

Night Hunts

By

Kat Ross

Freeditorial 

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'Boring, boring, boring.' Officer Thaddeus Wilhelm, of the Fairfax Police Department, drummed his fingers on the armrest and stared out the window at the passing landscape. 'Another perfectly calm night. How much more boring can it get? Better yet, how much of this can I take?'

A rise in violence against police officers had brought about changes in how some of departments handled road patrols. Fairfax's answer had been to start assigning two officers to a cruiser. Thad was still getting use to the idea of having someone in the car with him all the time.

"Problem?" his partner asked.

"No, Rhea, not really."

"Thad," Rhea Yokama laughed, glancing briefly over at him, "you've been drummin' your fingers for the last five miles. Would you rather drive?"

"No. I drove last night. You know our deal. We trade duties evenly. Besides, that wouldn't really help. It's just so quiet."

"You were expecting mass riots?"

"No," he sighed. "Just a little more action. Hell, I'll settle for a headlight."

"Robert 54," the radio interrupted the conversation.

"54, go ahead."

"20 at 9445 Fairfax."

"Ouch," Thad flinched. "Glad that's not us. I hate Domestics."

"Ditto."

"Robert 62, dispatch, stop."

"Robert 62, go ahead."

"Stop on Virginia reg, John, William, William, seven, one, seven, six. Repeat, J-W-W-7-1-7-6, would be on a black Ford Mustang, on 236 at Oak."

"Robert 62, clear at 2113 hours."

"Glad someone's getting some action," Thad grouched.

"Cheer up, Thad. Maybe we'll get a stuck cat."

"Right."

"Robert 55, 57." Dispatch called right after the beep. Thad raised an eyebrow and reached for the mike.

"55, go ahead."

"Welfare check, 3632 Parklane Road."

Thad grimaced faintly before answering. "55, clear."

"You're clear at 2115 hours."

"Welfare checks," he muttered hanging up the mike. "About as much fun as unsticking cats." He punched the message display switch to call up the printed dispatch, and additional information. "52 year old male, lives alone. Hasn't been seen since mid-afternoon. Car still in the drive. No lights on in the house. Complainant is a neighbor."

"Sounds fun." Rhea nodded. "Probably out with some of his buddies."

She swung the cruiser around and headed for Old Lee Highway.

"No doubt.," Thad snorted softly as he hit the 'enroute' key.

A few minutes later they were driving down a quiet residential street populated with homes built shortly after World War II.

"End of the cul-de-sac," Rhea nodded towards the dark house.

"Well, they were right about the lights being off. Still bet he's out for the night, and forgot to 'check-in'." Rhea chuckled softly as she turned the cruiser into the driveway. After telling dispatch that they had arrived, they got out of the car and walked towards the front porch.

"Nice, quiet, neighborhood," Rhea murmured, grinning.

"Bet they don't get a lot of stuck cats here," Thad returned.

"Mr. Jacques?" Rhea called out as she rang the bell. After waiting a moment, with not response, she tried the bell again. This time Thad called.

"Mr. Jacques? Police, Mr. Jacques, is everything all right?" He tried the door when no reply was received. "Check round back?" he asked, cocking an eyebrow at Rhea.

"Sounds good to me. You take the right side, I'll go left." Thad nodded and hopped off the porch.

He paused and looked in each window as he moved slowly around the house, trying to see if he could detect anything that might be unusual. Unlatching the gate to a tall wooden fence that separated the yard from a local park, he moved into the backyard, after quickly scanning the yard he moved back to the house He stopped and shone his light directly in one of the rear windows. Something appeared to be lying on the floor. The light was enough

for him to make out part of the room and what looked to be a body. He scrambled to the back door and tried it; it was locked. "Robert 55 to Dispatch." He keyed his portable radio with his right hand while he grabbed his baton and snapped it open with his left.

"Go ahead Robert 55." Dispatch answered promptly.

"Get me a 45. I've got a man down," Thad called into his shoulder mike. Releasing the switch, he took hold of the baton with both hands. Stepping to the side of the door, he solidly rapped the glass above the lock.

"You're clear, Robert 55. Squad will be enroute. 2129 hours." Dispatch's voice carried over the sound of breaking glass.

"I've got the kit, Thad." Rhea ran over towards him, emergency trauma kit in hand, as he reached in to unlock the door. It took him an extra second to find, and release, the deadbolt. Rhea was inside before he could get the door open by more than a few feet. Thad moved past her to unlock the front door and get some lights on before the squad arrived. "Rhea?" he called over his shoulder.

"I'm not gettin' a pulse, or respiration. Starting C.P.R." She delayed just long enough to slip on a pair of latex gloves then rolled Mr. Jacques over, placing him in the proper position. She paused again as something bright caught her eye. "Shit!" Rhea exclaimed as saw the bright red stain. "He's been shot!"

"Go ahead and start C.P.R., there may still be a chance," Thad directed as he reached for his mike. "Robert 55, Dispatch. Tell Squad to step it up. We have a code here."

"You're clear, Robert 55. 2132 hours."

Thad dropped down on the other side of Mr. Jacques and yanked a pressure bandage, an occlusive covering, and a set of gloves, out of the kit. He quickly snapped the gloves on, then centered the covering over the wound. The pressure bandage went on top of the now sealed hole in Mr. Jacques' chest, holding the air tight dressing in place. Holding the dressings in place with one hand, he ran the other down Mr. Jacques' side and back, trying to see if the shot had gone completely through. He stopped when he felt something wet and sticky near the waist. Thad stared at his damp, sticky, hand puzzled. It appeared as if the bullet had exited down by the waist. Which would have meant that the shot had been at an extreme angle or the bullet had tumbled. "Anything?" he asked as Rhea shifted to start compressions again. She shook her head in mid stroke. He glanced briefly at the man's face, and then looked back, frowning.

The front door all but bounced off its hinges as the first of the life squad stormed into the room. Thad and Rhea quickly rolled out of his way as more of the squad members entered. While the squad worked to salvage something of Jacques, Thad stripped off his gloves, slipped on another pair, and then walked around the living room and kitchen areas. He found that all the doors were, or had been, locked with a deadbolt or a nightchain. The windows were

securely latched. The only thing he found open was a dog door in the kitchen.

There was no sign of forced entry, or exit. Nor was there any sign of someone hiding on the premises. He returned to the living room in time to see the senior paramedic shaking her head. "EKG flat, no response to defib, skin exhibits a pallor, and we've had massive blood loss. I'd say this man is beyond our help."

"I'll call for a coroner to declare. Rhea sighed and keyed her shoulder mike. "Robert 57, Dispatch."

"Robert 57 go ahead."

"I need a 10-79 and a supervisor."

"Robert 57 clear at 2150 hours."

"Rhea, I'm going to do a full walk through, make sure the house is secure." Thad jerked a thumb towards the back of the house. Rhea just nodded and turned back to watch the paramedics.

