

< Chapter Two >

Brandon was getting very good at being a nice punctual date. Monica was liking that. When they had their next meetup for coffee he was on time and the whole thing went along well! Monica was also very proud of herself for not getting lost on campus this time around and for not losing her way in that ridiculously obtuse building that housed the campus coffee shop.

Their meetups so far hadn't been the longest ones, but she had managed to squeeze in three of them with the younger man so far. He was getting progressively more confident when he was around her, but it was so frustrating that they were only meeting briefly for coffee. Fifteen to thirty minutes just wasn't enough, and she was itching for something more substantial. The wolf was wondering if she would have to prompt him for something a little more than a caffeine pitstop if they were to ever discover if a relationship was even worth considering.

Today was a Wednesday and she'd found herself arriving on campus a little earlier than normal for their meetings. This meant she had a few minutes to wait until Brandon revealed himself in the doorway of the little dining area on the second floor where the coffee shop was. He arrived and she waved at him and watched as he excitedly approached. She stood up for him and the wolf stepped close to the side of his that wasn't laden with a heavy looking artist's bag. Monica gave him a side hug, which he awkwardly returned.

"Did you have a good morning?" She asked and he smiled back.

"Yep! You?" He replied, and she gestured to the coffee shop across the dining area.

"I really need coffee, Brandon." She laughed and together they each got their usual orders and returned to a table to sit. She was already thinking to herself if she'd need to nudge him now to get a proper date out of him. She was actually really wanting to see that happen. The positive vibes she was getting from him were still there, and staying strong, but if the boy didn't make a move on her then what else was she to do? She may not have been the most traditional woman, but dammit she sure would like it if he asked her out to lunch!

She wanted to exhale and just get it over with, but then she'd be finding herself disappointed with him. Well, if she did nothing and he didn't ask her out right and proper then she'd still be disappointed. She crossed her legs under the table and hoped he'd do the right thing and-

Monica caught herself in the middle of being a demanding date. Brandon was presently smiling at her from across the little table and excitedly telling her about a new class assignment that she'd just asked him about. His elbows were on the table and his hands were up as he gestured and explained that he and his class were now all designing billboard advertisements, and that it could be about 'anything' they wanted. He put big emphasis on the 'anything'. The final products would be printed out as large posters to be hung in the art building for a small student's showcase. He was clearly very excited by this and she was feeling happy for him.

She could tell he was passionate about doing this for a career. It was in his eyes, in his voice, ever present in the energy of his hands as he mapped out to her his idea for a billboard selling hoverboards like from Back to the Future. He was going to go places if he kept up this intensity. She had possessed that same kind of intensity when she was younger, and now she had her own successful restaurant.

Maybe the young donkey was being a bit slow on asking her out, but-

That was ok. It would be ok. Monica smiled again at him and asked if that was his first idea or if he'd gone through others, and that then led to him explaining he had come up with six other ideas, but he sat them all aside because he felt that the current one was the best. He was even trying to explain the logic of his decision, and it was clear to her that he'd put so much thought into this assignment.

"Is this the first time they've let you do something on your own? Your own idea, I mean?" She asked him, cutting herself in when he gave himself a moment to inhale.

"Oh, yeah! Like, almost all my classes just have us come in and they tell us what to do! But Professor McIntyre is just letting go crazy with this one!" He was beaming. His phone beeped, which was the little alarm Monica made sure he started setting to make sure he didn't stay too long with her and miss his class like he had the first time they'd met for coffee.

"Oh." He said, and the sound of dejection was ripe in his voice. She wanted to prolong the meeting, too. Get one more coffee, at least, but she knew that couldn't happen. Monica wouldn't allow it since his classes were important to him, and therefore to her, as well.

"Well, it's time for you to go to class!" She said cheerfully for his sake. Monica was already standing up and he reluctantly did the same and started pulling the strap of his bag over his shoulder.

"Yeah, but hey," he said, and his hands started searching his portfolio bag. He unzipped side pocket and fished around in it until he finally retrieved two slips of white paper. "I don't know if you'd be interested, but a bunch of us were given these free tickets to the art museum downtown, and I have an extra."

