

# BITTEN BY MOONLIGHT

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A detailed illustration of a werewolf in a forest. The werewolf is depicted with a grey and white fur coat, a human-like muscular body, and a wolf's head with pointed ears and a snarling mouth showing teeth. It is in a crouching, prowling pose, looking towards the left. The background is a dark, dense forest with tall, thin trees and a misty or foggy atmosphere at the bottom.

Edited by JoSelle Vanderhooft

**BITTEN**  
BY  
**MOONLIGHT**



EDITED BY  
**JOSELLE VANDERHOOF**

**ZUMAYA BOUNDLESS**

**2011**

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For Kim

# INTRODUCTION

***Werewolves aren't sexy.***

Oh, paranormal romances are brimming with hot, dominant, and surprisingly sleek-chested alpha males that argue otherwise. And of course, the pure animal lust that werewolves can represent does have its appeal.

But I would argue that our modern understanding of werewolves is fairly superficial. When you come down to it, werewolves aren't an extended sexual metaphor like vampires have been from Camille to Edward Cullen. They lack the otherworldly allure of fae, the sultriness of (at least the more maidenly) witches, and the sense of the forbidden that has made fallen angels sinful in an entirely different way. They were (and in some cases still are) the terror of several cultures because they represent a force that is just as violent as it is incapable of listening to reason or feeling pity.

And yet, they are such sad figures.

Throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, several people were tried and executed for being werewolves right alongside accused witches, to the point that werewolf and witch trials were often one in the same. While some of the condemned were likely guilty of creatively vicious murders (sociopathy having been with us always), many were innocent. More still were probably suffering from diseases like rabies, had a brain disorder or mental illness, or were even living with hypertrichosis, a rare genetic condition that causes noticeable and unusual hair growth all over an individual's body.

But persecution isn't the only thing that makes werewolves sad, even at times tragic, figures. Until very recently in popular literature, lycanthropy was often a condition thrust upon a person, typically after their having been bitten by a werewolf who, also tragically, was an animal at the time and not aware of or able to stop the harm he was doing. This is the premise of the classic 1941 Universal Studios film *The Wolfman*, and the reason it remains one of the most haunting and heart-breaking horror movies of all time.

Lycanthropy also underscores the tragedy of John Webster's magnificent Jacobean tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which the hotblooded and possibly incestuous Duke Ferdinand torments his twin sister while ostensibly suffering from the condition. Only, as he points out to one of his physicians, he is an inside-out werewolf, who retains human appearance while experiencing a wolf's rage and violent impulses.

While I do not expect or even want all werewolf stories to take *The Wolfman* or *The Duchess of Malfi* for their inspiration, I do ultimately prefer those that at least give a nod to the melancholy behind the wolf's yellow eyes, that understand werewolves as people who experience trauma, or at least confusion and heartache.

This understanding can be found in all four of these stunning novelettes, which pair lycanthropy with another experience that can often cause people a lot of pain—being lesbian in a world made for heterosexuals, and being disabled in a world made for people who do not live with disabilities.

In both “Silver Moon” and “The Dime in the Penny Well,” two very different women—the 40-something Becca and the 20-something Lybbie—struggle to come to terms with the realization they are attracted to other women while contending with the sudden realization that werewolves not only exist but that their existence changes everything they thought they knew about themselves.

In the noble houses of “Sanquali,” a werewolf guard pines for the lady she serves, knowing that the young woman will be forced into a marriage she despises. Finally, “Inside Out” follows a young woman who has been a werewolf since childhood, and who has lived a fairly restricted life because of her “illness.” However, a chance meeting with a caged werewolf in the forest where she regularly roams calls the nature of her condition into question in a very surprising and ultimately satisfying way.



While the stories of Larry Talbot and Duke Ferdinand did not end happily, the ones in this book all have happy, or at least bittersweet, endings. While lycanthropy does, indeed, profoundly affect each of the women in this book, and limits them in many ways, it does not prevent them from seeking to live their lives as they wish, from accepting themselves, or from finding and accepting love, friendship, and romance.

In this way, these are not only groundbreaking werewolf tales, but stories that are deeply sexy—not because they feature conventionally physically attractive women doing sexy things with other physically attractive women but because they touch the core of what good sex and romance should be: self-respect, courage, and a willingness to face and work through challenges even when those challenges are as daunting as, well, changing into a wolf whenever the full moon appears.

That, to me, is the definition of a sexy werewolf.

