

## PACKED

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She painted a scowl on her face as she shoved open the door of the bar, desperately hoping—please please please—that the nervous quiver running up and down her spine wouldn't force its way out onto her face. For once, it was a good thing that she was too drab to be noticed—muddy brown hair, a pasty complexion with a few lingering zits hanging one from her teenage years, a faded red hoodie, and ripped blue jeans. Nothing to see here, bitches, just another ordinary, nondescript woman.

She sniffed. Smells assailed her—the medicinal sting of alcohol, the sickening musk of cigarettes, rank urine splashed around the unwashed bathrooms, someone's excessive perfume, and a dozen different flavors of sweaty human body. And there in the back, something else—the scent of bone and blood and damp earth.

The trail led her to a table in the corner, where a woman sat nursing a nearly-empty mug of beer. The woman's nostrils twitched. “Can I help you?”

Trying to stay cool, Delilah crossed her arms. “Heard you could, yeah. Violet, right?”

“Yeah,” Violet said. She leaned back in her chair and coldly looked Delilah over. Delilah stared back at her, unflinching. Violet was maybe a few years older than her, with pale skin and lustrous black hair falling to her shoulders, dressed in a tight, half-zipped leather jacket over a low-cut purple tank top. She was, Delilah realized with surprise, chubby, bordering on fat—unusual for a Wolf. Wolves could be skinny and scrawny, like Delilah herself, or they could be cut like diamond and built like tanks, or somewhere in between, but they rarely carried much excess flesh on them. Violet did. She was a bulging hourglass, heavy-bottomed and buxom, with a roll of fat resting on the waistband of her leather pants. She was definitely a Wolf, though—there was no mistaking that feral smell.

“Two thousand,” Violet said. “In advance. And once we start, you do whatever I say. That's the deal. You got the money?”

Delilah reached into the pocket of her jeans, digging out her phone and wallet. “You can really cure me?”

Violet snorted. “Ain't no cure.”

“What? But they said—”

“I can *help* you. There are methods—tricks to keep from turning when you don't want to. *That's* what I offer.”

“That's bullshit,” Delilah growled. “I'm not paying you two thousand dollars for a bunch of fucking *yoga*.”

Violet shrugged. “Bye, then.” She picked up her beer again.

A growl rumbled in Delilah's throat. Violet's yellow-green eyes flicked up, meeting her own hazel ones. The growl shriveled to a whine, and died.

“Fine,” she spat, and shoved a massive wad of crumpled bills out onto the table.

“Two thousand thirty dollars,” Violet said when she was done counting it. She stuffed the whole pile in her jacket pocket. “And the phone.”

“But—”

“Or you can take your money back and get out.”

Delilah cursed and threw her phone down on the table.

“Okay,” Violet stated matter-of-factly. “We start now. You will obey me at every step of this treatment, or I will *make* you obey. Come with me.”

Delilah followed Violet through the tiny kitchen, where she saw the older woman slip the manager one of the crumpled fifties. Then, down a flight of stairs to a basement room, clean but almost bare. The only thing inside, besides a few cardboard boxes shoved against the wall, was a folding table and chair set up directly under the single bare light bulb. Frosty air blew in through the plastic strips of the

walk-in cooler.

“You gonna lock me in there?” Delilah said. “The agreement was you *stop* me changing, not give me a safe room.”

Violet dragged a plastic tub out of the cooler. It scraped heavily along the concrete floor. She looked back and grinned at Delilah. “Oh, trust me, you're not gonna change tonight. Now *sit*.”

Delilah's bones were already aching; it was just a few hours until moonrise, and the inevitable feral nightmare. Could this woman really prevent the irresistible torrent of hormones, the painful fits as her body tore itself apart and rebuilt itself, the ravenous hunger for flesh of any kind? If she could, almost anything would be worth it. She sat.

Violet smiled and patted her on the head. “Good doggy.”

She reached into the tub and pulled out—hot dogs. Two packages of eight hot dogs each. They were the cheapest kind, the dollar store brand.

“Now eat,” Violet said.

“What?” Delilah asked.

