

Not a lot to a rabbit. Sitting a few feet away from the remains of her meal, Sophia licked the top of her left hand-paw as she rested, cleaning blood out of her fur. *I guess that's why wolves prefer deer, but that was really good.* Without consciously meaning to, she started licking and gnawing on the arm of her sweatshirt. *Some of the organs were amazing, although the stomach tasted kind of weird. Oh, I could so go for another liver. At least I think that was a liver; we haven't gotten to anatomy in biology yet.*

An upper canine accidentally penetrated the arm of her sweatshirt and tore a jagged hole in it. Sophia glanced at it and shrugged. Pulling her left arm out of it, she held it with her right hand-paw before gnawing the torn arm of the garment as far up as she could reach. Sticking her arm through the hole, she repeated the process on the other side.

Sorry Grandma, I'll get a new one to make up for it. She gave her arms several licks to clean off the fibers that still clung to her fur. *I'll even get the one with the cat.*

Amused, she looked down at the cat as her tail plowed a shallow trough in the snow. Getting to all fours, she placed her "forelegs" out in front of her and stretched. Her tongue curled out as her mouth opened into a yawn. Lazily padding over to the carcass, she examined it, feeling slightly melancholy now that she was down from her high.

If I go back.

All that remained of the rabbit were some fragmented bones and fur. At first, she had eaten around the bones but realized it was easier to just use her powerful jaws to crush the smaller ones and swallow them with the muscle, fat and hide. Partway through her meal, she had discovered how delectable bone marrow was to her lupine palate and had gnawed apart the larger bones to get as much as she could. The only part of the bunny that was largely intact was the head. To her frustration, her muzzle had not been big enough enough to wrap around it

and generate enough force to crush it. So, she had contended herself with whatever soft tissue she could get from it.

I don't belong there. I'm not human anymore; I'm a wolf and I want to be a wolf. She nabbed a piece of fat and skin she had missed from the snow. Why do I have to pretend to be anything else?

Moving away from the remains, she leaned against a tree and reached back with a hand-paw to work her jean-shorts down her legs. Returning to stand on all fours, she bent her legs to lower her rump. Though it was too short to get in the way, she instinctively raised her tail and emptied her bladder into the snow. Her nostrils flared as the odors from her urine and feminine musk reached them. Leaning against the tree again, she reached back to pull her shorts back up but hesitated.

I could just...

But she shook her head and pulled them back over her still human hips.

Well, almost a wolf... Turning, she sniffed at the steaming, yellow snow. *At least I smell like one.*

Contrary to her musk and body, she could still make out significant traces of her human scent in her urine. While she could readily identify her own smell ever since the second full moon, tonight she could readily isolate the specific markers and patterns that made it uniquely hers. She found an odd comfort that, no matter how much she changed, the unique textures of her smell-print persisted. Aside from her own scent, she could detect what she had eaten from hours before. To her fascination, she could already detect the scent of the rabbit and even match smells to specific parts of it she had consumed.

Lifting her nose up, she spared a moment to gaze wistfully at the remains of her first kill. Then, she turned away from the site and peered into the moonlit forest.

Now to find my boyfriend.

Twenty minutes later, Sophia was making steady progress and was in high spirits despite her complaining muscles. Her post-meal lethargy was abating and a fresh supply of energy was spreading through her. Moving on all fours was increasingly second nature to her and her pace had increased as a consequence. She loved the feel of her "paws" rhythmically sinking into the snow and the gentle tug on her claws with each step. Her torso and tail swayed in time with the rest of her movements. She was even getting used to the irritating feeling of her sweatshirt and pants she stubbornly refused to shed rubbing against her fur - well, almost.

She found her new affinity for quadrupedal movement particularly advantageous as the land sloped downward into the valley Woodbury was built in. The decline itself wasn't particularly steep, but the recently fallen snow hid sections of treacherous ice and loose rock. On more than one occasion, her claws and four-footed stance saved her from a painful tumble. As the terrain leveled out, she slowed and then stopped.