JoSelle Vanderhooft  
Ft. Lauderdale FL  
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## SILVER MOON

***Becca's first hot flash came on suddenly and*** unexpectedly, superheating her body from head to toe until she was drenched with sweat. It propelled her off the couch and into the bathroom to splash cold water on her face. As the water dripped down her cheeks, she glanced at her tomato-like complexion and bit off a shriek.

There had been something new in her reflection, a flickering of golden eyes and fur, visible just for a moment. Something feral and wild strained toward the surface behind her normally impassive expression. She closed her eyes, shutting out the hallucination or whatever it was.

Everything slowed down for a moment, as if whatever wildness lurked inside was being locked back in its cage. When she opened her eyes, there was nothing new and terrifying to be seen. Her own face, round and furless, stared back at her with light brown eyes. It was a face like that of any other

woman of a certain age in a one-horse town like Wolf's Point. For a moment, she wondered if this gradual softening and rounding of features, this planing away of the sharp edges, was what they all had in common.

But the thought passed with a second, milder flash. She lurched outside and dropped onto her porch swing, the fan in her hand trying to supplement the tiny morning breeze. She rocked slowly back and forth and cursed turning fifty, but silently, so the neighbors wouldn't notice. Here in Wolf's Point, they noticed quite a bit. You couldn't be too careful.

Across the street, her neighbor Erin walked out onto her porch, and Becca gave her a half-hearted wave. Just her luck, Erin waved back then started over. This wasn't going to help cool her down much, that was for sure.

Talking to Erin made her feel...different. Kind of shy and squirmy inside. It was weird—she hadn't had trouble talking to anyone or even speaking in front of an audience for years now. Everyone said she was the best speaker at the local women's club, and at church, too. After all, she'd been doing that kind of stuff since Ed dumped her five years ago. *Good luck to him and his trophy bimbo*, she thought contemptuously and smiled a bit at how little that bugged her anymore.

Erin arrived on the heels of the smile.

"Hey, there. Pretty hot out this morning, huh?" She grinned the slow, lazy smile that always made Becca think about cowboys. Cowgirls. Whatever.

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“Yep. And I’m even hotter on top of that.” Becca rolled her eyes and fanned faster.

Erin raised an eyebrow and cocked her head to one side like a big dog.

“No question about that. Or am I missing something?”

Becca felt a flush paint her cheeks and nearly hid her face behind the fan just like an old time court lady. But of course, Erin hadn’t meant anything by it. Not like there was anything to mean, for that matter. Who’d say something like that about her middle-aged dumpy self anymore?

“I seem to be coming up on The Change,” she mumbled when she realized Erin was still waiting for an answer. She could almost hear the capital letters.

Erin’s grin turned a little strange, as if her face was somehow longer than it should be. Becca blinked and convinced herself it was just a trick of the morning light. Her neighbor’s face seemed normal enough when she looked back up—broad cheeks, silver-gray eyes, cheerful grin exposing slightly crooked teeth.

“Well,” Erin said at last, “this calls for a celebration. We usually hold a little party down at the club when that time of life comes around for one of our members.”

“News to me. No one ever said anything about it before. This one of those Red Hat things?” Becca scowled. Why would Erin know something like this when she didn’t? After all, she’d been a member for three years, for God’s sake. She was even in the

running to be club secretary in the next election. But she'd be damned if she was putting on a red hat and a feather boa, no matter how much fun everyone else said it was.

Erin grinned a little wider, as if she were imagining her in the hat and boa. Becca wondered what else she was wearing in the other woman's imagination, and flushed even more. This day got any weirder, and she was going to need to head over to the clinic for a checkup.

Erin's voice cut into her thoughts.

"Nope. Can you really see me in a red hat and boa?"

Becca glanced at her scruffy plaid shirt and jeans and shook her head. Erin went on talking.

"We just get together, have some cake and a margarita or two, and talk about some of the things that worked for us when we first started going through The Change. Don't spread the word too far, though—we're trying to keep the youngsters out until they're old enough to relate." She winked, a slow, sensuous gesture that made Becca smile despite herself. Erin continued. "Your schedule pretty open Friday night? We like to run a little late on these things."

Becca raised an eyebrow but nodded anyway. She was trying to picture the older members of their little club staying awake past nine, and so far, it wasn't working. But maybe she didn't know them as well as she thought.

Erin added another comment or two about stopping by to let her know when the time got final-

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ized then took off. Becca made herself not watch her walk away.