Thad checked the window in the bedrooms, looking in the closets, under the beds, and anywhere a person could hide, for signs of anyone in the house, and then started looking through the top dresser drawers and the jewelry box. He growled in mild frustration as he closed the last drawer.

"It's not here. I didn't see it on him. So, where is it? He would have kept it someplace safe, but where he could get to it. Maybe he does have it on, and I missed it." He returned to the living room. The shift supervisor, Lt. Mote, had arrived and was standing near the middle of the room with one of the homicide detectives. They were still waiting on the coroner.

"All the doors and windows are secure, sir. There is no sign of anyone hiding on the premises."

"Good," the lieutenant nodded. "Have we found the gun?"

"No, we haven't," Rhea told him.

"You checked outside?"

"Not yet."

"Better do that then. We don't want some neighbor kid finding it and shooting their friends."

"No, we don't." Thad emphatically shook his head. He stepped over to pick up the flashlight he had dropped when they arrived. While doing so he took a close look at the man's face and neck. The shirt collar was worn and frayed slightly on the insides, as if he wore a moderately heavy chain. A chain that was not there now.

The coroner arrived just as he picked up the light.

"Do we know anything about this person?" the coroner asked, pointing at the body with his thumb.

"Only his name and age," Lt. Mote answered. "No known family, as of yet."

"So, no one knows who he was."

"Not at this time."

"Any luck?" he asked stepping out. Rhea was talking to an off-duty officer who was standing by the front door. He could see the shadows of

neighbors standing in their driveways, watching, trying to see why there was an ambulance and several police cars parked at the end of the street.

"Not so far. We have two other teams searching."

"I saw the lights. Who is it?"

"Slater and Hendricks and Compten and Kimple. The guys are checkin' the back yard. The girls are checking the front."

"Nice set up. What about the garage area?"

"That's next."

They searched in relative silence for several minutes, the beams from their flashlights dancing across the grass.

"Hey, Wilhelm," Kathy Compten called from the front corner of the house, stopping the search. "Thought you might like to know, Mills is coming with the dog."

"Good idea," Rhea nodded. Searching that park out back is going to be hard.

"Great," Thad muttered.

The sound of a car engine brought them to the corner. They looked around in time to see Ron Mills, canine handler, open the rear door for the dog. What leapt out was a large, black and tan, Alsatian. At just over two foot tall and just under one hundred pounds, Panzer presented a very impressive image.

"He is beautiful."

"He's also extremely intelligent."

Rhea turned to stare at her partner in mild shock for the second time. "I thought you didn't like dogs?" Something in his voice spoke of some familiarity with the dog.

"All right, so Panzer is one of the only dogs I can get along with," Thad half growled, looking back around the corner. "Besides, he has quite an impressive reputation within the department."

Panzer moved purposely towards the front door, Mills half a step behind. He paused briefly at the door, barked once to get someone's attention. The door opened and Panzer walked in. The two-footed officers returned to their search.

Inside, Panzer walked towards the body. He nosed it for a few seconds, then started walking around the room in an ever widening spiral. When he moved towards the bedroom without his handler the coroner turned to Mills.

"Aren't you going to stay with your dog?"

Mills paused in his conversation with Lt. Mote. "Panzer? Nope. If he needs me, he'll call."

"I thought handlers were supposed to stay with the dogs, in case they get distracted."

"All I do with Panzer is drive the car and open the doors. He does the rest by himself. Works better without someone standing right behind him actually. In fact, if he could figure out how to get the key in the ignition and

turn it, he wouldn't need me at all."

"Interesting." The coroner turned to watch as Panzer moved out of the bedroom, back through the main room, and into the kitchen. A soft half whine brought Mills and Lt. Mote into the kitchen. They found Panzer standing in front of the kitchen door, looking intently at the dog door.

"What ya got, Panz?" Mills asked, absently rubbing Panzer's ears.

Panzer barked once and pushed at the small swinging door with his nose.

"Panz, you could barely fit through that. There's no way a human could."

Panzer looked back at Mills and snorted.

"Perhaps he has something." Lt. Mote turned and started back towards the living room. Mills and Panzer followed a few steps behind. "An adult man, of average build, might not be able to fit through. But a youth, or a small woman might be able to."

"That's a thought."

In the living room the coroner was in the process of loading the body onto a cot, preparing to remove it. As he pulled the sheet over Mr. Jacques' face one of the officers, Mark Slater, came in to speak with Lt. Mote. They had been unable to locate the gun anywhere, inside or outside.

"All right, tell the others to seal the house and cordon off the perimeter. We'll need to have one unit stay in the area and watch the house. The others will return to their patrol. We'll let homicide take over." He nodded at the homicide detective standing a few feet away.

"Yes, sir." Slater nodded, turned and headed out.

"Mills, take Panzer around the outside of the house. See if he'll hit on anything. Make sure to focus near the park." Mills nodded and motioned Panzer towards the door.

An hour later, after a futile search of the yard and the immediate region of the park Thad and Rhea closed the cruiser doors.

"Well you did say you wanted some action, Thad."

"That wasn't exactly the kind of action I was thinking of," Thad half laughed.

"Georgetown University Professor Shot and Killed In His Home," The Washington Post proclaimed on the front page the morning following the death. The article revealed the mysterious circumstances of the murder, saying that the body had been found in a locked house. It also said that while there was no solid evidence leading police to a suspect, it did not appear to have been a suicide.

Late on the third day following the murder, a young woman was returning from a hike in Eakin Park, east of Fairfax. When she rounded a blind bend in the trail she saw a young Hispanic man, of average build and appearance, standing in the middle of the pathway. As she started to walk

around him she noticed he was wearing a heavy gold necklace. It looked like an animal head, but she couldn't tell what kind of animal. She also noticed that he was watching her, closely.

A hiker found a body of a young woman, severely mutilated, lying in the bushes the next day. The best the park rangers could determine, she had been attacked by a good-sized feral dog. They had to send her dental prints in to make an id of the body.

A few days later, a nature enthusiast turned from the small deer he'd been watching to investigate a soft noise behind her. She eyed the man that approached critically. After admiring his medallion for a moment she decided that he presented no immediate threat. She absently motioned him to be quiet and returned her attention to the deer.

The second death in less than a week in Eakin made the front page. The article, citing park authorities, said that the deaths appeared to have been caused by a wild dog. The park rangers were starting a search for the animal. Since both deaths had occurred after sun set, in the lesser traveled areas, hikers were warned to stay in the more traveled areas and to be out of the park before night fall. Additionally, since both woman had been alone, hikers were advised to travel in groups.