"Oh?" She immediately said. Her eyes widened as she eyed the two tickets in his hands. Two. Tickets. The two of them together in fact! Her decision to relax and let Brandon move at his own pace was rewarding her already! 'Good girl, Monica!', she cheered privately as she smiled at Brandon's invitation.

"Like, yeah, me and my roommate each got one, but he doesn't want to go so I thought that maybe you would like to go with me?" He asked, and his voice was now so nervous it was infectious. She had to suppress the anxiety she felt in her hand as she lifted it to him. He'd finally asked her out for real! The wolf was a wise woman and kept her tail still, but her smile bright, as she reached out and pinched the end of one of the two tickets between her thumb and index finger.

"I'd love to, Brandon." Monica replied with a smooth voice and easy smile that reached from her mouth to her eyes, and she watched him blush. She plucked the ticket from his hand and brought it close to her chest so he could see it meant something to her. "When do we go?"

She was far more excited for this than she thought she'd be! Perhaps her frustration about him not asking her had worked itself up to a peak, and now that he'd asked, it had all been transformed into raw excitement. She was so out of touch with dating! It had been a few years since she'd even bothered trying. All work and no play had taken its toll.

"Um, it's this Saturday, if that's ok? The exhibit opens at noon." He told her, and she was immediately making mental plans to have her schedule clear that day. The wolf would make it happen. This was Brandon's chance to show her if he was worth any more dates, worthy of any more coffee meets, that he was worth-

She was being demanding again. Monica stopped herself from sighing at herself for his sake. She stepped close and leaned in tight to offer him a hug from the front. Though she kept her touch light against him she made damn sure that he felt her bust press against his chest. He'd earned a teensy tiny tease like that. "Let's keep in touch so we can plan how to get ourselves there, ok?"

He smiled at her and nodded. "Ok, Monica!"

"Now scoot! You have class!" She told him and playfully nudged him on the shoulder. He laughed and said his goodbye, and she returned it. When he was finally walking away with his back turned she exhaled hard. Monica was letting herself get caught up in all these high expectations she was unfairly placing on him. He was just this young guy. Brandon wasn't some man standing as her equal with bits of grey on his chin. Monica had allowed a man ten years her junior timidly and awkwardly stumble into her presence. Monica breathed and recited his age to herself mentally.

Monica was an accomplished chef, and quite literally a business bitch. A real workaholic that was running her own restaurant. He was just a 19 year old college boy studying art. He'd be in school for a few more years at the minimum, and even then once he got out he'd not be firmly planted anywhere. He'd have his work cut out for him to build that career he's hoping to have. She could not allow herself to judge him unfairly by measuring him against her own success. It would be much better to judge him by how he measures up to his potential.

She exhaled again and picked up her purse and drank down the last of her coffee. Her thoughts were out of sorts, and she spent the time it took to order a second coffee to get them into their proper row. Monica would go to the art museum with Brandon and continue to see how well he would do. He hadn't done anything wrong so far. The young man was just moving slower than she'd like him to, but when he finally got to where she wanted him to go he'd be just fine.

'He'd do alright', she told herself as she left the building. Maybe frustratingly slow, but that just meant the wait would sweeten the reward when it finally fell in her lap. Kinda of like edging, and she grinned as she neared the door. The wolf took a good hard sniff at her coffee and let the aroma fill her nose and saturate her lungs as she stood on the steps just outside the building.

Was she feeling younger? She huffed again and swished her tail. No. She was glad she was ten years his senior. A younger woman would have given up on him and trotted off into some frat boy's outstretched arms and his ridiculous popped collar. Monica had nothing but good feelings about Brandon, and she'd see what more he had to offer her on Saturday.

And so the weekend arrived.

Monica had maybe been a little too obvious with her excitement about their date. The wolf had checked over her texts with Brandon and saw she was pestering him quite a bit, and she wondered how he'd be feeling about that. She smiled and let herself drift closer to the young man as they walked down the sidewalk from the bus stop. She was confident that he felt mighty pleased with all her attention.

"So when will you get to feature your artwork here?" Monica asked him as they started up the steps at the front entrance of the museum. The San Fernando Museum of the Arts was a relatively new building, but it was built with older architecture in mind. Very Parisian. Brandon had elaborated over text that the reason students all got free tickets was due to their being an art exhibit opening that was featuring art by a lot of the students from his University.