Instead, she got ready for work, with a quick stop beforehand at the local store for groceries and maybe a magazine or two about dealing with menopause. There had to be something out there. Besides, the less thinking she did about Erin Adams and her mysterious groups the better.

But the grocery story didn't yield much in the way of information, unless Becca wanted sensual feasts to keep her man's interest. *Well, that ship sailed awhile back*, she thought as she looked over the magazine rack. For an instant, her lip curled over one incisor, and she almost growled.

The sensation made her gasp and look around quickly, hoping no one else had noticed. She needn't have worried. Becca Thornton at fifty might as well have been invisible. Carts went around her, younger women picked up the romance novels, men picked up the sports and car magazines, not one of them noticing anything different about her.

She shrugged. It was almost time to head over to the hardware store for her shift anyway, that time of life or not. She paid for her groceries and headed out into the sunny street.

Pete's Hardware was just a few blocks away, so she decided to walk, eating her sandwich on the way. Not for the first time, she found herself grateful that Wolf's Point still had a hardware store. And a downtown with a grocery store. Odd how Walmart and the other big chains were never able to get a foothold around here. Why, the nearest big box was more than a hundred miles away.

The end result was that Pete didn't have much competition, and she got paid more than she would have at the grocery store or one of the gift shops. Fine by her, but kind of strange, too.

She swung the door open to discover Erin, her buddy Molly, and Pete's wife Shelly all leaning against the counter, their heads close together like they were sharing secrets. Becca felt awkward and wondered whether or not to go over and join them. She'd known Shelly for years, of course, but not the other two, or at least not as well.

The three turned and grinned at her, breaking her thoughts up into little jagged shards. She had a disturbing impression of glowing eyes and lolling tongues, and she shook her head to clear it. Evidently, her Change was going to be more bizarre than anyone else's. Somehow, that figured.

Pete ambled down the nail aisle and nodded a greeting when he saw her.

"There's a guy over in paint wants your help, Becca," he rumbled. "Ladies." He added a second nod to the women at the counter before walking away into the plumbing and electrical supplies section. Becca made herself not watch him walk away. Peter Benning was a fine big figure of a man, just the kind she would've gone for when she was younger. But he was married, and besides, he just didn't make her feel all squirmy inside like...

"Hey, Becca, I'll stop by when you're done with your shift," Erin's voice purred in the vicinity of her ear, sending a flush through Becca's cheeks that she

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couldn't control. She nodded and bolted for the paints, refusing to think about what it all might mean.

After that, there was a succession of customers picking up paint or supplies or agonizing about color choices. Just enough to put Erin out of her mind. Almost, anyway. Becca settled into the rhythm of her work and restocked shelves once the first wave of customers had come and gone. Then Shelly came by wanting some help with the window display.

It was the end of her shift before she knew it, and there was Erin waiting outside, her long form leaning up against a lamppost like someone out of a noir film. All she needed was a fedora and a smoke. Becca squirmed and considered ducking out the back door for a moment, but Pete and Shelly were herding her out the front door.

"You gals have a nice evening." Pete winked at Erin.

*Just like we were on a date or something!* Becca bit the words back before they could cross her lips. No point in planting that particular seed where it didn't need to start growing. She made herself smile up at Erin.

"You didn't have to stop by to meet me, you know. I'm used to walking home alone in the evening."

Erin grinned back at her.

"But tonight the moon's almost full, and the mountains look even more gorgeous than usual. I thought you might want to take the long way home and check out the scenic route. I even brought tea." She held out a shiny little coffee mug and a small white paper bag. "And chocolate."

Becca found herself staring up at the moon like she'd never seen it before. Was it always so white, so



compelling? It pulled at the tides in her blood, rustling under her skin until she was so jumpy she wanted to run and howl. She forced her tone to sound casual.

“Let’s walk, then.”

They moved briskly, Becca surprising herself by keeping up with Erin’s long strides. There was a breeze blowing tonight, coming in from out of town somewhere. It was full of tantalizing scents, ones that Becca had never noticed before. The wind’s fingers twisted through her hair, lifting it out of the Scrunchie that tried to restrain it until she gave up and yanked the hair tie off. She felt like anything might happen tonight, and the thought thrummed through her like a drumbeat.

