

About the Author

Maura Byrne lives in Dublin, Ireland with her husband, her two teenage children and her dog. Her writing life started early when she wrote, directed and starred in her first play at age 9. A ferocious reader, Maura loved imagining strange worlds and characters. When she wasn't reading she was playing piano, dressing as a tomboy and watching episodes of *Black Beauty*. Her favourite childhood book was *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

When she grew up, Maura ran large exhibitions for children and was the first person to bring Barney the Dinosaur to Ireland. The writing bug attacked Maura a few years ago and she started writing again. She has written two more books about Bridget the reluctant werewolf and her world of zany friends.

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Bridget in Werewolf Rehab

MAURA BYRNE

Chapter One
A New Life

All around her, Bridget heard the other students inhale sharply. At last, the Principal had said what they all knew to be true - they really were a bunch of special needs teenagers.

The Principal continued talking, appearing not to notice the feeling of discomfort in the room, 'Here in Mallow, at Herr Wolf's international Institute, we have special programmes to help every one of you embrace your inner wolf. But before I talk about the daily schedule, I want to tell you about our teaching staff,' said the Principal waving at the nodding adults beside her and puffing out her chest. 'All of the teachers here are werewolves and with provocation, can shape shift at any time.'

Bridget eyed the teachers nervously: The men wore jackets with suede patches on the elbows, check shirts and corduroy trousers, the women wore pencil skirts with twin sets on top. Some of the women wore strong perfume but Bridget could still catch their pungent animal stench underneath and it made her stomach heave.

‘We stay mostly in human form but some of us will phase during your daily shape shifting practice. As thirteen year old humans experience puberty so too will all of you. It’s time to grow up and I assure you that in the next twelve weeks, we will turn every one of you into full-blooded animals who can make the smooth transition from human to wolf.’

All the teachers clapped loudly, Bridget heard someone groan behind her and she turned around. A tall, lanky lad with a mullet sneered at her and muttered angrily in a London accent. ‘One shape shift a day isn’t enough for me, mate.’

I thought nobody here liked turning into a werewolf?

The Principal interrupted Bridget’s thoughts again, ‘of course, some of you have no problem being a werewolf.’ She looked over Bridget’s head at the boy who’d just spoken. ‘And some of you have other problems.’ The Principal moved her eyes along the rows of students, ‘but rest assured, you will leave here feeling confident and loving your werewolf identity.’

The teachers clapped again. Bridget looked sideways. *I don’t even want to be here.*

‘And if any of you have plans to leave the school,’ the Principal stared at Bridget as if she’d just read her mind, ‘you can’t. We have barking attendants patrolling every gate.’

Looking at Katy, the girl who’d introduced herself on the way in, Bridget mouthed, ‘barking attendants,’ but Katy just shrugged her shoulders in reply. The Principal saw this exchange and said, ‘barking attendants are members of the Duhallow Hounds. They act as our security. Now before I

introduce you to your teachers, I have one other matter to discuss with you,' the Principal cleared her throat and looked out the window. 'No doubt you smelled the wonderful odour from the river Blackwater outside. Besides the gloomy climate, the river is the main reason we set Herr Wolf's up in Mallow.'

Bridget looked over beyond the window hopelessly and sniffed. Even though the windows were closed, the stink made her gag.

Staring into their eyes intensely, the Principal continued, 'the smell has a very important purpose. 'It keeps our enemies away.'

Bridget shifted in her stance and looked around. What enemies was she talking about? Werewolves really only had one. She heard the London boy behind her snarl loudly.

'Yes, Eddie, your anger is now justified. There are *vampires* on the other side of the river.'

Involuntary growls escaped from all their mouths, including Bridget's, and for one moment, everyone in the room was united in animalistic emotion.

'Groups of incompetent vampires attend Dracul's College on the other side of the river. But don't worry. The river is full of garlic-flavoured cheese effluent that they hate and they can never cross over.'

Bridget couldn't believe it. Two shocks in one day. She was stuck in werewolf rehab with compulsory shape shifting AND there were vampires living five hundred metres away. Just wonderful!

The Principal introduced the teachers quickly and then picked up some papers from the podium. Looking directly at Bridget, she asked, 'Would you mind handing out the timetable, Bridget?' Bridget shuffled up to the front and the Principal gave her a condescending smile.

'Oh, and introduce yourselves while you're at it,' added Principal Goode.

