

CHAPTER 14

4 Ava: Husky (III) The husky is still here. A call to Animal Control is simple enough, even though it feels like I'm betraying her loyalty to me. I feed her bits of deli meat I brought down from my apartment, and she goes into doggy custody with little fanfare. My day is bleak without her, but somehow, when Carlos and I are closing, I hear a scratching at the front door and glance up to see the now-familiar sight of my little Siberian buddy. Okay, she isn't really that little, and has to weigh at least fifty pounds, but to me, she's a baby. Carlos laughs behind me, a hearty sound that starts deep in his belly and bursts out to reverberate through the store. "I think she's keeping you, Ava." I let her inside, smiling when her cold nose gives my leg a gentle boop as she passes. "Hey, girl. We've got to stop meeting like this." She snuffles and tosses her head, chattering at me in that unique husky cadence. I ruffle the fur behind her ears with a sigh. "How did you escape, hmm? I hope you didn't leave a mess." I remember a viral video of a dog that went wild after escaping its kennel within a shelter somewhere, and the mess it left in its wake. If I recall correctly, that dog was also a husky. Carlos snorts as the dog yips at me. "You may as well take her upstairs. I doubt she's going anywhere. I have a feeling that the dog has chosen you. My mama would say it's a spiritual connection. You should name her." He taps her furry little snout with a grin, then shoots me a meaningful look. "Names have power." I jolt, finding wonder that someone put into words what I felt toward the mischievous, yet devoted to a bizarre level, stranger dog. But he's right. I can't keep calling her "the husky", or "the dog", can I? Then again, I'll be calling Animal Control again in the morning, so there's that. As if understanding my thoughts, she yips again and circles in agitation, chattering and groaning as her head bumps against me hard enough to throw me off balance. "I am not taking you for a walk every time you want to go potty," I warn her, but my voice sounds like I'm happy-talking to a child. "I'm calling Animal Control in the morning, so you better go home if you have one. Otherwise, it's back to the kennels." I rub and scrunch my hands all over the fur at her neck, laughing when she falls over and exposes her belly to me, tail wagging against the floor. "Come on, you silly little monkey. We need to close up. I'm serious, you need to go home." She blows out a little chuff, and I get the distinct feeling she's doing the dog equivalent of rolling her eyes at me before following us out the door. She tries to follow me upstairs to the front door of my apartment, but I point at her with narrowed eyes. "No. You go home now. Find your family. I can't take care of you." Whine. "No way. No matter how cute you are, I just can't. I don't have the space. I don't have the money. I'm sure you have a perfectly nice family that you ran away from. You should go back." Groan. That agitated circling again, before she curls up at the bottom of the steps and stares at me with mournful eyes! I escape into my apartment, feeling like the worst person alive for abandoning her. *** She's still there in the morning, and Animal Control picks her up within ten minutes of my phone call, exclaiming how odd the camera footage is. If their words are to be believed, her kennel door just... popped open. And she somehow escaped from one camera to the next. No one knows how. My supernatural radar tingles at their words, but hello, she's a husky. Not a wolf. I've never heard of a domestic dog shifter. Wolves, foxes, coyotes, panthers, and other wild animals? Sure. A dog? No. Not only no, but hell no. And yet she's there again when we close down the store. Three more days pass, and she escapes each time, waiting for me to clock out every night. Mrs. Elkins even stays late one night to watch it happen, clucking her tongue and telling me that fate has brought us together. Carlos, of course, agrees. Even Lisa is laughing at me through phone calls and texts. She loves all the photos of her and encourages me to keep her, saying it's beyond my control at this point. I flick at one of the husky's furry little ears. I've taken to calling her Selene, after the Moon Goddess that most wolf shifters believe in. "Fine. I give in. Come home with me. I'm pretty sure Animal Control is tired of my phone calls anyway." She trills and yips in an excited canine melody and I laugh, "Trust me, it's not that great. You won't have a lot of room, and I'm serious about you having to find a place to potty on your own. I'm not helping you." Selene croons, shoving her head under my hands and leaning into me with her full weight. I'm used to it by now and have myself braced to not fall over. "What do I feed you, though?" She huffs. "I guess I'll have to order some dog food and have it delivered." She groans.

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s, and I swear she's side-eyeing me. 14:41 6/8 14 Ava: Husky (III) "What? You're a dog. You eat dog food. I can't feed you muffins and croissants for the rest of her life." Another groan, mixed with a bit of a whine. I throw up my hands. "I'm arguing with a dog. I've lost my mind. It's official. Come on, Selene, let's go home." Selene trots in front of me as I unlock the door to my apartment, her tail and ears perked in interest. I hang my purse and breathe in the musty smell of old boxes as she begins to sniff everywhere, her nose twitching in rapid shivers of movement as she investigates her new home. Watching her explore warms my heart and settles something I didn't even realize was unsettled deep inside me. "Make yourself at home, Selene." She wags her tail in response, her nose leading her into the bedroom. My sense of smell is only a little stronger than a normal human's, and far inferior even to the domestic dog. I follow, curious to see what's so interesting. Selene's intense snuffling centers around a pile of boxes I still haven't sorted through, off to the side of the closet. 14:41 6/8 14 Ava: Husky (III) She paws at one of the boxes and glances at me with a questioning head tilt. I shake my head. "No, girl. Those are off-limits. They were here before I moved in, and I still have to go through them." She whines and settles into another sniffing session around the boxes before returning to the living room. I watch as she hops onto the couch, circling a few times before settling down, her glacial eyes following my ever every move. It's nice to have a companion, even if she's just a dog. A wolf should never be alone, after all. I change into a comfortable oversized t-shirt and a pair of shorts, going about my evening routine. I'm brushing my teeth when her head pokes through the bathroom door. "You're a curious one, aren't you?" I mumble around a mouth full of toothpaste. She woofs and ditches me for the couch. I can't blame her. Who wants to watch someone brushing tooth scum? I ringa mu mouth and roarot that I didn't niak un 14:41 —) 78 14 Ava: Husky (III) anything for dinner. My fridge isn't bare, but everything needs to be cooked. I don't have the energy for that. I settle beside Selene, settling in a feeling of completeness as she rests her head in my lap and closes her eyes. "I guess it's just you and me now, Selene. Two misfits trying to find our place in the world." She sighs, nuzzling closer. For the first time in a long time, I don't feel so alone. Comment R Post your first comment! Vote 11 Fandom Swipe left to continue > View All >

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