“Do you run?” Erin’s voice growled from somewhere above her, and Becca shivered as if she were shaking off an old skin. For an answer, she stuffed the mug in her bag and swung it out of the way. Then she lunged forward into a lope that came surprisingly easily to her. It wasn’t too fast, but it was certainly more of a run than she’d tried in years. She tried not to think about how much her calves would ache later.

Erin effortlessly kept pace with her as they charged from downtown onto the more deserted side streets, heading for the river. The bag banging against Becca’s back was a minor irritation, one she could ignore in light of her newly discovered speed and stamina. She sucked in the wind like a drink and imagined for a moment that the two of them were chasing something, something they had to catch. Her white tennis shoes

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twinkled below her against the dark pavement as they surged out onto the bridge.

The river rapids thundered beneath the rusting metal trusses, and Erin caught Becca's arm to slow her down and draw her to the rail. Together, they panted into the moonlit dark in companionable silence.

Becca grinned down at the water, its rushing length matching her mood.

"Maybe this will be the year I finally go on that whitewater trip Ed was always talking about."

"Sounds like a great idea." Erin said enthusiastically.

And just like that, Becca knew who she wanted to go with. She glanced sidelong at Erin, watching her nostrils flare in the breeze. The slight elongation of her face she had seen earlier was back, as was the gold tint in her eyes. But now it felt right, like it was the way she should look.

She grinned back at Becca, and even the length and sharpness of her teeth seemed to suit her face better than they had back in town.

"Thanks for running with me. I needed that."

"Rough day crunching the numbers?" Erin was an accountant, but Becca always had problems reconciling that with what she'd seen of her. She looked and acted like she should be riding the range, lariat in hand.

"Always." Erin threw back her head, tilting her nose up at the moon. For a second, Becca wondered if she was going to howl at it. They both looked up, silent again for a moment.

Then Becca glanced down at the water and her hands on the railing. Had her fingers always been

so long, the backs of her hands so dark, almost as if they were covered with...black fur?

“Have some tea.”

Erin nudged her hard, as if determined to break up her thoughts, and thrust a mug into Becca’s hands. When she looked at her fingers again a few moments later, they looked normal.

“So, when you were going through menopause, did you think you were seeing a lot of weird things, stuff you knew couldn’t be happening?” Becca asked at last. She tried to make her tone casual, as if she were just making conversation.

“You kidding?” Erin laughed heartily. “I thought I was seeing Elvis down at the diner every time I had a hot flash!” She reached out to pat Becca’s shoulder reassuringly. “You’ll be fine. It just takes a little adjustment.”

Seeing Elvis wouldn’t be so bad, Becca thought. It was everything else that was kind of disturbing.

That was when she noticed the van traveling slowly down the highway at the end of the bridge. Not that there was much to notice—it was white with a logo on the side that she couldn’t make out from where they stood. But there was something about the tinted windows and the way it slowed as it passed the bridge, almost like the driver was watching them, sizing them up, that made it sinister.

It made the back of her neck tingle, and her knees quivered a little like she wanted to chase the van or run away or something. She could feel Erin stiffen at her side, and when she looked up, the

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other woman's lips were curled back in a snarl. Her incisors looked impossibly long in the moonlight.

"The bastards are back!" Erin spat, glaring ferociously at the van as it disappeared around a curve.

"Huh? What bastards? You know whoever it was driving that thing?" Becca was alert now, sensing some kind of danger although she didn't know what.

Erin took a deep breath, seemingly forcing herself to relax a little.

"Just some guys out to cause trouble. They've been around here before, and a few of us had to let them know they weren't welcome. Looks like we'll be doing that again." She sent another glare in the direction the van had gone. "Well, come on. I think we better get you home."

Becca's lips parted as a horde of questions tried to force their way out. Why did Erin know all these things about Wolf's Point that she didn't? Secret rituals, vigilante justice—what was next? Monsters in the woods? But she glanced at her companion and closed her mouth, swallowing the questions. Erin's mind was elsewhere, and whatever she was thinking about was serious. Her own curiosity could wait a day or two.



That thought wasn't much comfort when it came to covering the gaping chasm of time that lay between her and Friday. She'd never known two days to pass so slowly, not even after her divorce. It didn't help that Erin wasn't around much, and that Shelly watched her with an odd expression every time they were both in the store together. It all kept her on

edge until she thought she'd climb out of her own skin.

She stopped by the clinic and the library, trying to figure out what was wrong with her, only to learn that "It's just that time of life, dear." She went on-line but didn't find anything that covered all of what she was feeling, either. So, when she got tired of thinking about her health, she found herself looking up Wolf's Point to see what else she didn't know about local history.