"It's a senior exhibition so maybe in two or three years depending on how fast I go through my courses. I wouldn't be exhibiting here though." Brandon replied. It looked to her like he was suppressing the urge to offer her his hand as they went up the steps shoulder to shoulder. She covered her sigh with a question.

"Why's that?" She asked.

"Well, I'm majoring in graphic design so my body of work won't be... like paintings and stuff. I think they do the exhibitions for the graphics design majors somewhere else, but I'm not sure where." He explained. They entered the museum and were asked by a member of the staff if they had tickets or if they needed to purchase them. The two of them produced their tickets, which were taken and torn in half so they would be left with only a stub.

They were allowed in and Monica had her first look at the museum. She'd never been here before, and this was the first museum she'd been to in a very long time. Her last foray into the arts was probably back during a middle or high school field trip, and knowing her younger teenaged self she probably didn't pay any attention at all while she was there.

It was really beautiful on the inside, and the lobby opened up with hallways leading out into the three main wings of the museum. There was a large statue in the middle of the lobby that looked like the modern art she'd see on tv from time to time. It was impossible to miss with how huge it was. The statue was a massive rectangle that looked like it had been twisted and twisted until it was like a paper clip bent out shape. She really hoped that the rest of the art would be better, and then slipped her arm around Brandon's and hugged it to her side.

"So let's go see!" She told him, and watched him blush. The student exhibition was in the east wing, which let them walk through a few galleries of collected art along the way. "Are we pressed for time? Maybe we can look around a bit?"

"They'll leave the exhibit open all day I think, and then again tomorrow." Brandon told her. Everything they walked passed was great looking art, but none of it was anything she personally recognised. Monica suspected all the artwork she knew by memory was probably sitting in France. It made her wonder how new museums get their artwork if all the good stuff is taken by all the other established museums.

"Then we can take our time!" She said brightly and gave him a smile. He sheepishly smiled back and agreed with her. Her arm tighten a little to give him assurance that things were good. She liked to believe that men could understand a woman's body language when it counted most, and she let Brandon feel her body against his as they roamed down the decorated halls. The wolf is in a very good mood, and since they were walking side by side she didn't have to worry about what her young gentleman would think if she let her tail wag a little.

And being a bit art illiterate also gave her a good way to initiate conversation with Brandon. This was his expertise after all! As her body spoke to his her ears listened to him point at things and give little details. Every now and then he'd point out an artist's name, but it seemed to her that even Brandon was having trouble figuring out if any of the works on display were from notable artists, alive or dead.

"So you won't be doing anything like this when you get your career started?" Monica asked after a bit more of their wandering. He shook his head gently.

"I mean, not professionally. Maybe if I wanted to as a hobby." He told her as they approached a small side room just off the east wing hall. Brandon had initially brought them in the direction of the exhibit hall, but they'd been taking little detours all the while since. She urged him in by the arm and saw the room was a miniature art gallery featuring portraits of people she didn't recognise. All were classical looking paintings so she assumed that they might have been by famous people, or at least were of famous people.

"But that doesn't bother you? All this stuff is what most people think of as art." The wolf asked and let go of his arm to step as close to a painting of a man standing in uniform. She got as close as she could without crossing the red rope barrier and looked at the portrait. She somewhat recognised the grey uniform as looking like it was from the Civil War. It was a grey uniform so it must have been a Confederate soldier.

"No. I mean I can draw or whatever on my own, but I like doing graphic design." He told her, then touched her arm and drew her further into the room. The room was full of similar paintings to the one she'd stopped to

examine. They were all of people and places that seemed to share the civil war theme.

"Are all these by the same artist?" She asked him. He hummed in contemplation and stepped around room to see if there was a plaque or sign. He found one.

"Yep. It's a collection by someone I've never heard of. It's all civil war stuff. That painting you were looking at was probably General Lee. I can only really remember what Lincoln and Grant looked like from school." He told her and stepped back to her side. She slipped her arm back in his and pulled him along to look at the rest of the paintings. She had to stop and think if she could remember anyone other than Abe's face from her school days. No, she couldn't. History had always been a boring class to her.