The morning after the second death Thad tossed his paper aside in disgust. Between the article of the deaths in the park, and the brief on the Jacques murder, the whole law enforcement community was beginning to look like a bunch of incompetent fools. He picked up the copy of the report he had lifted from Homicide. As he scanned through it, he saw why the press was having such a field day. There was no evidence in the Jacques murder. There were no fingerprints in the house or garage, other than Jacques'. Homicide had gone over the house from top to bottom, torn the yard apart, even turned the garage upside down. They could not find the gun, or any casings. These absences suggested that the perp had used a revolver and had taken it with him when he left. Moreover, they could not figure out how the perp had gotten into, much less out of, the house. The sound of the doorbell ringing interrupting his study. He heard his wife, Chrissy, talking to his partner, moving down the hall. Thad slipped the report, under a stack of papers on his coffee table.

"Hey, partner. Did you forget the extra duty we have today?" Rhea gave him a wicked grin as she walked in.

"Extra duty?" Thad frowned at her.

"At the High School." Rhea's grin grew wider. "The D.A.R.E. program."

"Shit!" He jumped off the couch and bolted for the bedroom.

"I take it he did." Rhea shook her head, smiling at Chrissy. "Hurry it up, Thad. We don't have all day."

A week past from the Jacques murder with no additional deaths in the park. And no new leads in the case.

A group of teenagers went hiking in the Great Falls National Park. As the hike grew longer and the day became late one of the girls stopped to retie her shoe. A pair of squirrels playing nearby drew her attention. When she finally turned around, she realized that her group, apparently not noticing that she had stopped, had gone on without her. She started down the path at a pretty fair clip, hoping to run into them. After several minutes had passed and she had not located them, she stopped and looked around. She had past a small side trail a ways back. Thinking that perhaps they had gone that way, she headed back towards that trail. Arriving at the intersection, she stopped and looked around. A fairly nice looking young man, wearing a pretty gold necklace, stepped off the game trail onto the main path.

"Hello," she hesitantly offered. "I'm looking for my friends. I think then may have taken that trail. Did you, by chance, see them."

"Yes, I think I did," he replied. "I'll take you to them." He smiled at her, fingering the necklace.

The rising sun found a park ranger kneeling next to a badly mutilated body. He glanced up as another ranger entered the small clearing.

"What've we got, Jim?"

"It appears to have been a young woman, Sam. Age is indeterminable. Gauging by the damage to the body, she was attacked by a large animal, possibly a dog."

"Must have been a hell of a fuckin' damn big dog, to have done that kind of damage." Sam glanced briefly over Jim's shoulder and shuddered. "There's nothin' left of her throat. What the hell happen to her clothes?" He turned slowly, looking around the clearing. "There's not a sign of a stitch here."

"Damned if I know," Jim muttered. He shifted his position to study the body from a different angle. "Maybe she wasn't wearing any to begin with."

Sam pivoted back around and stared at Jim. "You think this was a cult job?"

"Not hardly," Jim looked over his shoulder, a mysterious smile flickering briefly. "There's too many paw prints for it to have been human. Besides, it's too messy to have been cultists. They usually just bleed the victim then take the heart. Also, they tend to 'clean-up' after themselves. You know, remove the evidence."

"Ugh," Sam shuddered again, turning away. Jim smiled faintly a second time and returned to his examination of the body. He found a few coarse, grayish, guard hairs caught in the girl's fingernails. He fingered the hairs briefly, a frown slowly forming. They appeared to be wolf, but there hadn't been any wolves in Virginia for nearly a hundred years. They could be from a wolf-hybrid, but something told him that they weren't. If the public thought that there were wolves in the area again, there would be another round of wolf hysteria. He dropped the hairs into his shirt pocket, stood up and started to make a slow circuit of the clearing. He paused and studied the foot prints on a

small game trail. Turning back around, he looked over the scene, eyes half closed. One eyebrow rose a fraction. The sound of several large bodies moving through the brush brought his attention to the main entrance. His supervisor and a few other rangers, carrying a stretcher, entered the clearing.

He kept his suspicions to himself until he got home that evening.

"I think we need to call some of our friends," he told his girl friend over dinner.

"Oh?" She barely glanced up.

"Something about that body doesn't feel right."

"I assume you mean besides being dead in the park."

"Yeah. Let's just leave it at that for now. Wouldn't want to prejudice anyone."

"Okay, I'll see if the twins are in town, maybe Robin and Star. That should cover most of the bases."

"Thanks Winnie." Jim leaned across the table and gave her a quick kiss before heading for the den.

The young lovers were so engrossed with each other they failed to notice that their area of the park was empty, or that the sun was setting. The sound of a branch snapping, close by, drew some attention though.

"What was that?" The young girl looked around.

"Probably an animal of some type," the boy replied, without looking up.

"Bobby, it's getting late. The sun's going down." The girl started to stand up.

"Good, we can watch it." Bobby reached up and pulled the girl back down to him. "Come on, Tammy," he murmured when she started to resist, "don't be such a wuss. There parks are safe."

She giggled and relented to his overtures.

A second, closer, sound brought Bobby's head up, up to stare eye to eye with the young man that had entered their clearing, without being noticed. The stranger smiled a slow malicious smile. Bobby never knew what had hit him. He fell to one side, his head hanging limp from a broken neck. Tammy screamed as the stranger turned his attention to her, his smile spreading.

"Three Killed In Area Parks" The front page of the morning paper announced a new string of deaths. The article revealed that in two days time three people had been killed in Great Falls National Park. The deaths had occurred in lesser-frequented areas and apparently after dark. Just like the earlier deaths in Eakin Park. Once again, park officials were warning people to stay off the side trails and to be out of the park before dark. Speculation was that it was the same animal that had been in Eakin Park, that it had, somehow, changed locations. However, visitors to Eakin Park were still being cautioned to be out of the park by sunset and stay on the main trails. As of yet, there was no mention of closing either facility.

Thad scanned through the article a second time. Details were sparse, but he had a funny feeling about the deaths. It was mentioned only in passing that all but one of the people killed had been female. A detail that he thought interesting.

Thad laid the carefully folded paper on the table and stood up. Cindy was visiting her sister so he didn't have to say anything about where he was going. Half an hour later he was walking down a quiet street in the older section of Hendon. He pulled into the lot of a white building that looked like a church but bore the square and compass of a Masonic Lodge, got out and walked a few blocks. He stopped at a house with a tall wooden fence surrounding the backyard.

"Rudolf?"

A faint clicking, and the sound of someone moving about, responded to his call. A moment later an older, slightly grizzled, man came out wearing a grey and maroon bathrobe. He carefully closed the gate behind him and looked around before turning to Thad.

"Taking a chance on coming here, kid."

"I know." Thad glanced over his shoulder in the direction of the dark street and the nearby homes. "But I need to talk to you."

"What'd ya want?"

"You were called in on the Jacques murder."

"Obviously."

"What did you see?"

"The guy was shot. Nothing was apparently missing, so robbery was ruled out as the motive."

"There was something missing," Thad quietly told him.

"Two," Rudolf corrected.

"Two?"

"There was a small footrest missing from the front of the easy chair. I could just make out where it had been. The perp moved the chair to try and hide it."

"Why take a footrest?" One eyebrow crept up.

"It probably had the bullet in it."