There was, it turned out, quite a bit. The first white settlers arrived and called it Riverview until they encountered the local Indian population. The details were murky, but it seemed like there had been some fighting, followed by some peacemaking and then some intermarrying. The town's current name grew out of its first official ordinance, right after incorporation—*no one may hunt a wolf within one hundred miles of the town center.*

*That's strange.* Becca felt something, not quite a chill, run down her back, followed by the familiar flash of heat. Why was this so important that it became the first law they passed? And why was she reacting to it? It wasn't like she planned on going wolf hunting anytime soon. The packs avoided the townsfolk for the most part, spending their time in the preserve right outside town.

She'd gone on the preserve's Wolf Call nights like everyone else did, right after she and Ed moved to town. Two nights of camping out, listening to them howl and watching them run. They'd been beautiful to watch and listen to. Their howls had haunted her dreams for weeks afterwards.

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But that was it. She didn't own any kitschy wolf print sweatshirts or have any little paw prints tattooed on her ankles, like some of the women in town. She poked around some more and noticed that the ordinance was still in place. More interestingly, the towns nearby abided by it, too.

Then there was the much stranger discovery. On a site called "The Slayers Nest," she ran across a call for volunteers to head out to Wolf's Point. It didn't say for what, and the site's black background with the animated flaming torches and blood red lettering didn't make her want to sign up for membership.

But there was a logo that looked a bit like the one painted on the side of the van the other night. Now, she could see it was a wooden stake crossed with a gray bullet, surrounded by an open wolf's jaw with two broken fangs.

She bit back a snarl, her hackles rising with the next hot flash, and she looked away from the screen for a few minutes while she forced deep breaths into her lungs. Clearly, she was overreacting. It was probably one of those live-action role-playing games she'd heard about.

But why come to Wolf's Point? Apart from some references on some of the occult sites and a note on something called a "furry" site, she couldn't figure out the specifics. Even so, it was enough to tell her there was more to her town than met the eye, at least as far as outsiders were concerned.

That night, she dreamt of wolves. She was one of them, and they were tearing through the forest in

pursuit of something, although she couldn't tell what. The air whipped through her fur, and her paws blurred beneath her as she sped up for the sheer joy of running.

A larger wolf ranged alongside her and flashed her a panting doggy grin. Its eyes glinted golden and familiar, and she barked a greeting at it. Together, they jumped a stream and scrambled up some rocks.

Then she could see what they were chasing.

She woke up with a yell, one foot landing on the floor next to her bed as her body jerked upward in shock. Trembling, she reached for the lamp on the nightstand and flooded the room with light. She pulled her foot back and sat curled up for what felt like hours, her head held carefully in her hands while her breathing slowed.

That was when she realized she couldn't clearly remember what she'd seen in her dream, only that it had scared the crap out of her. Becca cursed her subconscious in a very unladylike way for a few moments. Then she got up to get a glass of water. She wandered into the living room to drink it while she looked out at the deserted street.

Or at least it appeared deserted, until she looked a bit more closely at the shadows. There were big dogs out there, five or six of them. They trotted along, all seemingly headed in the direction of the old bridge. She didn't recognize any of them, and she watched, baffled, as they vanished into the trees at the end of the street.

She forced herself not to go outside, not to follow them. Instead, she dragged one reluctant foot

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after another back to her bedroom and read for an hour until she was too sleepy to keep her eyes open. The morning arrived way too soon.

When she couldn't pretend to sleep anymore, she got up, showered, and ate breakfast. Then she went for a long walk. Almost without thinking about it, she found herself following the same route to the river the dogs had taken the night before. Or morning before. She groaned out loud and kept walking.

The river gorge was beautiful at this time of day. The trees—aspens and birch, for the most part—rustled in the morning breeze, and Becca started to relax for the first time since her dream. She perched on a large rock and watched the water go by, letting the light from the newly risen sun sink into her bones.

The scrape of foot against stone made her jump from her reverie, all senses suddenly alert. The woman who stood on the other bank watching her was unfamiliar, much like the dogs. She was short and broad-shouldered and had a long, jagged scar on one cheek, visible even under the shadows from the trees. Her short-cropped hair was dark and wavy against her scalp, and her eyes were hard. She didn't smile in response to Becca's nod.