“Eat the hot dogs,” Violet repeated. Delilah shrugged. Whatever Violet had put in them, there were worse ways to get it into your body. She tore open the first package.

They were cold and slippery, and wouldn't have been very appetizing even if they were cooked, but each one was gone in a few quick bites. It only took her a few minutes to finish both packages. She didn't feel any different, except for the heavy sensation of a lump of low-quality meat resting in her belly.

“Good,” Violet said. She pulled out two more packages and slapped them down in front of Delilah. “Again.”

She'd paid two thousand dollars for this. More like two-fifty, counting the phone. Delilah tore open the packages and ate the hot dogs.

“Good,” Violet said. “Again.” Two more packages. Delilah's lip twitched in disgust.

“All that money and you couldn't even get the good kind—”

“Eat.”

“Just how many shitty hot dogs are you going to feed me?”

“As many as I want.”

Delilah choked them down. When she'd gulped the last one, she sat back in the chair, feeling slightly sick. She was very full now, and she knew her sweat would reek of pork tomorrow.

“Good job,” Violet said, and she reached into the tub again. This time she pulled out a large plastic bag full of hamburger patties. Some of them had been partly eaten—others had ketchup smears, or bits of cheese stuck to them.

“Leftovers from the bar,” Violet said. “Nice and cheap. Eat.”

“I'm full.”

“I don't care. Eat.”

“I'm *full!*” Delilah said again, shoving the bag away. “You're supposed to be teaching me how to fight the change, and all you're doing is feeding me a pile of garbage! Is this supposed to *help?*” She muttered under her breath. “God, no wonder you're such a fat fucking tub of—”

She felt fingers curling, snakelike, into her hair. With one sharp movement, Violet slammed her head down onto the table. Delilah's vision exploded into stars.

“The *fuck*—” Delilah tried to pull away, but Violet was *strong*. Delilah felt like she had an iron beam bolted to her head.

“You want to keep yourself from changing?” Violet growled in her ear. “Then eat.”

She shoved Delilah forward. Shaking, the smaller woman picked up a charred patty. Violet wasn't just any Wolf—somewhere, buried under that flab, was the powerful build of a pack alpha. She could rip Delilah's throat out if she wanted. Delilah *had* to do what she said. And so, despite her uncomfortably full stomach, she ate. And she kept eating.

“Faster,” Violet snapped. “You're slowing down.”

*No shit*, Delilah thought, but she stuffed another patty into her mouth. “Hww—”

“Swallow.”

Delilah swallowed. “How...much...more?”

“Finish those.”

Another patty. Another patty. *Another* patty. And then finally, *finally*, they were gone. Delilah looked down at the bare table, wondering exactly how many pounds of meat she'd just forced into herself. She'd eaten more—so much more—than she'd ever eaten before in her life.

“Take a ten minute break,” Violet said.

“Jesus shit, I'm going to barf.” Delilah groaned. “I'm gonna need more than ten minutes.”

Violet frowned. “You can have a ten minute break, or you can keep eating right now. Which is it?”

“Break!” gasped Delilah. Violet nodded and made for the walk-in, brushing aside the plastic strips. Delilah fumbled with her belt, undid the buckle, and popped the fly of her jeans, making room for her distended stomach. She stood up and walked around the tiny room, hunched over. Eventually she succeeded in forcing out a few belches. Her stomach ached, and she felt too hot. She wriggled out of her hoodie, leaving herself wearing nothing but a white undershirt. Even that felt too tight, like she was going to bust out of it, but she wasn't in the mood to give this Violet woman a look at her panties *and* bra.

Violet returned from the bar with a plate loaded with rare sirloin steaks, cut thick and stacked on top of eat other like flapjacks, reeking of bloody juices. Under normal circumstances, Delilah would have drooled over them, but now just the thought was enough to—

“Urkfph,” she gagged. “Are those for me?”

“Sit,” Violet said. Delilah did, her heart sinking.

“These are for *me*,” Violet explained, and just as relief began on to show on Delilah's face, “*this* is for you.”