"Oh. But how'd he get it out?"

"Think, kid. One door was still unlocked. He took everything out, came back in, and locked up the house. There were signs of him at every window and door in the place. Then he left. Assuming he's not overly large, it wouldn't have been too hard."

"Of course." Thad nodded. "You heard any of the news lately?"

"Some. Ron and Becky leave the evening news on sometimes."

"I got this funny feeling they're related."

"Could be. Wouldn't be the first time. Hell, use to be that those that didn't turn dark were the exception."

"Yeah. Now all we have to do is catch the dirtbag."

"That's your job kid," Rudolf snorted. "You better go, before someone sees us."

Thad looked over his shoulder, half-expecting to see someone coming, seeing nothing he turned back. Rudolf was gone. He heard a faint clicking on the other side of the now closed gate. Chuckling he turned to leave. Rudolf hadn't lived as long as he had by being careless. During the drive home, he pondered the information he'd gotten. Maybe it was time to call in a favor.

The next day, before going on duty, Thad stopped at his cousin's home.

"All right, what do you need?" Winfriede leaned back in her chair and crossed her legs.

"We have a case we can't crack. We need the help of someone who can work on another level."

"What kind of case?" Winfriede asked.

"A murder. We have no suspects, no motive, and a locked house," Thad told her. "Homicide is totally baffled."

"So what's your interest in the case?"

"I was one of the first ones on the scene. I'd like to see this solved, somehow."

"Okay, I'll buy that." Winfriede nodded.

"I know you're psychometric." Winfriede nodded, agreeing with him. "Can you 'work' off a picture?"

"Sometimes." Winfriede's voice was a carefully schooled neutral.

"Okay," Thad nodded. "I brought some pictures, copies from the scene. Unfortunately, I was unable to get my hands on any of the victim's personal effects."

"Then the pictures will have to do." Winfriede uncrossed her legs and leaned forward slightly in her seat.

Thad nodded and picked the folder up off the floor. Pulling two of the better close-up shots out, he laid them on the table, ignoring the look of surprise on his partner's face. He rotated the photos to face Winfriede as she reached out to pick them up with her left hand.

Winfriede mentally groaned when she noticed that all the pictures were taken after the subject had died. Still, she felt she had to at least give it a try. Closing her eyes, Winfriede blanked her mind and focused on the subject in the pictures. After a couple of minutes she sighed and slowly shook her head. The only thing she had been able to get from the photos had been the pain of traumatic death, and the void of life departed.

"Let me see the photos of the home."

Thad pulled out a couple of other photos and handed them over. Winfriede looked at one of them for a moment the slowly nodded. She looked at a second and nodded again.

"You get anything?"

"Yes, I did manage to get something. "The person you are looking for is a 23 - 25 year old Hispanic male, about 5 foot 9, black hair, brown eyes,

around 185 pounds, medium build. No distinguishing marks or tattoos. Wears his hair about collar length, no glasses or facial hair. He has a faint accent. He was one of Jacques' students a few years back. Best I can give you for a name is Rodrigeos . I don't know if that helps."

"Actually, it does help." Thad leaned forward, clasping his hands together. "We can contact the school and have them check their records. He should have given them an address."

"That's assuming he still lives there."

Thad shook his head briefly and stood up. He grabbed the folder the pictures had been in as she rose. "Thank you, Winnie. You've given us something to work from."

Winfriede rose a fraction behind him. "My honor," she replied. "Next time though, why don't you stop by with your wife, when you don't need a favor?"

The sun had only risen twice since the meeting between Thad and Winnie, before another corpse was found. The body, female, was badly mangled, as had been the other bodies. Once again her clothing was missing. Since the death had occurred in Great Falls again Ranger Jim Seagraves, took charge of the investigation. One of the first things he did, after viewing the scene and the body, was to place a call to a friend in the canine division.

The sun was still short of its zenith when a Ford pick-up truck pulled up to the Rangers station. A large Alsatian bound out of the bed of the truck before the engine cut off. The dog headed straight for the scene without waiting for instructions from his handler.

While Jim was escorting his friends from Canine to the site, Winnie and her friends were preparing to enter the home of the former Mr. Frederick Jacques.

"Why the back door?" one of the boys wanted to know.

"Two reasons," Star said as she twisted her pick another fraction to catch a tumbler. "First, they didn't re-latch the dead-bolt to this door. Second, no noisy neighbors watching us back here. Now, will you please hush up."

"Oh." He fell silent glanced at his brother and shrugged.

"Yes!" A moment later Star straightened triumphantly. "After you, gentlemen." She pushed the door open and jokingly bowed.

"Care to explain where ..."

"you come by that skill?" the twins asked as they stepped into the living room.

"Side hobby. You'd be surprised what a P.I.'s called on to do." She laughed at the somewhat surprised looks she received. "What? Surely you didn't think I chased daemons and ghosts for a living, did you?"

"No," one of the twins shook his head. "It just never occurred, that with your apparent mind set, that you'd ever do anything even remotely illegal."

"Ghosts, daemons, gremlins, sounds like good money to me." The

second twin flashed her a smile.

"Cool it, Jeff." She glared at the second twin. He gave her an innocent look as he moved towards the kitchen/dining room area, a look that she returned with a smile. "You made the mistake of opening your big mouth," she told him. "Jamie's not known for wisecracking like that."

"We could fool you," the other twin, Jamie, said looking over his shoulder, smiling. It was a game these two played; trying to keep people guessing who was who.

"Not that good, you can't." She laughed and moved into the living room.

"What I'd like to know," Jamie turned to face Winnie, his expression serious, "is why are we here in the first place?"

"If we are right, and the deaths in the parks are related to the murder here, this is probably the best place to start. Perhaps get some information the newspapers, and Police, missed. Since you two are the best at fulltrance, retrocognition, work, I was hoping that you could give us that information."

"You got that straight," Jeff chortled as he returned from his stroll around the house. "Course, I think we're the only 'trance team in the region. His grin widened as he stopped next to his brother and rocked back on his heels. "By the way, this is the only room I got more than a faint twinge in." He waved an arm expansively, indicating the living room.

"Then this would be the best place to set up."

Jeff nodded once to his brother in agreement, found himself a relatively comfortable spot in the middle of the floor, and sat down.

Winnie dropped gracelessly into the easy chair near the back door. She gave the others a half smile. "At this point I am here only to witness what you find, that and drive the car."

Star looked around the room for a moment then started towards the back of the house. "While you guys do your thing, I am going to see if I can get a read off the house."

Jamie nodded, moved to the couch against the adjacent wall and half sat - half leaned on the far side arm. "When you're ready," he said to his brother.

The room grew silent as Jeff made himself comfortable and closed his eyes. The silence had stretched into long minutes before Jamie rose from the couch arm and moved to crouch in front of Jeff.

Jeff, 'Tell' me what you 'See'," he softly directed. After a brief pause he spoke again. "Take it back farther, to before the Police, when Jacques was still alive." He fell silent again for a few seconds then rose, giving Winnie a quick glance and a nod, and moved towards the living room door.

