

*"I bet you like it 'doggie style,' don't you bitch?"*

*"Get out of town, ya furry freaky!"*

*"Wanna show us how much you pant, girlie?"*

Comments like these followed her as she walked down the street. She tugged the hood farther over her head and the bottom of her jacket farther down her backside. Her long, flared jeans covered the tennis shoes she wore. She walked quicker as the cat-callers continued to shout out suggestions to her.

Others on the street kept silent and simply moved out of her path, giving her a wide berth as if they were afraid of coming in contact with her, looks of horror or disgust on their faces. Her face felt warm as she tried to make herself smaller, wishing for the millionth time that night that she was invisible.

Ducking down a darkened alley, the girl paused to catch her breath. The strangers on the sidewalk passed by the opening without a second glance, as if the alley didn't exist. To them, it probably didn't, no one wanted to look down a dark lane only to see the face of some poor soul trapped in a world they had no control over.

Music from a nearby door caught her attention. The name *Swingin' Tails* shone brightly in neon lights above the mountain of a man who stood near the entrance. A tail twitched behind him as he checked the pair of IDs from a group of young women standing before him. They also had ears and tails out in the open.

She frowned and crept closer to the music and open door. She paused only when the security guard looked at her as he shooed the girls in behind him. She wanted to slink away and hide, but she felt like she was trapped between one horror and another.

"Quit sneakin', girlie," the guard called out, unmoving. "Come here, I don't bite."

She moved forward slowly, still unsure about the club or the man guarding it. "You have a tail..." she muttered, almost a question.

The guard raised an eyebrow. "Yeah, so do you, little wolf. What's your point?"

"I've never seen another... Another..." She trailed off as she moved a little closer. "Is everyone in the club like-like...?"

"Like what? Like you, like me?" He laughed, loud and boisterous. "Darlin' where you been your whole life, trapped down a hole?"

She blinked and the guard's face dropped, suddenly realizing that maybe she didn't know anything because she had been locked away someplace far away from her kind of folk. He pressed the Bluetooth device in his ear and muttered something she couldn't hear. For several moments, he carried a hushed, yet heated, debate with whoever was on the other side of the connection.

The guard looked at the girl and beckoned her forward. "You'll go in and head towards the back. Boss wants to have a chat with ya."

"Oh, but I—" she started, but the guard placed a hand on her back, shoving her forward.

"No *buts*, little miss," the guard said. "No one says no to the Boss."

With that, the door was promptly shut behind her. The music was louder now and she pulled the hood even farther down over her head. She looked around, trying to figure out where to go through the crowd, but it seemed impossible. The bar looked promising, if anything, perhaps one of the bartenders could point her in the right direction.

"Welcome to *Swingin' Tails*," A young man with the ears and tail of a tiger greeted her as soon as she approached. "What can I get for you, darlin'?"

She blushed, "Uh, I'm supposed to go see the boss?"

The tiger raised an eyebrow. “Really?” he looked at her, tilting his head. “Oh, you must be the one Darrell was talking about. Got to the end of the bar, and then take a right. Knock hard a couple of times; they might not hear you over the music.”

“Thanks, uh,” she said, stumbling over his name.

“It’s Trevor.” He winked. “Do I get yours?”

She smiled shyly. Of all the crazy people she had met tonight, she liked him the best. “I’m Athena. Maybe when I’m done, I can still get a drink?”

Trevor grinned, tail twitching excitedly. “Sure thing, doll!”