Home economics had been her jam. It was all practical realistic things, but as a teenage girl she just really loved cooking. It was the funnest class to her that didn't feel like a class even though she was learning. Whenever she was at home she got to learn how to cook from her parents and enjoyed those moments. If she was indoors her mother taught her at the stove, and when outdoors she was standing at the grill with her dad. When she'd discovered that she could take a class at school that let them bake and cook she had been so thrilled! That led her quickly down the road to going to culinary school, and that had set her path in life in stone. Now look at where she was.

Now she looked at where he was.

Brandon.

"What made you want to do art, Brandon?" She asked him. He didn't immediately reply.

"I'm not sure I know." He replied after a moment more. She saw that he was still thinking on her question like the answer was really eluding him.

"You had to have something to poke you into it? Going to college is a pretty big deal." She said and smiled gently at him. They were finishing their loop in the civil war room and were leaving when Brandon found his answer.

"I know I liked drawing. But that never felt like something I wanted to do as a job when my parents or teachers would ask me what i wanted to do

when I grew up." He said, then continued. "But I remember when I was a lot younger my mom helped me do a lemonade stand."

"You had a little lemonade stand?" She giggled and hugged his arm tighter. Oh, she thought that was so cute! She was already imagining seeing the family photo album being flipped open with a little boy's face smiling from behind a wooden stand. A nice big pitcher of lemonade sitting there with a wet ring on the counter and a stack of little plastic cups ready to be filled.

She stopped thinking then for a moment. That was a strong reaction she'd just had. Monica's hand was resting over his wrist while he kept his hand tucked into his pocket. She was now acutely aware that he was still shy and awkward with her. He was still doing his best on his first date with her. She was also acutely aware of how badly she wanted to pull his hand out of his pocket so she could slip her hand in his. She bit her lip once and let it go.

"Yeah, I guess I saw it on tv or something, or maybe it was my mom's idea. Either way she helped do a lemonade stand on the side of the street outside our house. We kind of lived in a big neighborhood." He told her his cute story and she bit her lip again and held it as her smile broadened and her thoughts swam back down to the hand hidden in his pocket.

"But she told me to go make a sign for the lemonade stand, and so I had a bunch of watercolors. It was just a piece of white construction paper and I painted a lemon on it and one of them red plastic cups." Brandon had her in his thrall and he didn't even know it. They were stepping down to toward the exhibit hall now and she could see more people mingling and milling around beyond the two opened double doors.

"That sounds really cute, Brandon." She told him and poked his shoulder with her free hand.

"Well, a bunch of my neighbors bought lemonade from me and complimented me on my sign." He said. "So I don't know. I remember that day selling lemonade, and people liking my sign. I guess maybe that'd helped push me in this direction."

Monica wasn't sure that was it. The little boy was beaming with pride at people complimenting his art. Making billboards isn't the same thing. Brandon didn't have a firm grasp of his own motivations, but the wolf felt confident that if she ever got that blasted hand of his out his pocket and into her own she could help him figure out what they were. She was such a sucker for cute kid stories! She was a grown woman and needed to slow herself down.

"Now I'm thirsty." He said, and laughed. "I doubt they have lemonade here in the vending machines."

She was thirsty, too, but not in the same way as he was and, besides, the last thing she needed on a date was a full bladder. He stopped and pulled his hands out of his pockets and she brightened her smile as her hand drifted over his wrist for the briefest moment before he pulled his arm away and with it her chance to hold his hand.

"How about I go grab us something to drink?" he asked her with a smile and she hid her disappointment with a smile of her own.

"Sure! Get me a Sprite if they have one." She told him. He suddenly looked more awkward, smiled and nodded and turned to walk back toward the museum entrance. With his back now turned to her she exhaled quietly. Maybe next time. No. No maybe. Next time. She felt it strong in her chest, and maybe a little too strong. His story had pulled and tugged at special places in her and her date just had no idea!

But with Brandon having now left her by her lonesome Monica took it as an opportunity to distract herself. She needed to refocus! Monica didn't need to be so hard smitten over cute imagery of little boys selling lemonade! She entered in through the open doorway of the exhibit and started exploring, but she tried not to wander too deeply into the exhibition. Without her date to help explain everything she was looking at she felt a little lost, and the gallery the exhibit was in was rather large. Brandon might not be able to find her very easy if she wandered too far in.