Bridget turned nervously to Katy. 'Hi again. Where are you from?'

'I'm from Nashville, Tennessee, Bridget.'

Bridget was a little taken aback. 'My father was from Nashville,' she said quickly.

'For real? There ain't many werewolf families in Nashville. Maybe we're cousins. What was your Daddy's name?'

'Patrick Quarry,' said Bridget in a faltering voice. It still hurt to say it.

'I'm gonna ask my Momma later. She knows everyone in Nashville.'

Bridget looked away and noticed that the other students were introducing themselves. She walked over to the group and timidly nudged the timetables in front of them.

'Hi, I'm Andrew,' said the boy Bridget had noticed earlier pulling at the front of his trousers. He was still doing it but now he looked embarrassed.

'What's with the trouser grabbing?' asked Katy loudly.

Bridget immediately felt sorry for Andrew but the others laughed nervously.

Andrew reddened but then he smirked, 'I have out-of-control territory marking tendencies.'

A tall blond boy chuckled as he took a timetable from Bridget. 'I'm Roald from Amsterdam,' he said. The sight of his long tongue curling out from between his teeth made Bridget move back.

Behind him, a glossy-haired boy stretched out his hand. 'Thanks Bridget, my name is Dev. I'm from India and I'm allergic to fur.' Everyone responded with a giggle.

A sallow girl with stick-thin arms and short jet black hair introduced herself as Simonetta from Rome.

The Principal interrupted the chatter and pointed to her watch. 'Read your timetables quickly everyone. You can do the rest of the introductions later. Miss Joyce is waiting for you in the choir room.'

Bridget looked down at the timetable and gulped:

Herr Wolf's Institute Timetable

9-10am	The Art of Growling and Howling
10-11am	Shape Shifting Practice
11-12am	The Claw Factor at the Nail and Hair Clinic
12-1pm	Lunch
1-2pm	Lab Work
2-3pm	Learning to Love Your Inner Wolf
3-4pm	Dental, Oral and Body Hygiene
4-5pm	Games-Pass the Weasel, Badger Hunt and Spot the Trap
5-6pm	Dinner

Bridget had never seen anything quite like this before. In regular school, there were classes for English and History but not here - every class had to do with being a werewolf. How would she cope with twelve long weeks of this? Everyone seemed friendly enough but she didn't actually *want* to be a werewolf. Looking at the worried faces of the others, she realised that many felt exactly the same.

The Principal approached the group, 'there are other students in the school of course but the eight of you won't mix very much with them initially. However, once you're ready to move out of this deep rehab, you'll have classes with them. Come on everyone. Let's go to the Choir room.'

Bridget exhaled gently and walked out into the corridor. The smell was vomit-inducing and she looked around her, feeling more uneasy. Paw marks smudged every window pane, paintings of woodland scenes covered the walls and the song 'Moon River' played over the intercom. Bridget felt something sticking to her boots and looked down to see bits of straw peeking out from the soles of her feet. Katy skipped up to her and Bridget felt slightly relieved - at least she had one friend in this school for loser werewolves. But then Bridget couldn't help looking at the floors in disdain because drains ran along both sides of the corridor. She saw Andrew lift his leg up tentatively near a pillar.

'Stop that Andrew,' shouted the Principal from behind. 'You must not urinate in the corridor unless you're in wolf form. The toilet is back that way,' the Principal said pointing behind them. Andrew looked delighted with this information and rushed off.

‘So the corridors are just one big toilet,’ muttered Bridget, shuddering.

The Principal narrowed her eyes irritably. ‘They are nothing of the sort, Bridget. A wolf might be caught short so it’s necessary to have drains for when you’re in animal form.’

Bridget felt annoyed with herself. She had already managed to get on the wrong side of the Principal and it was only the first day. Her shoe stubbed against something on the floor and she looked down to find a half-eaten bone.

The Principal cleared her throat. ‘After class, can you tidy up those bones and put them in the bone cupboard under the stairs please. Enjoy choir and I’ll see you all at ten.’

Just brilliant! Bone cupboards, open toilets and smelly corridors!

* * *

When Bridget walked into the Choir Room, the first thing she noticed was the enormous organ. Oversized bean bags lay scattered all over the floor and many of the students fell onto them, laughing. But Bridget stayed rooted to the spot, sniffing, not liking the strong smell of sweat one bit.