Its mid afternoon," Jeff quietly began relaying what his twin was telling him. "The doorbell rings. No one is expected. Jacques moves to answer the door." Jeff turned to look into the small foyer.

Jacques opened the door and found one of his former students, Rodrigeos, standing on the porch.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

Yeah, you can do me a big favor," the young Hispanic man said.

"Come in," Jacques stepped back and motioned him in. "Is it something to do with your studies?"

"In a way." The younger man gave him a wide smile.

"Of course, Mr. Rodrigeos isn't it?" A grunt confirmed his memory. "How can I be of assistance?" He indicated that Rodrigeos should take a seat as they moved into the living room. Rodrigeos obligingly sat in the middle of the couch and waited for Jacques to take his seat.

"I've been doing some in depth research into the history of some of the deep mountain areas of eastern France and Central Europe. I've come across some references to a set of ancient amulets. Not just any phylactery, very special ones. Amulets that give the wearer the powers of the beast."

"Such legends are generally regarded as myths by serious historians," Jacques told him. "You should not be wasting your time with this nonsense."

"Really? Well the legends go on to tell of how there were special people chosen to protect these amulets in later times, to keep them out of the 'wrong' hands. There is also a very concise description of some of these amulets. A description that matches the medallion you wore a couple of times."

"I am afraid I do not know what you are talking about."

"Don't be coy with me, Old Man. I've seen the wolf head."

"That necklace was a gift from my brother, Philip."

"If your brother had the medallion, he was one of the chosen ones. Just like you are now."

"Young Man, if you insist on talking such utter nonsense I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to leave." Jacques stood up and made to start for the door.

"I know what you are, Old Man!" Rodrigeos jumped up, kicking the coffee table out of the way. The corner narrowly missed Jacques as it slammed into the chair.

"Now see here ..."

"I got 'proof'. If you don't give me what I want, the 'proof' will find its way to the Dean of History's office."

Jacques studied the younger man in silence for a few seconds. "Mr. Rodrigeos, see here, you really don't know what these, so called, amulets are."

"Yes, I do," Rodrigeos cut him off. "I know what it is, and I want it." He moved to block Jacques' pathway. "You know I can produce that 'proof' too. I'm real good. Now, think what that would do to your precious image," he all but purred the last line. "Give me the amulet. No one will know, besides us."

"No! You have absolutely no idea of what you ask."

"Yes I do." Rodrigeos repeated, lunging forward to grab Jacques' shirt front. "I know, and I want the power."

"I said no!" Jacques grabbed Rodrigeos's wrist and twisted it till he released the shirt. In the process, one of the buttons tore off, revealing the amulet in question hanging around Jacques' neck. Jacques short stepped to the side as Rodrigeos tried to grab at it. "None of the dark children must be allowed to gain possession."

Rodrigeos raged silently, dropping back a step. A swift movement produced an old, scarred, Saturday night special from beneath his ragged jacket. "I said I wanted it, Old Man. Now give it to me."

In response, Jacques reached up and briefly touched the amulet, speaking a few short words in his native language. The head glowed faintly in response. The glow faded underneath a coat of charcoal grey as a large wolf took Jacques' place. The wolf growled low in its chest and moved one stiff legged step forward.

"Oh Fuck!" Rodrigeos gasp. He took an almost instinctive step away from the wolf. "Mother fucker really is a wolf."

The wolf growled once more, lowering its head, the ears flattened against the skull and the brush held stiffly erect. The growl became a snarl as Rodrigeos pointed his pistol at the wolf's head.

When the wolf leapt at him, Rodrigeos panicked and jerked the trigger. The bullet caught the wolf in mid-spring on the left side of its chest and exited near the right hip. The bullet ended up lodged in the footrest of the easy chair Jacques had been sitting in.

"God Damn! I thought it took silver to kill these sons-of-bitches." He watched Jacques for a moment as the wolf resumed human form for the last time, then slowly reached down and removed the amulet. Dropping the amulet into his jacket pocket, he turned and looked around the room. Pulling his handkerchief out of his rear pocket he retraced his steps to the front door. There he locked the door and threw the dead-bolt. Slowly he made his way around the house, making sure all the windows were latched and locking the back door. Turning from that door he looked at the body again, and at the hole in the footrest. Thinking for a moment, he went into the kitchen and opened the door. He laughed to himself when he saw the dog door that was just the right size. He returned to the living room, picked up the damning piece of evidence, and carried it out to the truck parked in the driveway. When he returned to the living room, he adjusted the position of the chair to conceal the prints left in the carpet by the footrest. He turned to study the body again and thought about carrying it out also, but the lack of any type of covering in his truck bed prevented him from doing so. A body was a tad too obvious. Instead, he just laughed and put the amulet on.

"He locked the kitchen door then turned himself into a wolf and left,

using Jacques' own emergency exit." Jamie concluded the story and came back from the kitchen door.

"That explains the lack of finger prints. He apparently kept his hands covered, or off anything that could be printed. The guy definitely was not stupid," Winfriede said.

"Just crazy," Jeff added, starting to stand up. "I thought you had to use silver too," he said, stretching the kinks out.

Star pushed off from the wall where she had been leaning. "Sometimes, but not always. There are records of *Weres* being killed with farm implements. Of course, those were usually the magic transformed, not the cursed, or the line *Weres*."

"You'd think it would be the other way around. Since the nuts using magic are more inclined to the darkside," Jeff protested.

Jamie came up behind his brother and started rubbing his shoulders. "Not always, Jeff. Remember Jacques? I wouldn't class him as being on the darkside."

"It actually has very little to do with the *Were's* alignment. There seems to be something in the atomic structure of silver that reacts adversely with the enzyme that causes, or permits, the transformation. If that reaction is strong enough it'll kill them." Star smiled as she concluded and nodded towards the door. "I'll continue the lesson later, boys. Right now, we need to leave, before the neighbors get too curious about the strange cars. By the way, all I got from the house confirms what you just saw."

The twins softly laughed and headed out the back door, Winnie a few steps behind. They circled around the house to cars parked on the street after making sure the door was locked.

The sun was an hour past its zenith when Jim's group arrived at one of the park's small parking areas. The area was only large enough to accommodate three, maybe four, vehicles. The weeds growing through the gravel attested to its limited use. This lot was not very close to any of the main trails, or prized eating areas.

The dog moved around the lot, nosing the stones periodically. A low, barely audible, rumble was all that indicated how frustrated he was. The trail had stopped where apparently a vehicle had recently been parked.

"Based on Pan's behavior, I'd say the trail has gone cold." The handler, Ron Mills, watched the dog for a moment then clicked his tongue and twitched the long lead to call the dog over.

The dog eyed him for a brief moment then reluctantly came over.

"Damn," Jim muttered. "Means he probably got in a car, or something."