She hovered kind of close to the front of the exhibit while drifting and lingering at each piece of art on display. The various art pieces here were all very confusing! Some of them looked like 'art' in the ways she understood it, and then others looked like 'modern' art. All weird things that didn't look like anything she was supposed to grasp.

Odd statues like the big one in the main lobby, paintings that looked like a toddler had kicked a bucket of paint over a canvas. Some of it she honestly thought she could do herself and she didn't have any artistic skill of her own that wasn't culinary in its nature. Like, seriously, she could dump a paint bucket over, too! That was easy. These students paid tens of thousands of dollars to learn how to tip over a bucket? She huffed and was suddenly happy that Brandon was pursuing the dream of making billboards instead of art. Maybe he was better off this way.

She then stepped over to a low square table with white bed sheets draped over it in layers. There was something beneath the sheets, but she didn't know what it was. The shape looked kind of like a person, but the pose wasn't like any kind of mannequin she'd see in a department store. Monica studied the form beneath the opaque sheet and by her best guess it was supposed to be someone sitting on their butt with their knees pulled up and arms stretched out behind them to put their palms to the table. With the sheet over the mannequin it looked like a snow covered mayan temple or pyramid. This was a dumb display.

Monica couldn't determine what the sex of the person was suppose to be, or even what they were. There was a bump for the head and two for the knees. There was flow to the sheets as the fabric fell to the table top and over the edge to spill onto the floor. There was no definition for ears, for feathers, no nothing to help her understand who or what was supposed to be depicted by this weird art display.

It was just a mystery figure under a sheet and sitting on a table. This was art? Again, Monica could sit her ass down on a table at her restaurant and throw a table cloth over her head. Bam! Art. If the artist had bothered making a sculpture to be put underneath a bed sheet, then why cover it with a sheet at all? Why not show off what they created? Monica didn't want to look at a damn sheet at an art museum. She was glad her ticket was free!

Then the bed sheet suddenly sneezed and Monica gasped in fright.

"Sorry." The bed sheet whispered and then fell silent. Monica gaped at the sheet and then turned and walked away. She really wanted Brandon to come back to rescue her! She found a new piece of art to take her mind away from the previous, and most distressing, display. It was some kind of sculpture that may or may not have been made with actual Play-Doh.

"Excuse me, ma'am?" A voice called for her attention, and Monica barely stifled her desire to jump out of her skin. She was still reeling from the bed sheet sneezing at her. Monica turned to see a short older lady, a hare, making her approach. The woman looked like she was in her fifties, or perhaps her sixties at most. The grey hare looked friendly and she was already introducing herself. "Hello! I'm Professor Mackey. I'm with the University."

"Why, hello. How can I help you?" She asked. Monica caught it too little and too late that she had lapsed into her routine of being asked for at her restaurant, and had replied accordingly to the hare's introduction. She recovered herself with a smile.

"Why, yes, I believe you may!" The hare said with a beaming smile that was almost off putting. The wolf caught the aroma of a snake oil salesman as the older woman clasped her hands together once with excitement before letting them drop down to a fanny pack she wore at her waist.

Monica watched with one brow lifting with uncertainty as the lady pulled out her wallet and then began to thumb through it. The woman had more credit cards than someone with a career in teaching should rightly be allowed to have, she noticed. That or the teacher's union had finally made some breakthroughs.

"I saw that you came in with Brandon! By any chance, are you a student at the University?" She asked as her hands thumbed through her wallet with a touch of frustration at their inability to find whatever it was the hare was seeking. Monica shook her head. Not that the hare would notice the gesture with her eyes down and gazing into the folds of her wallet.

"Oh, no. Brandon and I are," she paused briefly. What should she say? The hare was still thumbing through her wallet. Monica wet her lips nervously, then finished her sentence. "Currently seeing each other."

Oh ho, now that one made her tingle. She'd said it, and she was now all a tingle, and she bit her lip and stifled a brighter smile that made her feel a tad flush. Why, when was the last time she tingled like that? It left her a bit bewildered! The hare made a little 'ah ha!' and looked back up at the wolf and offered her a business card with an outstretched hand. Monica looked down at the card curiously before reaching out to take it.