Cradling the steaks under one arm—*set 'em on the table, bitch, it's not like I'm going to steal them*, Delilah groused mentally—Violet returned to the plastic tub. This time she pulled out a large bowl covered with Saran wrap and filled with--

“Oh, god,” Delilah choked as it was set in front of her. The bowl was heaped with a small mountain of shredded pork dripping with barbecue sauce.

“Eat,” Violet commanded.

“No fucking way. Oh, god, my stomach—oh, fuck—”

“Eat!” Violet barked, standing over Delilah.

“I'm telling you I can't!” Delilah snarled. “Fuck it! I'm *done* with this bullshit.”

She started to stand up, but Violet grabbed her and forced her head toward the bowl. Delilah tried to pull away, but Violet leaned down with all her considerable heft. The meat came closer, closer, until her face was pushed into it and her screams were muffled by a cushion of pork.

“Were you under the impression you could leave?” Violet said. “You have exactly two choices. You can eat, or you can suffocate.”

Delilah thrashed for a moment, then went limp. She forced herself to take a mouthful and start chewing, and Violet jerked her head up slightly so her nose would be free.

“That's it. You just keep eating and you'll keep breathing, too, got it?”

The younger woman nodded. Violet held her there for about five minutes, listening to the steady chewing, then coiled her fingers more tightly through her hair and jerked her to a sitting position.

Delilah's face was covered with sauce, and her cheeks bulged with barbecued pork. Her eyes were shiny and wet.

“How are we doing?” Violet asked. “Are we enjoying our night?”

“Cffmph,” Delilah said, shreds of half-chewed meat spilling out of her mouth. “Can't—I can't—I can't keep eating, please, Violet, please, oh fuck, I swear I'm gonna fucking explode.”

Violet ran a finger across Delilah's bloated stomach. It was covered in gooseflesh, like a Thanksgiving turkey ready for the oven, freshly packed with stuffing.

"You're not going to split in two. You're a *Wolf*, you dumb piece of shit." She jabbed a finger into the girl's drum-tight abdomen, wringing a miserable moan from her. "Your stomach's the toughest part of you."

"Please," Delilah whispered, one fat tear clearing a path down her sauce-smearred cheek. Her lower lip quivered. "If you put my head in that bowl again, I'll puke."

Violet grinned. "Then you'll be eating puke." She shoved Delilah's head back down into the swamp of salty meat.

For half an hour, she kept her there. She ate the plate of sirloin steaks while she waited, relishing each one as the bloody chunks passed down her throat.

By the time the plate was clean, she felt sluggish and overfull. Delilah wasn't moving.

"You're not dead, are you?" Violet asked, prodding her. "Damn. Maybe my math was off."

A gurgling sob came from the depths of the bowl.

"Ah. Okay, guess you're done," Violet decided, yanking up on Delilah's hair. The girl's eyes were red and glassy. Flecks of meat tumbled from her slack mouth. Violet heaved her back into the chair, where she slumped like an overfilled sack of suet. Her stomach was so swollen she looked like she was ready to give birth to a litter.

Violet returned to the tub and knelt again, her own full stomach straining at the button of her pants. She pulled out a single blackened breakfast sausage and held it up.

Delilah's eyes locked onto the sausage. She whimpered. Violet waved it in front of her face, slowly, lazily. Delilah's eyes followed it back and forth, but her face still hung slack, her jaw hanging open dully.

Violet pushed it into her mouth, probing like a dentist with a pick, exploring the limp tongue and meat-stained teeth. When she was satisfied that no reaction was forthcoming, she popped the sausage into her own mouth and swallowed.

"Looks like you've had enough," she said, approvingly. Delilah moaned. Violet prodded one bulging flank, forcing another, louder moan from her lips, and swung one leg over her. She was straddling her, now, their mutual bloated abdomens almost touching.

"The catalyst for the Change is the frenzy," she said. "The catalyst for the frenzy is—well, there's two catalysts, really. One's moonlight, of course. But you know as well as I do that you'll change even if no moonlight touches your bare skin. We know when it's night. We know when it's safe to hunt. And when our bodies are ready to hunt, they make us hungry, *so* hungry we can't fight it, and we go into the frenzy."