"Looks that way," Ron agreed. "Which means even Wonder Nose here couldn't track him."

"Not once it hit the main roadway, no." Jim smiled and held his hand out for the dog to check him.

After nosing his hand for a second, the dog cocked his head and presented an ear for Jim to scratch.

"I got to hand it to you, Ron. I thought you were crazy. Bringing an Alsatian to do long distance tracking."

"Hey," Ron laughed, "Pan here beats out some of our top Bloodhounds."

"I wish he could track a vehicle," Jim said wistfully. "Well I guess we better head back." He stopped scratching and pointed back towards the pathway they had come from.

"Yeah, it's getting late. Come on, Pan." Ron signaled the Alsatian to heel and started for that path.

Jim followed a few paces behind, lost in thought. Either this was one very strange dog, or it wasn't a werewolf they were after.

"Death Toll Continues To Climb" the headlines screamed. The fourth such death in a local National park and sixth in the past few months in area parks. Authorities baffled.

Thad shook his head as he clipped the article out and put it with the others. He had noticed that this time they had tried using a dog to track the animal. But that tactic had proven useless.

"Buena dios, Senora," Thad smiled, and nodded, as the door to the landlady's apartment slowly opened.

"¿Que?" The landlady asked. Even out of uniform she knew he was a cop. Her eyes flickered, scanning the area. Did anyone see him; know she was talking to him.

"Por favor," he said, then paused, essentially reaching the limit of his Spanish. He sighed mentally, and promised himself once again to study the language. "¿Habla Ingles?" He asked hopefully.

"No." She shook her head.

He sighed again and pulled out the picture of Rodrigeos . He was going to have to try to make due with pantomime. "Senor Rodrigeos ," he showed her the picture he had gotten from the school. "Dos ocho," he pointed towards the nearest apartment door and hoped she figured out that he meant apartment number twenty-eight.

She frowned at him for a moment before she figured out what he meant. "Irse." She shook her head.

"Irse," he repeated, confused. He racked his brain for a moment, then a thought occurred to him. He held up his right palm and 'walked' two fingers of his left across it, then pointed out to the parking lot.

"Si." She nodded, held up her hand and pantomimed a square and pointed to the lot.

"¿Donde?"

"Desconocide." She shook her head again

"Mucho gracias. Adios." He nodded again and started to turn and leave.

"Adios." He heard the door click shut before he had gone three steps.

Thad sighed as he collapsed behind the wheel of his Skylark. Somehow he wasn't surprised. The address the school had given him was old too. At least they had had a forwarding address though. This time, the trail ran cold. Rodrigeos 's license was expired and the address on that was even older than the one the school had. His vehicle registration, also expired, showed this address. Oddly, he had no known police record. Thad started the car and backed out of the parking slot. This case was going to be a lot harder than he had thought it would be. As he pulled onto Route 50, east bound, Thad glanced briefly at the late afternoon sun and grimaced. A quick check of his watch confirmed his suspicions. It was getting on towards supertime.

The slant of the mid-autumn sun told the young girl that it was getting late as she started her 3/4 mile walk home across a corner of Langley Oaks Park from her friend's house. She knew the sun would be setting shortly so she stepped up her pace, trying to cut the normally twenty minute trip down a bit. With supper hour so near, the boys that were usually playing ball in the park were absent. So only the birds and squirrels watched her hurry past.

Halfway across the park she noticed a young Hispanic man strolling nearby. She stopped and looked a second time.

The Hispanic man noticed her watching him and smiled at her. He altered his course and came towards her.

"Good evening, Senorita, it's a lovely night, isn't it?"

"Yes, ..it is," she answered slowly.

"Taking a walk?"

"No. I'm heading home; home for supper."

"Perhaps I could walk with you," he suggested, making a tentative reach for her arm.

"No, it's okay." She shied away from his hand. "I live just up the way, on Turkey Run."

"Oh," he cooed, "that's still quite a bit away. I insist, you must let me walk with you." His smile widened a fraction. "You never know what you're going to run into." He caught her arm in a firm grasp and slowly pulled her towards him. The steady pulling brought his other hand into her line of view. The hand and the knife it held. "Scream," he said as she started to open her mouth, "and I'll cut your pretty throat open. Stay quiet and I might let you live," he told her as she steered her towards a nearby tree.

She whimpered softly as he pushed her against the tree and started cutting off her clothes.

He smiled and gave a throaty laugh when the knife blade drew a thin line of blood as he sliced her bra and panties in one move. Placing the knife against her throat he pushed her to the ground on top of her damaged clothing. She began crying when he knelt on top of her and fumbled one handed with the zipper of his pants.

The crying became silent sobs as he started to have his way with her, the

knife always touching her throat or breast.

Bending closer he started nibbling at her ear and neck, a soft grunt echoing in that ear with each thrust of his pelvis. She closed her eyes and tried to turn her face away.

She wriggled fruitlessly as the grunts became louder and more frequent. She could feel something hard, metallic like, beneath his shirt digging into her chest with each thrust.

"Yes," he purred, feeling her struggle. As his blood began to course rapidly through his veins his grunts started to form into almost words. "I lied," he said smiling as he felt himself start to reach his peak.

Her attacker's grunts becoming soft growls and a shift in the feel of his shirt drew the girl's attention, however unwillingly, back to him. She slowly opened her eyes, rolling her head back a fraction. She came face to face with a large greyish dog. A dog whose narrowed eyes and canted ears could only mean pleasure as he released himself into her. A scream tore its way out of her throat. The scream was cut short when the beast suddenly lowered its head and closed powerful jaws on her neck, severing her wind pipe and carotid artery.

The animal did not pull away when the girl's blood began spraying about. Rather he lowered his head again and reveled in it, occasionally licking at the blood on his muzzle.

After he had finished with the girl's body, and resumed human form, the man began collecting her clothes. The sound of approaching voices spooked him, causing him to leave, abandoning part of the clothes.

This time the body wasn't even cold when the police arrived. Someone had thought they heard screaming and had called 911. The dogs followed a deer trail to the Colonial Farm. It stopped cold in a small parking lot. The speed and joy with which the dogs returned to their handlers when they were called off diametrically opposed their behavior while tracking the killer. They'd had to be called back on line numerous times. Even the most skilled hound had been very reluctant to work the trail.

"Here's another one for you, Thad." Rhea tossed a copy of the Times onto the squad room table, a grim smile flashing as she sat down next to him.

Thad picked the paper up and scanned the headlines. After nearly a week of silence, the killer dog had apparently moved south, killing a teenager in Langley Oaks Park. For a change, this time part of the clothes could be found, torn, next to the body.

"That's one pup that gets around," Rhea mused when he lay the paper back down on the table.

"They're assuming it's the same animal," Thad said quietly. "It may not be."

"Sure, two different dogs are going to do the same kind of damage."

"A dog attack, is a dog attack," he insisted.