Miss Joyce looked at Bridget and sighed. ‘We have anti-viral spray on the counter top there, Bridget. Just give your bean bag a squirt and let’s get started.’

Bridget looked at the others. Eddie sneered and muttered, ‘Weirdo,’ just loud enough for her to hear. Katy’s nose twitched and she looked over at

Bridget. 'I don't mind the smell of animals so much but I hate the taste of meat.'

Miss Joyce raised her voice a little. 'Quiet everyone. I need to test your vocal abilities so let's start with Miguel.'

Bridget watched as Miguel who had thick black hair and enormous brown eyes took his place, tentative at first. When he opened his mouth though, only a hoarse whisper came out. '*Ghet your motor running, head out ...* Sorry, Miss Yoyce,' he said tearfully, 'but I lost my howl.' Then he looked around him, his face red with embarrassment.

Simonetta leaned over to Roald. 'What did he say he lost?'

Roald looked puzzled, 'I think he said he lost his owl.'

'His owl?' asked Simonetta perplexed, 'he had a pet owl?'

Eddie laughed hysterically, thumping his lap with his hands. Bridget looked at Simonetta sympathetically and she leaned over to her. 'It's not his owl, Simonetta. It's his howl... his voice,' Bridget explained.

'Oh, okay,' said Simonetta with a smirk.

Eddie teased callously, 'a wolf with no howl, ridiculous, mate.'

Miss Joyce ignored Eddie, reassuring Miguel instead. 'Don't worry. That's why you're here. Trust me, you'll be howling mad in no time.' She scanned her list, 'Saori, you're next.'

Bridget watched as a slender Asian girl named Saori bowed her head before everyone, scratching furiously behind her ears with her fingers. She opened her mouth into a delicate 'O' shape and

sang. *'Get your moto' runnin', head out on the highway, rooking for adventure and whateva' comes your way.'*

Bridget tried to stop the giggles but when everyone began to laugh, she had to give in.

'You'll have to work on not reversing the letters 'L' and 'R',' remarked Miss Joyce to Saori as she slinked back to her bean bag.

A loud howling noise signalling the end of class broke everyone's concentration. Bridget had a lump in her throat because shape shifting was next. Andrew shoved Bridget out of the way as he bolted out the door down the corridor to the toilet.

'Shape shifting class is held down on the farm. Turn right after the toilets and then follow the signs,' Miss Joyce shouted after them.

'I'm gonna hate this,' Katy said to Bridget dolefully.

Bridget swallowed. 'Probably not as much as I will.'

Katy linked Bridget's arm and they walked outside. Bridget's stomach lurched when the initial smell of the river hit her nose. How was she ever going to get used to this stench? Still, at least Katy was very friendly and the others didn't seem so bad, well except for Eddie.

Bridget and Katy walked along a narrow path, the grass flicking against Bridget's shoes. She looked across the fields and saw flies hovering over piles of freshly heaped dung. Grimacing, Bridget realised it was probably the teacher's excrement. The fields were bordered by a forest and pretty soon they came to an enormous barn, the size of two football fields. Everyone else ran ahead of Bridget and Katy. All Bridget could smell was wet fur. She moved inside

the doors and saw lots of frightened-looking weasels and badgers. At once, the animals sensed the danger and began to screech with fright and Bridget felt so sorry for them.

The Principal came towards the students from the back of the barn. 'Alright, Mr Looney and I are here to watch you shape shift. We'll be demonstrating later for those with difficulties.'

'I don't need anyone to show me,' snapped Eddie. 'I shift all the time!'

Bridget was shocked. None of them had been shifting for more than a year. With a full moon once a month, surely he'd only done it twelve times. She'd only tried twice herself. How could Eddie be such an expert?

The Principal narrowed her eyes. 'Yes, Eddie. We know that shape shift practice may seem worthless to a hyper-wolf like you but there are others here who need to practice.'

'What's a hyper-wolf?' asked Bridget in astonishment.

The Principal eyed a very proud-looking Eddie. 'A hyper-wolf shifts too much. The animal side is out of balance with the human side. He is an out-of-control werewolf.'

'I'm not out of control,' Eddie shouted angrily.

'Watch your tone Eddie,' answered Principal Goode tetchily. 'A hyper-wolf is dangerous to werewolves everywhere. We'd don't want humans to find out that we really exist. Control of your animal side is essential.'

Bridget looked over at Katy and winced. She watched as Eddie slunk over to the side in a huff.