The back side was blank, but the face of it had the logo for the University of San Fernando on it. Professor Sarah Mackey. Studio Art. And handwritten over the card, in sharp red ink, was a scribbled and barely legible message that read '10/hr for 3 hours' with a sharp and bold exclamation point to punctuate it.

The wolf looked again at the hare who was now watching Monica intently from behind her thick rimless glasses. Back down at the card.

"Ma'am?" She had to ask.

"Since you're with Brandon I dared to extend an invitation! We're always so desperate for volunteers at the campus and it never fails that every month we struggle to find people to sign up. Also," the hare continued on with her salesman's pitch. "You're a very tall and strapping young woman, Ms...?"

Strapping? Monica was hit was a wave of confusion.

"Monica, ma'am." She replied curiously to the professor who'd let herself trail off, then listened closer as the hare picked her speech right back up again. Again, 'strapping'? A strapping young woman? She felt her brow begin to furl. Who talks like that? Monica was tall and 'fit'. She enjoyed a good diet and made sure she got in her exercise! Now Brandon... He was a strapping young lad, and then she smiled at the thought of him dressed in less. Her imagination could be vivid, and in the face of the dubious hare before her and the person hiding under a bed sheet somewhere over there she needed something to smile about!

"Monica! You've got a wonderful body type-" she said, and Monica was now even more confused and the card in her hand felt oddly heavy as her eyes dropped back down to its face and the bright text printed there. Maybe it was cursed. "And it would be amazing if you could volunteer to model for us down at the University if you had the time!"

The hare was smiling like she'd made this pitch a million times before. Monica looked at her, then at the card, and felt herself go flush and she was already shaking her head as the realization really settled in over her that she was being asked to strip naked in front of a crowd.

"I'm not really interested, ma'am. Modeling isn't my thing." she answered quickly and went to hand the card back to its owner. Now she was really hoping Brandon would hurry back asap. It wasn't every day an old woman that wasn't your gyno asked you to strip for her.

"Oh, don't dismiss it so out of hand! At least think it over! My cellular is on the card if you change you mind, honey!" Professor Mackey told her and reached out and took the wolf's hand and pushed it and the card it held back toward Monica. "We have multiple classes that need models, and you can always model in your underwear if you're shy."

'You can always model in your underwear if your shy', Monica thought to herself incredulously. To be honest she wanted to be offended at being accused of being shy! What did she have to feel self conscious about? The wolf opened her mouth to reply, but found herself speechless at the hare's audacity.

"Professor Mackey!" A male voice called out like an angel from heaven and the hare's attention was pulled away from the wolf and toward a new location off elsewhere in the exhibit. The woman sighed and turned back to Monica.

"Just think it over and give me a ring if you change your mind! Good to meet you, Ms. Monica! Say hi to Brandon for me?" And with that she smiled and turned to walk away. Monica was all by herself again. She looked back down at the little card with no doubt the most bewildered look etched over her expression. That woman was so bold! But, and she thought a little more on it, perhaps she had to be bold. She shook her head at no one in particular. How many people were seriously ok with posing naked in front of strangers?

Monica spent the next few minutes staring at a painting of a tree with breasts and a vagina. She didn't know what was worse, the painting or being asked by a stranger to pose naked in front of other strangers.

"Back!" Brandon's voice came from behind her, which spooked her and made her jump. Seriously, her nerves felt like they were just going to be out of order for the rest of the day. Maybe Brandon could fix them, she hoped. But then she panicked. Monica hadn't known what to do with the card so she'd just... kinda held it in her hand not being sure what to do with it.

Before she spun around on her heel to greet her date she quickly slipped the business card down between her cleavage before turning to face the young man. She didn't expect to feel so embarrassed about having the card, but there it was bright red ink right in her psyche. Brandon was standing with a bag of chips in hand for each of them, and two cans of Sprite to wash it down.

"Oh good!" She said with relief, then quickly added. "I was getting a bit lost with all the... art your classmates have here."

Brandon looked at her curiously then. There was no way for her to hide her own awkwardness, but then she watched him turn his head to look at the painting she herself had just been looking at. The expression on his face soured with his brows furling with concentration. He looked back at her.

"Yeah, I don't think I can interpret that one for you, Monica." He said and offered her one of the sodas. "That's a weird one."