That's cool, I can feel the pressure change in my ears. She folded her knees into a kneeling position as she took a moment to rest. *This must be that wooded area outside of town.*

This part of the valley was particularly rocky and that had discouraged development to date. The rocky soil also made it more difficult for trees to grow and the sparser foliage made it a popular place for animals like deer and elk to forage. It wasn't unusual for tourists to picnic or hike in the forest in the hopes of seeing some. Luckily, no one was going to be out on New Year's Eve night.

There are some deer and other animals around. No cover though; I won't be able to sneak up on anything down here.

There was little undergrowth, which allowed for a relatively unobstructed field of view. However, her reduced visual acuity meant the trees quickly became an indistinguishable blur even with her wolfish night vision.

She hardly even noticed.

Wow, I think I can smell the entire town from here.

On the relatively flat and unobstructed terrain, the air carried scents from all over the valley. Once again, she marveled at how her brain was able to effortlessly put together a detailed map far beyond what she could see. Whether it was the materials used in construction, what it was used for or even just the different ages of the materials, every building in town had something distinctive about it. She found she could even put together a rough mental map that corresponded to her knowledge of the town's layout.

Heh, Albertson's must be the one that smells like a bit of everything. And I can smell people! She lifted her short muzzle up, sniffing. *But what I really want is...*

At first, disappointment seemed to be in the offing. Then the breeze picked up and new scents filled her nostrils. Her changed nose twitched as she took in the new arrivals and then her ears and tail perked up. It took another fraction of a second for her olfactory lobe to finally inform her conscious mind.

Shadow! It was faint but definite and her heart soared. *I can smell him!*

Unfortunately, he was still miles away and she had no idea if her scent could reach him from down in the valley. As quickly as she had been buoyed by hope, depression now threatened to drown her.

It would still take me several hours to get to him. We'd barely get to spend any time together. Sophia let out a lupine-sounding whine. *If only I hadn't messed up the dates.*

As she sank into despair, her ears swiveled as a police siren echoed off the nearby foothills. It was surprisingly loud even though she knew it was a ways off. She angled her ears and head towards it and listened intently as its pitch changed. The shrill sound oddly reminded her of...

Maybe I do have a way to call him...

In truth, she had no idea what she was supposed to do. Yet, she could feel her altered vocal cords and instinct told her it was possible. Getting back to all fours, she took several preparatory breaths and tilted her muzzle up. Inhaling deeply, she opened her airway and then expelled the air from her lungs.

It was a bit weak and off-pitch as howls go, but it rang out into the night and reverberated off the hills for several seconds after she had emptied her lungs.

'I'm here!'

She couldn't help wagging her tail as glee filled her. *I howled! I really howled!*

As the echoes died down, she waited hopefully with her ears erect. The siren had come closer and was passing along the road to the south.

Come on, please have heard me.

Another second ticked by and then another.

She was about to try again when her ears registered a distant but instantly recognizable melody. It was short, but its complex and overlapping tones were rich with meaning.

'I hear you! I'm coming! Wait!'

A wolfish grin broke across her face and her short tail felt like it was going to fly off her butt.

Shadow!

Joy like she had never felt before engulfed her and her 'paws' were in motion before she even realized it. Somehow she retained her balance as her foot-paws launched her forward, a cloud of snow trailing her. Her hand-paws struggled to keep pace as she raced across the snowy landscape, not caring that her tongue hung out of her mouth nor that her butt and tail were arched high into the air. She was feeling increasingly hot under her clothes and her

muscles were screaming at her, but the only thing she could think of was Shadow's fur rubbing against hers and his tongue running along her muzzle.

Despite constantly being in danger of flipping over her own hand-paws, she managed to stay upright for a full thirty minutes. She was verging on exhaustion, but she could smell him now and that was enough to keep her going. Her side was cramping and every muscle in her body was on fire. Yet she ran on.

Finally, his incredible musk was close and she could see a blurry form running through the trees in front of her. Drawing on her last reserves, she pumped her 'paws' even harder...

... It was too fast for her hybrid form to handle. Her arms buckled as her powerful foot-paws propelled her with more force than they could handle. She somersaulted and rolled several times in the snow. Pain shot through her as she tumbled, but something else grabbed her attention. An alarmed combination of lupine sounds that was the most beautiful symphony she ever heard echoed through her mind. And she fully understood all of it.

'Two-Legged Wolfess of Many Scents!'