Becca found herself getting more than a little angry. Who did she think she was, anyway? Stupid tourists. She could feel her lip curl back over her teeth, and it was all she could do not to growl at the stranger.



They stared at each other for a few more seconds until Becca finally cleared her throat and demanded, “Yes? Do you need something?”

The other woman stepped forward, her full lips curling in a smile that didn’t reach her eyes.

“Just out for a walk. I was camping downstream, and this looked like a nice spot for a swim.” She gestured at the pool with a powerful hand.

Somehow, Becca didn’t believe her. But then, what difference did it make? What kind of harm could she possibly do?

The woman stretched gracefully, her shoulders moving like a wrestler’s.

“You ever see any wolves in these woods?” Her tone was casual, but something in it caught Becca’s attention, brought her body awake and alert, taut like a wire.

But she kept her tone casual, too.

“Yep, lots. It’s illegal to hunt them here, you know.”

The woman smiled again.

“I look like a wolf hunter to you? I like to take photos, but I don’t like to be surprised by my subjects. I just wanted to know how safe it was out here.”

Becca carefully chose her words before she spoke. After all, it wasn’t like *nothing* ever happened in Wolf’s Point.

There had been that young man killed out in the quarry a few years back, but they’d caught the guy who did that, something about a fight over a truck. Then there had been the couple who tried to set up the meth lab, blown sky-high, the two of them were.

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The coroner had ruled that an accident. It was flammable stuff, or so she'd heard.

No point in being too trusting.

"It's pretty safe around here. Most folks who find it otherwise bring their own trouble with them." The words surprised her, like they'd come from someone else.

The other woman raised an eyebrow and held up her hands to show they were empty.

"Not looking for any trouble. Just heard this was a nice safe place to camp for a woman on her own."

Becca flinched. Here she was projecting her nightmares and her bad mood onto some poor stranger.

"I'm sorry. I had a bad night, and you startled me, that's all. The wolves are mostly over at the preserve, and yes, it is a safe place to camp. If you want to go into town, we've got a pretty good deli and the pie at Millie's is the best for a couple hundred miles around. And if you're up for a hike, Jenner's Falls is a few miles upstream. It's really pretty this time of year." She glanced down at her watch. "I need to head back and get to work. Have a nice stay."

The woman bared her teeth in acknowledgement and nodded.

"You have a good day."

Becca headed back up through the trees, but just before she went over the ridge, she glanced back. The woman was still looking after her, and there was a man standing next to her now. She ducked behind a tree and watched them through a screen of leaves for a couple of minutes. The man was talking, gesturing, but she couldn't hear what he was saying. Then he

turned, and she saw the logo from the Slayer site on the back of his black jacket.

She flinched. Whoever they were, someone should know about them.

She headed for town at a trot, bound for the sheriff's office, her steps only slowing to a walk as she paused to catch her breath on the outskirts of town. Odd how she'd felt so invincible running with Erin the other night, and now she could barely do more than a brisk walk.

"You're in a hurry this morning."

The familiar voice made her whirl around, heart racing and cheeks flushing. Erin was walking up the street behind her, a concerned look on her face. Becca tried to sort through the jumble of her thoughts. What was she going to tell the sheriff, anyway?

"I saw some campers up in the woods. They didn't do anything, but they gave me the creeps," she said. She rubbed her arms anxiously and scowled. "For some reason, I thought they might be after the wolves."

Erin's face hardened, and her jaw set.

"You don't say." She spoke softly, her tone belying the menace in her expression. "What made you think that?"

"I don't know, really. The woman I talked to was asking about the wolves in the woods, and the guy, he had on this jacket with a logo on it. It's probably just some role-playing thing...no big deal." Becca shrugged, trying to shed the twisting feeling in her gut. Here she was, trying to downplay something even though she knew it was wrong. It had felt like that right before she found out Ed had a girlfriend.

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But she could see Erin wasn't paying attention to her last few words. Instead, the larger woman caught her shoulder in a light squeeze.

"You going to let the sheriff know? At least maybe one of his deputies or the rangers can check them out."

Becca nodded.

"Something just doesn't feel right."

Erin nodded, too, her mouth set.

"All right. I've got some things to take care of. I'll see you tonight, right?"

Tonight? Becca couldn't believe she'd forgotten it was Friday.

"I'll be there. Actually, why don't I just go there with you? It might ease the jitters." She smiled, hoping Erin couldn't see all of what she was feeling.

Erin winked and nodded.

