

“Just yourself tonight?” Rachel looked up at the vixen standing on the other side of the cafeteria counter. She was wearing an apron and a name tag reading “Gwen” over about 200 pounds of red-coated flesh. In contrast with the white rabbit who barely reached 100 and was carefully picking out the components of a salad over at the bar.

Dabbing a bit of light ranch dressing on her pile of lettuce and veggies, no cheese meat or croutons, Rachel responded. “Yeah, Stacey had some kind of studying to do. It’s just me here to suggest you eat a salad like this.”

Gwen shrugged off the jab and started organizing some packets behind the counter. “What about Sam? I haven’t seen here in a while.”

“Oh, she’s at some basketball meet somewhere. Should be back soon.” Rachel picked her salad up and turned to find a table for herself.

“You sure? It’s been nearly a month hasn’t it? And what about Amber?” The rabbit stopped, thinking uncomfortable thoughts for a minute. But she didn’t feel like a protracted conversation about her friends, it was getting dark anyways.

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By the time Rachel was done the sun was fully set and she was in a hurry to get back to the dorms. There were plenty of streetlamps covering the distance from the cafeteria to her residence, but it still made her feel uneasy to make the short trip alone at this hour.

A noise off in the distance had her momentarily on edge. For an instant she actually succumbed to feralistic instinct and stopped to listen and look, her ears sticking straight up and slowly rotating like her four-legged lapine ancestors. After a minute she chided herself for her

paranoia, it was probably just a feral squirrel or something. She'd been listening to Stacey's crazy theories too much.

She started back towards the dorms again, but she had found herself thinking about Stacey again. What was up with that girl? Sure, Amber hadn't given any indication that she was going anywhere, but Samantha was always talking about her basketball meets or whatever and who would even dare to mess with a wolf like her anyways?

A shadow slid across the pavement next to her, casually passing from the glow of one streetlamp to the next. It was so simple and casual that Rachel never even took notice of the motion.

The rabbit continued on her way to the dorms, there was an alley between two of the academic buildings with no regular lighting, but it was the fastest route there. With some hesitation she decided speed was the better option and turned into the alley. She prepared to run for the far end of the passage at the fastest safe speed.

A figure lunged at her from the shadows of the alleyway, clamping one meaty hand over her mouth and throwing her back against the wall. Rachel tried to let out a muffled scream but couldn't get it past the muscle holding her lips tight. Frozen in fear, she had no time to react before her assailant opened a long, narrow muzzle and turned to close its' fanged jaws around her neck. Her attempts at drawing in one last breath only succeeded in inhaling hot droplets of her own blood as the fangs pierced her jugular through to the windpipe. Rachel's stifled screams were reduced to a wet gurgle as her consciousness faded, her last thoughts before the blackness overcame her were disbelief at how that anthro managed to kill her so quickly.

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Rachel was gone now, no explanation, no note, no body. Just like their last two friends. Stacy could not believe that the police had found nothing, not a trace of the three young women who had disappeared each one month after the other. Even she could see the pattern easily enough, why couldn't they?

What was she going to do? Stacy was the only one left of their little clique, surely she was going to be next in just under a month. How could she avoid whatever fate had befallen Rachel, Sam, and Amber?

An idea came to her mind, a bit of a dumb one that may have been influenced by an excess of television, but it was the best she had. If the police hadn't found any sign of her friends she would have to find them herself. The cops wouldn't have known where to look now would they? The police didn't know her friends like she did. And besides, if the disappearances were on a monthly schedule she should be safe for the next few weeks at least.

Stacy started on a survey of the places around campus where she, Rachel, Sam, and Amber had all frequented. She swung by the football field where they'd met up with athletes for after parties. She went to the coffeeshop their sorority had used as an unofficial "base of operations" since the city law banning frat houses. She even tried the science wing on campus where they'd had a few classes to make up the requirements on their degrees. Nothing, no scraps of their clothes, no claw marks, even their scents were starting to fade away.

While heading to one of the bars near campus just as they were starting to open Stacy was starting to consider that perhaps she was climbing up the wrong tree. She was getting nowhere in this search for her lost friends in all the places where they had been around together. Maybe the police hadn't found any clues simply because there weren't any to be found?

No, no, she was just looking in the wrong places just like the cops had. None of her friends had vanished while she was watching, duh. Come to think of it, she'd seen Sam earlier in the day when the wolf had disappeared and been surprised when she didn't show up to the evening meet-up with Rachel. She should have been looking someplace where her friends regularly went by themselves, and likely a place where they would all go but at different times. As she stood there on the sidewalk halfway between the dorms and the pizza shop strategically placed by campus it came to her.

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The cafeteria had unfortunately been too busy for her to do much investigation when she initially had the idea. And somehow she doubted that the staff would allow her to look around in there after hours. Thus, Stacy hid in the ladies' room in the building for a few hours, taking a catnap on the couch once she felt certain most of the cafeteria staff had left for the night.

She awoke from a dream of stalking down a mysterious hooded figure to the motion sensor-activated lights in the bathroom coming on with a bright flash. Springing into action she surveyed the room around her, no sound but the ventilation system, nobody visible besides herself with her tail twitching agitatedly in front of the light sensor. The cat flattened her tail with annoyance and pulled her phone out of her pocket to check the time: 2:26 am.

With a start, Stacy slunk out of the bathroom and ventured out into the main cafeteria floor. Using the dim light of her phone's screen her sensitive feline eyes were able to scan the floor without turning on any of the ceiling lights.