"All right people, let's settle down," the shift sergeant stepped up to the

front of the room, effectively silencing all discussions. He glanced at his notes and began the briefing. "Item one: We've all seen or hear the reports about last night. ..."

"Hey, Sarg.," one of the uniforms called as the briefing concluded. "Homicide done anything on the Jacques murder?"

"Yeah," one of the others called back, "fucked it up."

"How do you solve a case with no evidence?"

"Officially," the sergeant cut in, "the case is still active. But, after a month and still no solid leads, they are moving on to other, more pressing, matters. Anything else?" He asked, looking around at the swing shift crew. He nodded when no one else spoke. "Okay, let's hit the road people, and be careful out there."

Four days after the Langley Oaks death, the police were still searching for some solid clues in the park deaths. Four days with no indication of whether the deaths were caused by one dog, or by a rouge pack.

The setting sun cast gold rimmed shadows on the pages of a news paper being read by a young Hispanic man in Scott's Run Nature Preserve. He laughed softly to himself while he read. Reading the news was almost as much fun as stalking the girls. Laying the paper aside he noticed a young Asian woman walking towards him on the pathway. He rose from the park bench gently fingering the wolf's head amulet he wore as she came nearer.

"Good evening, Senorita."

"Can I help you?" The woman slowed, eyeing him cautiously.

"I was going to ask you that question. It is starting to get late. Perhaps I can walk you to your car."

"No, thank you." She side stepped and tried to continue down the pathway. He backed up a couple of paces to stay in front of her.

"Well, then would you like some company on your stroll."

"Thank you, I prefer to be left alone. Now, if you will kindly get out of my way, I will go on my way."

Rather than move off the path, he stepped in front of her, placing a hand on her arm near her wrist. She paused, looked at the hand, then at him.

"You can either remove it, or lose it."

"You think so?" His answer was to tighten his grip.

She looked him in the eye, took a half step backwards pulling him towards her slightly. Raising her arm in an outwards circle she caught his wrist between her thumb and forefinger. Her other hand came up to grab the other side of his hand and wrist. An inside twist and half shove forced him to his knees.

He attempted to pull his hand free. Then, when that failed, he reached inside his jacket with his free hand and pulled his knife. A slash in the direction of her stomach resulted in an instinctive release and back step.

Springing to his feet, he made a lunge towards her. She again to a step back,

give herself some room to move, then dropped her left hand to block his knife. A continuation of the blocking motion pushed the knife wielding hand outside the range of her body. He jumped back a step. Then came at her from a different angle, knife held high this time. She raised both arms, crossing her wrist to form an x and trapped the descending knife. Seeing that the position left her somewhat exposed, he doubled up his fist and slammed it into her abdomen, knocking the wind out of her. She doubled over, gasping. Taking advantage of her position, he shoved her to the ground. She managed to get her head up as she landed and butted him in the face, bleeding his lip. He snarled in pain and anger and pressed the knife hard against her throat.

"You'll pay for that, bitch," he growled as he ripped her shirt. Pinning her down with a knee in the stomach, he transferred his attack to her pants. They parted with a satisfying rip under his knife.

Seeing that his attention was slightly distracted, the girl reached up, grabbed two handfuls of lank hair, and pulled his head down towards her. A second head butt resulted in a bloody nose for him. And a hard slap to the side of the head for her.

Figuring that this one was going to be tough, he decided to keep the knife right at her throat. This limited his movements only slightly. Balancing on one knee, he undid his pants and freed his half-ridged member. He turned his attention back to her, before she could try some other trick on him. Blood from his nose ran down onto the amulet swaying between them as he began drawing images on breast with the tip of his knife. With each pendulum like swing, more of his blood dripped onto the amulet.

His victim stopped her struggles, staring in shock as Rodrigeos began transforming. The amulet, now covered with his blood, melded into a coat of gray fur. He stopped thrusting, a puzzled whine issuing from his throat as the transformation finalized. The girl seeing a wolf where a man had been began screaming in fear. The wolf jumped back a couple of steps, whines growing louder. The girl decided to take advantage of the apparent opportunity and stated to roll to one side and stand up. The puzzled whines became snarls of rage in response to her movement. He sprang for her throat silencing her mid-scream. The lifeless body fell to the ground landing on the knife Rodrigeos had held on her.

The wolf backed up several paces and shook the girl's blood from his coat. He stood motionless for several minutes. Finally, he shook again, turned with a fear laced whine, and ran away from the body.

Portable floodlights cast a desert noon brilliance on the scene of the most recent death. Sgt. Panzer snorted, shook his head and sat next to his handler, Mills, watching the human officers photographing and mapping the scene and body. Mills tapped his foot slightly in impatience, waiting for the officer in charge of the scene to tell him why he and Panzer had been summoned.

"Hi, Ron," Thad and Rhea stopped next to Panzer. Rhea reached down

and scratched Pan's ears. He looked up and licked her hand then resumed watching the activity around him.

"Hi, guys. What are you two doing here?"

"Dispatch called requesting off-duty units to come and aid in searching and securing the parameter," Rhea added.

"We made the mistake of answering our phones when they rang."

"Haven't you learned to let your answering machines take your calls?" Ron laughed.

"Not yet."

Another K-9 unit walked by with his handler, paused in mid-stride to turn and glare at Pan, a silent snarl exposing his teeth. His handler twitched his lead one time and they resumed walking to the other side of the scene where, despite the late hour, a crowd was starting to gather.

"Hey, Wilhelm, Yokama, you two going to just stand there talking, or are you going to do your jobs?" The voice of the watch supervisor rang across the scene. "Mills, get Wonder Nose over here."

"Well, guess we better get a move on, before he really gets upset." Thad said with a shrug. "Catch you later, Ron."

"And you said you didn't really know who Panzer was," Rhea told him as they started walking away. Thad simply gave her a faint smile.

Ron laughed softly at the other officers, signaled Panzer to stand, and started towards the spot where the body was found.

"Okay, Mills, we want you to see if Panzer can track this dog. None of the other dogs have been able to follow his trail for more than a few hundred yards. And, it is more than time to find, and stop, him." The watch supervisor explained to Ron.

"Yes, Sir." He nodded once and looked down at Panzer. "Okay, Pan, find him boy. Take me to him."

Pan snorted, shook his head, and began sniffing around the body. After a few moments he turned and started heading in a southwesterly direction.

Minutes later, he paused next to an older model Toyota pick-up truck parked in a small parking area. He circled the truck once and paused again next to the driver's door. Ron stepped back a pace as Pan began casting in an ever-widening circle to pick the scent up again. Finding it leading away from the tail of the truck, he headed out across the lot. The trail appeared to run cold after turning southeast and crossing the parking lot. Panzer cast up and down the gravel lot for several yards, trying to locate the dog's trail. After several frustrating minutes, Ron called him back to his side.

"Pan, hold. Come here, boy." Pan stopped, looked back at Ron for a second, then walked over to his side.