"I'll pick you up around eight-thirty." Then she loped off down the street that led downtown like something was chasing her.

Becca walked after her and wondered just what was going on. And why she'd ever thought that Wolf's Point was a boring little town.



She told the sheriff about the two strangers by the creek, deliberately making her tone casual but concerned. Sheriff Gray was a nice enough guy, but she still felt like he wasn't really paying attention.

"Sure thing, Miz Thornton. I'll have Lizzy stop by and check it out." He jerked his head at the deputy sitting behind him.

Lizzy Blackhawk was typing something into a computer, her expression impassive. She glanced up at the sheriff's comment and gave Becca a long, unreadable glance. Then she raised one dark eyebrow and nodded before returning to the computer.

Oh, well, Becca thought. I've done what I can. And since Lizzy was Shelly's cousin, maybe her boss could encourage her to follow up a bit sooner.

She kept telling herself that during her shift at the hardware store, but her suspicions made doing so difficult. She would have talked to Shelly about it, but Pete said she was out at her mother's. Somehow, it didn't seem like a good idea to share her worries with him. No point in planting the suggestion she was getting crazy in her old age. Instead, she fretted until her whole body felt like a strung wire, strummed to the breaking point with every hot flash that struck that afternoon.

By the time she left work, she was a wreck. She dashed into the house and took a shower and inhaled dinner in five minutes. Then she stared into her closet for what seemed like an hour. What did you wear to a mystery event attended by a woman you wanted to impress, even though you knew there was no good reason for you to feel that way? Her thoughts whirled, and she wished she was out in the woods, running in the moonlight, letting the wind whistle through her hair. *Now, where did that come from?*

Finally, she grabbed a light, loose-fitting top, and slacks instead of her usual jeans. Nothing too fancy, but something she would be reasonably comfort-

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able in it. She put her hair up in a clip and stared in the mirror, thinking about makeup.

The doorbell interrupted her, and she dashed to the front door to let Erin in.

“You ready?” Erin grinned down at her, a disturbing light in her gold-tinted eyes. “My, you look good enough to eat.”

Becca shivered all over and fumbled for a response.

“Um...thanks. Guess we’d better get going,” was all that came to mind.

She grabbed her purse and pushed through the doorway past Erin in her rush to avoid making eye contact. Erin led the way to her car without comment.

The whole trip down to the Wolf’s Point Women’s Club was like that, at least from Becca’s point of view. Erin chatted away about town gossip and projects she was doing around her house like nothing was wrong.

But Becca could feel it—something huge and important hung in the air around them. It was inside her, too, coursing through her body with every thump of her heart until her skin felt like it was all that stood between her and transformation. Stage fright had never felt like this before. She rolled down the passenger window to get some air on her overheated face.

She almost bolted from the car when they got to the club. She wasn’t ready for dealing with *The Change* with a bunch of women she didn’t know that well. Night had just come on, and she felt she needed its darkness to hide her reactions, to hide whatever it was she was turning into. The words to

ask Erin if it had been like this for her wouldn't come to her lips, and she was left mute and quivering as she followed her friend reluctantly into the club.

Inside, the clubhouse was like she'd never seen it before, which was a ridiculous notion. There was something about the shadows, about the lit candles on the tables, about the expressions on the faces of the women that made it new and, somehow, terrifying. Why weren't the lights on? The candles gave the place a spooky look. Shelly greeted her with a long-toothed smile, predatory yet welcoming.

As Erin had promised, there was a cake and a couple of pitchers of margaritas on the table, but Becca no longer felt like it was just a simple celebration. The atmosphere was charged, and while she was thinking about it, where was everyone else? Surely, someone else was in on these Change rituals besides Shelly, Erin, and Molly?

Erin poured her a margarita, and she gulped down half of it before she realized what she was doing.

Shelly sat down next to her.

"Look, Becca, sometimes The Change comes on really suddenly, and we don't have much time to prepare."

The door opened, and other women began trickling in by twos and threes. Shelly sighed and patted Becca's shoulder.

"Don't worry about a thing. We all went through it our first time, too." She stood and went to greet

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the others, leaving Becca staring after her, gaping in complete bewilderment.

As if Shelly's words were some kind of signal, Molly beckoned for Becca to join her and ushered her to a large cushioned chair surrounded by a circle of other chairs. The rest of the women followed them in. Becca sat and fidgeted, the silence in the room making her twitchier by the minute.

"So, am I being initiated or something?"

