

Amongst Strangers

Chapter 3: Into Town

"Here, put this on," Lance said, tossing set of clothes to the wolf.

"Do what?" Larathe asked as he snatched the cloth out of the air.

"Put that on," the man repeated. "You need to be decent if we're going to town."

"I am decent!" Larathe said, sounding rather offended.

"I meant you need to be dressed." Lance replied.

"What? Why? I'm not cold."

"It's a human thing," Lance sighed. "Please just get dressed. People won't freak out as much if you at least look like you now about our culture."

"Why do I have to go to the city with you anyway?" Larathe asked as he examined the shirt he was given. "Wouldn't it be better if I kind of eased in?"

"I'd like to have humans understand your kind better and you to understand us. We're not all bad, you know. Besides, you'll be with me, so there's much less chance you'll be attacked on sight."

Larathe sighed, pulling the shirt over his head. "Fine," he grumbled, struggling with the sleeves.

Lance watched in amusement as the wolf fought with the cloth. "Would you like some help with that?" he asked.

The wolf gave a muffled growl in response, the shirt not quite fitting over his muzzle. "Yes..." came a rather gruff, irritated sounding voice.

Lance tugged the shirt back up over Larathe's head. "Look up," he instructed, then pulled the cloth over the canine's muzzle and smoothing it over his fur. "There ya go."

The canine frowned as he fussed about with the shirt. "Why do you wear this stuff?" he grumbled, shaking out. "It's so uncomfortable!"

Lance chuckled. "It's to cover up and keep warm." He said. "You don't go out if you're not dressed."

"This is stupid." Larathe grumbled, picking up the pants and looking them over. "Do I really have to put these on?" He asked, raising a brow.

"Well yeah," Lance said. "Even more so because you're male."

Larathe paused for a moment and then frowned. "That makes no sense."

"You really don't need to flaunt yourself in public." Lance replied. "It's meant to take care of your uh....package."

"My...what?" Larathe asked, an ear flopping over in confusion.

"Private areas," Lance sighed, gesturing towards the wolfs crotch. "It's generally not acceptable to display yourself in public."

Larathe looked down, then over at lance. "Jealous?" He asked, tilting his head curiously.

"No, I don't..." Lance started giving a small sigh. "Look, others might be, but it's just inappropriate."

"Are you all this embarrassed about your body?" Larathe asked, looking himself over.

"It's just human culture." Lance sighed. "Some people are while others...not so much. Either way, everyone dresses up."

"You're all very strange." Larathe sighed, sitting down and pulling the pants on. "And...where am I supposed to put my tail?" He asked, the waistband catching at the base. "Also; this thing pushes my fur all the wrong way." He complained.

"I'll see if I can find a tailor to make a pair that'll fit better when we're in town. I guess jeans just aren't made for you, huh?"

"Clearly..." The wolf grumbled.

"Here," lance said, picking out a belt from the closet. "Let's try this for now." He turned, pulling a pair of sheers from one of the shelves. "Turn around."

The wolf frowned, wary of the newer object the human was holding. "Why?"

"I'm going to cut a hole where your tail can go." Lance said. "At least make it a little more comfortable."

The wolf glanced down before pulling the pants off and tossing it over to the human. "Much rather not have you stabbing my rear." He said. "Besides, I don't much like the idea of you cutting my fur either."

"Oh come on, I'm not that bad," Lance replied, cutting into the denim.

"Maybe not, but if you slipped..."

"Fair," Lance replied. "There you go, he said, holding the pants up.

"Kind of ragged..." The wolf muttered.

"Hey, I don't sew," the man replied, giving the pants back to the wolf

Larathe sighed, pulling the pants back on, this time slipping his tail through the slit in the waistband. "Well, I guess that works...mostly."

"Here...this'll keep them from falling off." Lance said, lacing the belt through the loops of the pants.

"Ugh, this thing is so uncomfortable," Larathe complained, shaking his legs out.

"Hey, you look good though."

"I look stupid."

"Oh don't be like that. Clothes can really change your appearance."

"Hey!"

"What?" the man asked. "That's not a bad thing."

"I like how I look." The wolf grumbled. "Without all of this...junk."

"I didn't mean it like that," Lance said. "You look good without the clothes too...but you also look more feral."

Larathe frowned, splaying his ears in disapproval. "Well what the hell? I'm not feral at all!"

"Rugged then," Lance said. "I don't mean to offend..."

"Feral wolves are wild. Four legs, territorial, occasionally aggressive."

The man opened his mouth to point out a few of the similarities between the two, but then thought better of it. "I see..." He said, thinking for a moment. "In that case, have you trained any?"

The canine frowned. "Ferals? No...why?"

"Well, they could be a great help when hunting," Lance said. "Dogs have helped us quite a bit in that respect."

Larathe groaned. "I don't know if you've noticed yet, but I'm also a wolf," he said. "We track down prey the same as they do."

"Ah...well in that case I suppose it might be more of a moot point." Lance said.

"Haven't you ever come across any of the others?" Larathe asked. "It's not like the deer are in short supply."

"Deer?" Lance asked. "Well...we hunt deer, if that's what you mean."

"I meant others similar to myself."

"Were-deer?" Lance asked. "They exist?"

Larathe paused to think for a moment, shaking his head. "Doesn't were suggest some sort of shapeshifting?" He asked.

"Well, traditional stories have a were-beast shift into another form on a full moon...but the term were, as far as I am aware, came from wer, or man."

"Well, I'm definitely not a man-wolf," Larathe muttered.

"So you're a woman?"

Larathe simply looked at lance as though he were stupid, unable to figure out if the human were being serious or not.

Lance sighed. "I'm joking," he said. "Nevermind."

"Right..."