"Yeah, it sure is!" She laughed, took her drink and a bag of chips, and tried to hide her embarrassment. Well, she at least tried to direct it at the painting and not the Professor and that damn bed sheet person. She'd rather him think about how weird the painting was, and she was hoping they wouldn't run into the Professor again for her to bring up modeling. She just wanted to finish her date with Brandon and have things go back to being sweet and cute about little boys and their lemonade stands.

She was trying not be upset with herself as they boarded the bus later. Even though she'd claimed they had 'all day' that wasn't really true at all. Brandon still had assignments he had to turn in the following week and his date couldn't last all day like she'd have wanted. Her upset wasn't at him though. Monica had let herself get out of sorts and it kept her from giving Brandon her all.

The wolf blamed that professor and her weird students. Most of the art on display was really strange, and she couldn't help but point out to Brandon that the bed sheet display was a real person sitting on a table. He didn't understand that one either, and that did make her feel a little better.

Their next date needed to just be at the mall, she thought. Seriously. But she reminded herself that she was happy that he'd asked her out finally. And to be fair he had no way to know this would turn so awkward. At least the regular part of the museum was nice even though she didn't really have the artist's eye to appreciate all of it. Brandon made it sweeter with him being there.

"Weird to be on a bus that's this empty." She said to break the silence after they'd seated themselves. There wasn't a soul behind them at the back of the bus and the only other riders were seated a few rows further ahead of them. Maybe ten people total. It was nice, since Monica prefer a little more tranquility on her rides on public transit, which she seldom got. If it wasn't for the price adding up over time she'd taxi herself to work and back every day just to avoid the crush of people on buses.

"Yeah we got lucky." Brandon replied. They shared a seat with Monica sitting next to the window. Monica noticed that he'd chosen to sit with a few inches keeping them apart. The wolf glanced out the window and saw how the sky was beginning to slowly dim. It was pretty a pretty clear sky today. Hardly a single cloud was out.

"So, would you like to get coffee again tomorrow morning? If you can." Brandon spoke up after a period of silence. She looked his way and smiled. Brandon smiled back at her, and she again noted to herself that he had a nice smile.

"Sure. Or lunch if you'd rather eat than drink." The wolf volunteered. Brandon smiled bigger and nodded, but her attention must have been too much and he looked away at toward the front of the bus. He was being awfully bashful all of a sudden. Monica caught notice that he was shifting his legs open and shut like he was antsy. His fidgeting was weird, but not unexpected. She quietly sighed and he glanced her way and then back ahead again.

"Maybe I could go to your restaurant and we can eat together?" He suggested. Monica lifted her brows and turned to him. He tried to hide his recoil. "I-I mean we don't have to! If you don't want your co-workers to--"

"Can you make the time to come visit for lunch?" She interrupted him. He shut his mouth and she watched him swallow. Monica had her eyes locked onto his and he struggled to maintain her gaze. His eyes reminded her how pretty she thought they were.

"Yeah! I have some homework to do, but I'll have time for lunch, Monica." he said, then she reached over with her hand and thumped him on the thigh playfully.

"You're not planning on putting off doing your homework to see a pretty girl, are you?" She smiled at him. He flushed and shook his head.

"No!" He told her. "I'll make sure I get all my homework done, mom."

He smiled real nice for her from his lips to his eyes and she laughed. Monica decided that he was a trustworthy and responsible young man. She softened her gaze and leaned herself back into her seat without looking away from him.

"Then why don't you come and embarrass me in front of my employees, hm?" She said and he nervously laughed in reply, but still kept his eyes on hers and nodded in agreement. Monica gave a smile, then looked back out the window to give him a small reprieve.

She wished to herself that he'd throw caution to the wind and just throw out a little more of that boldness she knew he kept tucked away in there. She really liked him, but she could only goad him forward so far. Well, that wasn't fair. He'd prompted her for coffee tomorrow hadn't he? Sure, it wasn't lunch, but it was more fair for her to initiate the second date since he'd invited her to the first. Though... he did bring up her restaurant before even she could. Here she was almost forgetting that little detail!

The seat cushion creaked and her eye cast back to her right to see Brandon awkwardly cross his legs and shift in his seat. By the time the donkey was finished he was about an inch closer to her, but there was still a gap between them. She looked him in the face, but he kept his gaze nervously ahead. Monica looked ahead of them, and there wasn't anything worth taking note of.