She was speaking like a teacher, lecturing almost. She gently cupped Delilah's chin in her hands and lifted her face. "Night's falling outside as we speak. Are you hungry, runt? Ready to stick your snout into a nice fresh deer? Just imagine gulping down a few pounds of nice, bloody venison—those heavy chunks sliding down your throat, into your belly."

Delilah coughed and gagged, her throat convulsing in a weak effort at heaving. Violet grinned.

The younger woman *could* feel night coming on. And with it came the hunger, digging viciously into her gut like a mewling, biting pack of pups. But this time it was different. Every pang was instantly snuffed out, drowned under waves of miserable nausea. It was as if her body were a balloon, distended to the verge of bursting, and within her she contained an endless, sloshing sea of sickening green. The ravenous imps screamed and cried and sank within the mire.

Cold sweat dripped down her body. Her innards churned. Someone under it all, a primal mind still wanted her to keep gorging herself, but ever time the impulse filtered up to her waking brain, a fresh wave of disgust swept over her.

Her body seemed unwilling to give up. She felt her nails lengthening. The tickle of hair sprouting on her arms. Her guts writhed and churned as her organs tried to change shape, but gave up, defeated

by the mass of food already stuffed inside her, only to regroup and try anew. She writhed in the chair, her bloated grossness allowing her no possible position of comfort, as her bones squeezed and cracked.

Finally, the fever broke, and the change seemed to simply release her. She collapsed in her chair. She was exhausted, her entire body was damp with sweat, and she still felt enormous and nauseated, but she wanted to cry with relief.

Violet pressed an ice-cold bottle of water to her forehead, then opened it and poured a bit of liquid over her head. Delilah panted gratefully as the little streams of pure pleasure dribbled down her face and dripped from her chin. When Violet put the bottle to her lips, she drank greedily, despite her stomach's protests at being forced to hold even one more drop of matter. She was so dehydrated and clogged with meat that it tasted like ambrosia.

“Good job, runt,” Violet said, slapping her on the back. “You're done for tonight. Get up.”

Groaning, Delilah struggled to her feet. She leaned forward, letting the table take her weight, and rocked back and forth. She was going to have to walk home with her jeans unbuttoned, she realized, not to mention the fact that she looked practically pregnant and was a disheveled mess on top of everything else. Her cheeks flushed with shame.

“What...what about tomorrow night?” she managed.

“We're done here, so that's your problem. I'd stock up on cheap meat if I were you—this can get expensive fast.”

Delilah looked up in dismay. “I have to eat like this every *night*?”

“More or less. Eventually you'll get a hold of the change and learn to master it, sort of. I don't have to eat *that* much anymore. Still takes a pretty hefty meal, though.”

Delilah looked Violet up and down. “Fuck. I'm going to get fat as hell, aren't I?”

“Fatter,” Violet agreed smugly.

Delilah belched. “Fuck,” she said again, frowning. “*Fuuuck*.”

“It's just part of the price you've gotta pay,” Violet said. “You won't be a runt for much longer.”

“Okay, fine,” Delilah sighed. “Fine! I can handle packing on a little weight. I mean, you've been doing this for, what, years? And you're not *that* fat. If I peak around where you have, I guess can live with that. It's better than waking up covered in blood.”

Violet snickered. Then she threw back her head and laughed uproariously, her heavy bosom heaving up and down.

“What's so funny?” Delilah asked.

“*Peak*? You think this is my *peak*?” Violet snorted. “I've been *losing* weight. I *peaked* a couple of years ago at, oh, I'd say about a hundred and ten pounds heavier than I am now.”

“*What*?”

“So you'd better start eating now. Start practicing, so one day you'll be able to fight the change without completely gorging yourself. And then, runt, you *might* manage to be as thin as me again.”

Delilah looked down at her frame, still slim, except for the bulge in her stomach. She imagined herself at Violet's size. And then she imagined how fat she'd have to be to make Violet look thin by comparison. *That* was how fat she was going to get.

“*Fuck*.”