"Well, come on...we should get going if we want to be back home by noon."

Larathe groaned. "I still think waltzing right into a human territory is suicidal," he grumbled, following the human out of the cabin. "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

"Well," Lance said, making his way over to the truck. "What better way to learn about humans than by living amongst them?" He asked, his hand resting on the door handle.

"Point made..." the wolf grumbled.

"One base rule though..." Lance said. "You're visiting...you're going to have to listen to me while you're in town. I'd rather not have any...incidents."

"What? Like...your pet?"

"To...an extent."

Larathe shook his head. "No way!"

"Within reason," Lance said. "I just need you to stay put or follow if I tell you to. I won't tell you to do tricks or something stupid like that...you're not a dog."

"Technically, I am canine," the wolf muttered. "But I'm definitely not your pet. You make stupid requests and I reserve the right to question it then."

"That's fair," Lance said.

"Good..." Larathe muttered, looking the truck over curiously. "So...what is this thing and is it sleeping or something?"

Lance smiled. "It's a truck. A faster mode of transportation. It lets us get places faster."

The wolf frowned. "What's wrong with walking?"

"It's a lot slower than this is."

Larathe tapped the metal body of the vehicle. "It's...cold."

"Well, it's not running right now either," Lance said. "Climb in, I'll show you what it does," the man said as he opened the door and took his spot behind the wheel.

The wolf looked around at the vehicle, spotting the door on the passenger side and made his way over. Unlike the door knobs in the house, this thing wouldn't turn. It took him a few moments to figure it out, but the canine eventually managed to get the

door open. Once he had taken his seat beside Lance, he suddenly began to feel very cramped.

"Claustrophobic?" Lance asked, taking a note of the canine's discomfort.

"What?"

"It's a fear of being in tight spaces."

"Well I certainly don't like it, but I wouldn't call it a fear," Larathe said.

"Okay then," Lance said, pulling the seatbelt around himself and buckling in.

"Close your door and buckle up, we're going for a ride," he said with a smile.

"That...sounds dangerous." Larathe muttered, closing the door nonetheless. It took him a moment to locate the belt, but once he had buckled in, he couldn't help but feel even more uncomfortable. "Is all this really necessary?" He asked.

"Safety precautions," Lance said. "You know how fast you can run?"

"Yeah?"

"Hurts when you run into something, doesn't it?"

"Well...kind of, yeah."

"Well...this thing moves quite a bit faster than you can run and if you ran into something going that fast you're probably going to break something."

"And...how does this flimsy thing help?" Larathe asked, tugging at the belt.

Lance reached over and gave it a hard yank, engaging the safety. "If we hit anything, this will prevent you from going through the window." He said.

"Okay...?" Larathe asked, tugging at the belt again. "I...don't get it."

"It's just to make sure you don't get launched out of the truck." Lance said. "ready to roll?"

"I...guess."

No sooner had the wolf spoken when the vehicle sprung to life.

"HOLY-" Larathe barked, nearly jumping out of his seat. "What the hell?!"

"Relax," Lance laughed, glancing over at the panicked canine. "It's okay. It's not going to bite you."

"Like hell it won't!" The wolf replied, pulling his legs up into the chair. "I don't like this thing!"

"Just watch through the window. You'll like it." Lance said, throwing the truck into gear. "Trust me."

The wolf gave a quiet whine, his tail wrapped tight around his legs. As they picked up speed, the wolf found his attention drawn to the window, the startling roar

of the engine having been forgotten, replaced now with a gentle hum. Before long, he found himself riveted to the glass as the flora sped past.

Lance couldn't help but smile as he glanced over at the wolf beside him. "I told you you'd like it," he said.

"Oh hush..." Larathe grumbled, continuing to stare through the window.

"You can roll it down if you want," the man said.

"Roll...what down?"

"The glass," Lance replied. "Just push on the button by your arm,"

The wolf frowned slightly, running his paws over the button curiously. He gave a small jump as the window descended and the air from outside hit him in the face.

"Exactly how fast are we going?" The wolf asked, sitting back somewhat.

"About sixty-five miles an hour or so." Lance replied.

"Sixty five what?" Larathe asked.

"We're going a little faster than a mile a minute. About three times faster than you can sprint, probably."

"That's...really fast," the wolf said, looking back out the window. He took a moment before sticking his head out, looking back the way they had come. Larathe gave a quiet chuckle, his fur blowing about in the wind as it rushed past. Now this is what the wolf called exciting!

"Enjoying yourself?" Lance asked as the canine's tail thumped against the seat.

Larathe pulled his head back in, looking over, his fur a complete mess. "Why do you humans cover this thing up?" he asked, running his paws over his fur in an effort to straighten it back out. "Why not just remove all this...stuff?"

Lance laughed. "Because we don't like it when it rains," he replied. "There are vehicles we call convertibles though. The roof on those can be taken off."

"That's cool!"

"You'll get to ride in one sometime," Lance said, smiling slightly.

The next hour was spent on the road, the wolf watching as the trees and foliage flew by. As they began to draw closer to the city, traffic along the road began to increase and the afternoon sun beat down upon the duo. The metallic shine of the traffic passing by flashing past.

"Alright Larathe, time to get inside," Lance said.

The wolf glanced over; giving a started bark as the window began to ascend, leaning away from the glass. "Uhhh..."

"I can control the windows from here," Lance explained.

Larathe frowned slightly, returning his attention to the window. The trees had begun to thin out, replaced by large fields full of crops. Off in the distance, he could make out several buildings lining the road, traffic increasing as they made their way closer to the city. The wolf pressed his muzzle against the glass, looking up at the massive buildings towering above them as lance brought them through a mass of skyscrapers, over to a more residential area of the city.