She was also wondering why was he being so nervous like this all of a sudden? He had been a lot better while they were at the museum. Why he'd been so good that he had her smitten with his stories and wanting to snatch his hand. She wondered about that some more, but then Brandon uncrossed his legs and rotated to put one over the other. A meaningless switcheroo. She kept her head forward and pretended to look out the window, but watched him out the corner of her eye. He leaned forward and reached down to mess with the hem of his pant leg.

As he pulled the hem up and over the tongue of his shoe he wiggled his butt like he was getting more comfortable in his seat. By the time he was leaning back to sit their shoulders were touching and he'd closed the gap between them. Monica was fighting back a broad and growing smile and she looked out the window to better keep it from him. Brandon was not hiding his effort to sit snug with her at all! The poor dopey boy! Her feelings of being smitten was rushing back to the forefront of her mind and it was making her feel so good.

She couldn't see him in the reflection of the glass. All Monica could see was herself and the tight smile she was attempting to suppress. Couldn't hide that smile in her eyes though. That was an act of deception that she'd never bothered to learn. This was fun, she thought to herself. This is what she'd been missing out on for the last couple of years. That was sad, she realized. She'd been missing out on little things like this moment on the bus with Brandon. She then watched the look on her face change suddenly when her eyes widened along with her brows as she felt Brandon's hand nervously touch her thigh.

The wolf hazarded a glance again out of the corner of her eye and Brandon was inching his hand over her thigh to her arm. She'd been clasping her hands in her lap the entire time, and poor Brandon was anxiously bumbling his way along toward her wrist. He was looking straight ahead at the front of the bus with a pale expression like he had no idea what he was doing! He wasn't looking down to see it when Monica moved her right hand closer to his until her wrist touched his fingers.

He hesitated, then gently wrapped his fingers around her wrist. She stopped hiding her smile as she felt him slide his hand down until his fingers slid over her now upturned palm. The wolf spread her fingers for him and there they were holding hands with fingers entwined. Monica had finally gotten that hand after all, hadn't she?

"Well aren't we just a pair, hm?" She said all playful and coy. "Whatever will people think when they see us holding hands?"

She squeezed his hand. Brandon squeezed back and looked at her, nervous still, but smiling.

"They might think we're dating." He said kind of quietly. People would think they were dating! Monica couldn't of hid her smile now if she tried, and she didn't want to! There was nothing that could convince Monica to hide that from him. Brandon in turn looked at her, and he started to smile himself even more. He opened his mouth, then shut it. It was clear he wanted to say something but didn't know what it should be. Or maybe he 'felt' what it should be but couldn't find the words for it.

"If you come by for lunch tomorrow I can introduce you as my new boyfriend." She told him bluntly. Her smile didn't fade, but she leaned in close to him. He was now so nervous she could feel it through his hand. Her shoulder pushed against his and Monica brought her nose right close to his cheek.

The wolf kissed his cheek gently. "I like you enough to try it out. See how it goes."

The donkey nodded his head in rapid stiff jerks. He was smiling hard, but it was now his turn to try and suppress it. He failed badly at it and she watched as she got to see those pretty teeth of his again.

Their first kiss didn't turned out to be what she'd expect it to be. Monica had imagined it involving a bit more tongue, but she wouldn't let herself be upset over it. What she'd gotten instead was an awfully cute cheek! By the time the bus reached the stop where they would be forced to go their separate ways Monica had her head resting on his shoulder.

This young man had somehow managed to capture her on their first 'full' date. The wolf got home in time to make herself something to eat and the whole time she was cooking she was wondering when she would be making him his first meal with her. There she was, a professional chef that ran her own restaurant, standing in the middle of her own damn kitchen! She laughed out loud to herself.

"I'll cook whatever he orders tomorrow myself." She said in answer to no one in particular. That would work! Who cares if the staff uses it as ammo against her for a good ribbing. She was a big girl, and she could take a little kitchen hazing for cooking her boyfriend his order and delivering it to his table.

She turned on one of her burners and sat a pot down to start heating some water. She lifted a hand and crossed her fingers. God help her! Don't let tomorrow turn awkward like today had!