Erin gave her a reassuring smile that resembled a wolf's grin, and it was all Becca could do not to bolt for the door.

She forced herself to look around as the others—twenty or so—sat down. She recognized them all as women she had seen around town, even though not all of them lived in Wolf's Point. There was Mrs. Hui, whose family ran the only Chinese restaurant in town, and Carly, the pastor's wife. Her neighbor Gladys nodded from her seat.

All were women of a "certain age," as those stupid magazines she'd read put it, none under forty-five or so but all hale and hearty. There was something more they had in common, too, although she couldn't quite place what it was.

Erin set up a large mirror across from her so she could watch her own frowning, searching face and stiff body. It annoyed her, this senseless gesture, and she found herself snarling a little in response. There, just for a moment, was the face that had terrified her the other day in her bathroom, and she flinched away, shivering. Surely, she didn't look like that all the time, did she?



Shelly glanced out the window then cleared her throat and stood, one long taper in her hand. Becca thought she looked like a shaman, standing there with her long black hair flowing over her shoulders and her dark eyes looking out on forever. She had never seemed so beautiful—or so alien.

Shelly cleared her throat and said, “I think we’re ready to begin. It’s moonrise. Thank you all for coming to welcome our member Becca Thornton as she enters The Change that has taken each of us in our time. Let us help Becca embrace her own transformation and join with us to make the pack stronger.”

She waved the candle in a strange pattern and sprinkled some substance on the floor as she walked forward and circled Becca’s chair.

*What the hell is this? What “pack?”* Becca’s thoughts were frantic, her skin burning. She could feel sweat trickling down her back and sides, her heart racing so fast she trembled with each beat. Her whole body felt odd, out of place, as if it belonged to someone else. Everything was too long, too short, too stretched. Too furry.

*Furry?* The thought shot through her, and she stood, ready to flee.

The flash of her movement showed in the mirror, and she glanced at it then froze. Her face was long, her eyes golden. Her hair seemed to be working its way down her forehead. She was crouched over, huge and menacing. Her hands were far longer than they should have been, with fingers whose nails now resembled claws. They were also covered with a light-brown fuzz.

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Becca Thornton opened her mouth to scream, but what came out was more like a cross between a howl and a yelp. She jumped forward, trying to get away from the monster in the mirror and found herself bouncing back as if she'd hit a wall. She spun around the chair searching for a way out, clawing at the air with hands that were no longer hers.

Erin stood and unbuttoned her shirt and pants. She undressed carefully and calmly, as if being naked before the Wolf Point Women's Association was the most normal thing in the world. Watching her lean form emerge from her clothes made Becca's throat dry, made her heart beat even faster. In that moment, she almost knew what she wanted from Erin. Almost.

At least until she began to change.

Erin's transformation was quick and fluid, beginning with the stretching of her face and her hands and ending with the growth of her fur. Within moments, Becca was staring at a large gold-tinged wolf with Erin's eyes.

That was when she knew she was going insane. A sense of betrayal so deep it made her bones ache washed over her. How could Erin have kept this from her?

Shelly's voice broke into her thoughts, forced her to hear something besides her own fears.

"Wolf's Point has always held its own magic, from time immemorial. In each generation, a group of women past childbearing age become its vessels, and in turn the protectors of this land and its peo-

ple. We embrace the spirit form of all of the valley's past inhabitants, taking on their skins and their strengths. We embrace the forms and rituals of the settlers who came after the First Ones. We are at once old and new.

"You are called to join us, Becca Thornton. The blood in your veins marks you as one of us. Do you hear its summons?"

Becca could feel her jaw drop. What was this, some episode of *Buffy* she'd never seen before? Sure, she heard a call, all right, and it was telling her to run out of this room, away from these crazy women and their dogs and magic tricks. Telling her to run into the woods, to feel the moon's song in her blood, the wind in her fur, to chase down her prey and...

*Oh, shit.* She stared at Shelly for long minutes, all the while feeling shifts in her body that shouldn't have been happening.

The other women were changing around Shelly now, and that wasn't helping. She could smell them all, for one thing, her nose suddenly much more acute. And she could hear things, things that couldn't possibly be close enough to hear.

Shelly kept watching her, clearly waiting for an answer. What the hell was she supposed to do?

Finally, she forced her long lips into something resembling human speech.

"Do I have a choice?"

Shelly's lips quirked in something resembling a smile that wasn't, quite.

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