‘Let’s get started. Besides Eddie is there anybody else who enjoys shape shifting?’

Bridget looked around to see that only Roald and Andrew stuck their hands up. Only three of her class mates actually liked it. What a relief!

The Principal, tightly holding a folder in her hand, clenched her jaw and sucked a breath in through her teeth. ‘Let’s go down through the list. Bridget, your problem is?’

Bridget felt very self-conscious having to start the discussion and she lowered her head, whispering. ‘I don’t want to *be* a werewolf.’

‘Not a good enough answer. There has to be a reason why. Your mother says your reluctance started *after* your father died.’

Bridget blushed and fidgeted with her hands. How could the Principal mention her father so casually, in front of all these strangers? Even though she didn’t look at anyone, she heard audible breaths and sensed some sympathy from the group. ‘I...I...don’t know,’ Bridget whispered.

The Principal looked away impatiently and fixed her gaze on Katy. ‘I’m a vegetarian. I don’t like turning into an animal because when I eat the raw meat, I feel sick to my belly afterwards.’ Katy’s sniffing voice began to break and Bridget put her hands out to rub her shoulders in comfort.

‘I have no h-owl. I’m not safe if I can’t howl at my enemies,’ added Miguel.

‘I’m addicted to junk food. I prefer a Big Mac and cola to raw rabbit,’ said Simonetta screwing up her face.

Roald and Andrew chuckled. The Principal looked at Roald and smirked. ‘Of course, a few of

you have other little problems but we won't get into that now.'

The Principal looked at Dev and he began to sneeze. Then he wiped the nasal drip from his face and placed an inhaler under his left nostril and sniffed deeply. 'Mrs Principal, it is obvious why I don't like it. I'm allergic to fur. When I make the change, I sneeze and my eyes start streaming. I run into trees because I can't see where I'm going. It's so awful!'

Everyone started to laugh loudly and the Principal's eyes flashed. 'It's not a joking matter. You must all be proud of your werewolf heritage.' She seemed so intensely irritated by the conversation that she ignored Saori altogether. 'Okay, enough chat. Let's get to it. I'm going to strike Andrew and Roald.' Frowning over at Eddie, she said. 'I'm sure you don't need any help.'

Eddie vaulted from the rickety fence he'd been sitting on and as he approached, the weasels and badgers squealed violently. Bridget turned away and swallowed.

'Bridget, please turn around. I insist that you watch this!' shouted the Principal angrily.

Bridget felt helpless and began to tremble. Leaning slightly against Katy, Bridget fought to get her breathing back under control.

The Principal struck Roald hard on the head and Bridget watched anxiously as Roald dropped onto all fours and tossed his head from side to side, growling. His blue eyes changed to a florescent yellow and Bridget closed her eyes, digging her fingers into Katy's arm. The skin on Roald's back made a creaking sound as it began to stretch and

crack. Drops of blood fell onto the hay in the barn and Bridget felt Katy's body shudder. 'I hate the blood,' she whispered.

Bridget glanced reassuringly at Katy until she heard the sound of ripping clothes. Roald's rib cage expanded and bones poked out from under his skin, as he moaned and thrashed about on the hay. His spine began to arch and lengthen and the muscles in his legs and arms started to pulse. Roald's body shook uncontrollably and he raised his head as his snout shot out of his face. Fangs and teeth grew quickly down, just as his neck extended and a tail grew from between his back legs.

'Oh no, not the fur,' shouted Dev hysterically.

'Oh, shut up you big girl's blouse,' said Eddie in a mocking voice.

Roald's new body sprouted millions of hairs then he dipped his head, quickly raised it again, flicking his long pink tongue out from between his teeth. Bridget felt utterly disgusted and her stomach threatened to explode. She couldn't watch another shape shift. She ran outside, ignoring the Principal's protestations. She heard footsteps following her and turned to see Katy.

Bridget's hands trembled uncontrollably. 'Oh Katy, I can't stand it,' she spluttered, 'how am I expected to watch this every day?'

Katy nodded and pulled her in close for a hug. 'It's okay, Bridget. I know just how you feel. We'll get through it together.'

Bridget looked at the open barn door and saw the Principal waiting.

'I can't go back in,' Bridget sobbed, running up the path. She was happy no one tried to stop her.

She wasn't going to make it through the term. The last time she'd felt this helpless was when her Dad died.