Halfway through her search of the building a dark spot on the cafeteria floor caught Stacy's eye, curious, she knelt down to take a closer look. It was a stain of some dark fluid,

reddish in color. Hoping that it wasn't what she thought it was she reached out and touched it with one finger, extending the claw to try and pick it up with minimal stains on her fur. It was partially congealed, starting to develop a thin crust, but when she brought it up to her nose for a quick sniff she could still discern the coppery scent of blood.

With a gasp, Stacy swept the area around the small stain, looking for more blood stains. She found nothing, in fact, it seemed like the floor had been cleaned very recently. The floor between the tables was next to spotless and she could smell cleaning fluids all around. Though, there was still some food crumbs and splatters of dried soda underneath the other tables, it was just around this one table that the floor was clean. *Why would they only clean that specific spot?* She thought to herself as she walked around, looking at the floor. As she strode she found that it was just one particular corridor between the tables that was cleaned.

Her curiosity getting the better of her, the cat crouched down to better inspect the floor and began sniffing for more signs of the cleaner. Sniffing, like a dog, if Sam saw her now she wouldn't live it down for a semester. But, she supposed that wasn't entirely fair, cats had pretty decent senses of smell as well, why not use it? The cleaned trail led out to the side door on one end, she started to push the door open before realizing that would be pointless, the outdoors were dirty enough that the trail would be obscured. But, in the other direction she might be able to find some answers.

The astringent smell led her around the serving counter and towards the heavy metal door to the walk-in freezer. Did that mean whatever left the blood stain was in there? Were the cafeteria workers murderers or was her imagination acting up too much? Stacy pondered these as she struggled with the lock on the freezer door. Eventually, she managed to undo the right pins

and the door inched open, letting out a gust of chilled air. Holding her arms to herself to ward off the cold the feline stepped in, wary of whatever might be inside.

Inside were rows of shelves with various frozen food items, vegetables, desserts, a slab of frozen ribs caught her attention but after a few seconds she concluded that they were from a feral animal, not an anthro. After inspecting half a dozen frost-covered shelves she was starting to think that she would freeze to death before finding anything untoward in this far too large enclosure, she'd need to leave soon if she couldn't find a further clue.

That was when she glimpsed at the floor again, in here the floor was covered in a thin layer of frost that seemed almost like snow. She could see where her paws had disturbed the frost layer and more tracks that must have been left by the cafeteria workers as they came in and out of the freezer. The killer, if there was one, would have left similar tracks, all she needed to do was follow all the paths. To her disappointment, most of the tracks led to opened bags of peas or boxes of hamburger patties, but, towards the back, there was one trail leading behind a pallet of unopened tofu crates.

There, Stacy found a pair of what looked like trash bags, tied up multiple times to prevent frost getting in. The bags had no labels and there appeared to be bulges or points sticking out of whatever was in there. After a moment's hesitation she reached for the nearest bag and began to feel for the hard objects underneath the plastic. The shapes were indistinct, nearly impossible to identify, but oddly familiar. Whatever was in the bag, she had no way to tell but it made her feel uneasy regardless. Idly, she started to pull at the knot in the top of the bag, attempting to pry it apart but failing. As she shivered there in the cold, eventually she got frustrated enough that she just popped her claws and sliced a long slit down the side of the bag.

Red-stained fur and bones tumbled out, the head was mutilated so badly that initially Stacy couldn't discern her species, much less her identity, but clinging to the eviscerated ribcage she found some tatters of the woolen sweater Rachel had worn before she disappeared. Stacy sat there, trembling in open-mouthed disbelief, the rabbit's once-white fur was now colored dark brownish-red with blood, her friend had been reduced to nothing but frozen gore. Even more disconcerting was the fact that some parts of her seemed to be missing, she was pretty certain anthros had more organs than she saw strewn out on the floor before her. The other two bags, Sam and Amber she was certain but afraid to check, were even smaller than Rachel's bag had been, and Sam had been a tall wolfess with plenty of muscle, where had that mass gone?

The cat was shocked out of her catatonia by the sound of someone shouting "is someone in here?" With a start Stacy leapt up and saw the slightly chubby vixen in a student employee's uniform walking into the freezer. She looked surprised to see the feline there in the back, blood drained from her face and crusted red on her hands.

"Gwen?" Stacy replied. "It's horrible back here, I don't believe it?"

"What are you doing here?" Gwen stepped forward towards the feline in the back of the freezer room. "I only got here to fix a snack before opening up for the day. Why are you in here?"

*Seriously?* Stacy thought, *that's what she's thinking about now?* "Maybe if you weren't so busy snacking, tubby, you'd notice the killer in your midst!" The feline snarled back at the 200-pound vulpine, who stiffened for a second before advancing more swiftly. "There's at least one of our classmates back here, butchered like a feral."

“You know, I’d been trying to lose weight for a while.” Gwen stated, cold fury in her voice as she stepped up. “It’s only recently that I gave it up.”

“Priorities, fatty fox!” Stacy waved a crusted finger at the approaching vixen. “We need to do something about... Gaggh!” Before she could react Gwen had drawn a long kitchen knife from behind her back and thrust it into the cat’s ribcage.

“It’s so hard to find good places for a cache,” the vixen commented wryly as she withdrew the blade from the dying feline and lapped at the blood dripping slowly from the edge. “Fortunately your skinny bones won’t be too difficult to hide.”