"I'm sorry, Sir," Ron turned to the supervisor, "but the trail seems to run into the street. There is little chance of Panzer being able to follow it across the road. The gas, oil, and rubber, from the traffic will have obliterated just about all the scent."

"What about picking it up on the other side?"

"We are not sure but what this dog may have run down the street for quite a distance before crossing, if he crossed at all. I don't like asking my dog to try and track where there is little scent, and only a slim chance of finding the other side of the trail. It damages their confidence when they cannot fulfill their training."

"All right, Mills, you're the dog handler. If you say we can't track the animal, then we can't track it."

Ron nodded and signaled Pan to return to his vehicle. On the way back, Ron absentmindedly noticed that Wilhelm was standing near the old truck, looking it over.

Has Killer Dog Moved north? All the papers were asking that question after the deaths in Langley Oaks and Scott's Run Nature Preserve. Only one paper, The Journal, theorized that it may have been two separate animals. Their argument was that the distance was too great for just one animal.

Langley Oaks was inside the beltway, over twelve miles northeast of Fairfax and Scott's Run Nature Preserve was almost about three miles from Langley Oaks. What they could not explain was the deaths at Great Falls Park.

Second Killer Dog On The Loose. Two more bodies were found within 36 hours. Both victims, young females, were found with their throats ripped open, near the camping grounds in Fairfax Lake Park. The papers and Evening News Casts warned residents to keep their pets inside, and to avoid any stray dogs seen in the parks and on the streets. The police were said to be intensifying their search for the killer animals. Special search dogs were being brought in from one of the local military bases to aid in the investigation.

Thad read through the articles and all the arguments about whether this was the same dog or not. He shook his head sadly, laid the papers aside and looked at the book lying on the couch next to him. The book was older than his great-great-grandfather. It was opened to a page showing a diagram of a set of amulets. One of those amulets bore a very strong resemblance to the one that had been stolen from Professor Jaques' home the night of his murder. He knew without a doubt that the attackers were one and the same. And that it was no animal that was doing the killing, at least wise not a wild animal, or a domestic animal that had gone rouge. It was a man, a man gone mad with power. Rodriguez had thought he did his research. But he hadn't found all the material. Some of it was very old and was not available in English, but only in Old Dutchen. He had missing a very important piece of information; a piece of information that was going to cost him dearly in the end.

Winnie glanced around the room at the people gathered there. "We do have some new information. There was another park death last night. This one in Two Creeks Trail Area. So far, the papers seem to be keeping quiet

about it though. It appears to match the pattern of the previous two deaths."

Jim leaned back in his seat and sighed. "What does that tell us?"

"That he has spread out?" Star suggested.

"No. It means that he is trapped in wolf form, and running scared."

"Huh?" One of the twins looked around puzzled.

"Robin, you're the closest thing we have to an expert on Lycanthropy, care to explain." Jim indicated that she should stand up.

"I would not go so far as to say I am an expert," Robin shrugged. "I have simply done more reading on the matter."

"So, how does that tell you that he is trapped?"

Robin stood up and walked over to the map hung on the east wall for this meeting. "The thing about most of these amulets of transformation is that they tend to "bite" back if used wrong, or too much." She tapped on the spot indicating the death in Scott's Run Nature Preserve. "This is where we see a very sudden change in M.O. The body was left pretty much intact."

"Which is what led the police and the papers to think there are two dogs," Jeff quietly added.

"Right, but they do not have our information."

"Do we know that it is indeed the same person, or dog?" Jeff asked.

"We have, as they say, reason to believe," Robin smiled. "After this point," she turned back to the map, "we see a marked change in the territory. All previous deaths, as well as having had mutilated bodies, were east of Loudoun County. Now, we have several deaths in Loudoun, the bodies are still dressed and are less mutilated. Based on some of my research into the Amulets of Transformation, it can be assumed that the amulet the perp stole has been abused. According to the information, once one of these Amulets is abused, or over used, and the blood of the abuser is spilled on them, that person is transformed and is unable change back. Or in the case of one already transformed prior to the spillage, they are simply trapped."

"Only trapped?" Jamie sniggered.

Robin shot a quick glare in his direction then continued. "A common fallacy among those who would abuse the powers is that if you spill enough "innocent" blood, you can then reverse the transformation."

"That would explain three deaths within three days, since the previous murders were spaced out more." Winnie nodded.

"It also has never been known to work," Robin finished.

"Notice, also," Jim stepped up next to Robin, "the path our killer appears to be taking. The first of the latest string of deaths happened at Fairfax Lakes, the next was at Claude Moore, this last was at Two Creeks Trail. If you have paid attention, you will have noticed that this strip of "Parks" are roughly interconnected by the Washington and Old Dominion Trail."

"So?"

"So, what is west of Loudoun County?"

"The mountains." Winnie quickly provided. "If he changes course, and

heads a bit more southwest, he could make it to the Appalachian Trail and have free access north or south.”

"You think he is headed there?" Star looked at the map puzzled.

"Yes, I do. He's been staying close to the Washington and Old Dominion Trail, but that ends in Purcellville, after that he'll have to cross a several miles of open land and housing to complete the journey."

"That puts him out in the open where people can see him."

"By this point, I don't think he cares." Jim turned and looked back at his team. "Guys, I want you and Winnie to go to the scene of the last few deaths. We need to confirm beyond a reasonable doubt that this is the same person.

Robin, I want you and Star to dig into whatever resources you can come up with and find me a way to break the transformation. Preferable method would be without killing him. It would be better to let the Mundanes handle him."

"Like they would believe how the murders were committed."

Jim opted to ignore the wise-crack from one of the twins. "If there are no more questions, or comments, I declare this meeting adjourned. Attend to your assignments. All of you know the procedure for relaying messages."

One by one the members of his team nodded, stood up, and walked out of the mountain cabin.

"It's the same, Winnie," one of the twins shook his head. "Exactly the same readings as the last scene. And the one at the professor's home."

"You're sure? No doubts."

"I am. Don't even need to trance here. The energies are still strong." He glanced over at his brother and received a nod. "It is the same person doing the killings. We would not go so far as to say that he has done all of the killings, but unquestionably the same person who committed these murders killed Professor Jacques."

"Then that is all we need to know."

"Good." The other half of the trance team looked at the paling sky. "I would like to get home to my wife before I have to go to work."

"Hey, Robin, what exactly are we looking for?" Star looked up from the books in her lap and stretched against the back of Robin's chair.

"It's hard to give specifics. We are trying to find some way to break this transformation. It could be a simple cantrip, an incantation, or require a full ritual. These books," Robin waved a hand towards the small pile on her desk, "have some types of transformations spells that we need to check. These spells have counters to them; otherwise the person using them would be as trapped as our Mr. Rodrigeos. And so far, I have yet to see anything suggesting that *Absarka* really works."

Star chuckled softly at the obscure reference and looked back at her book one finger twining a lock of hair round and round. "Well, all I am finding is the usual gloom and doom associated with werewolf. No suggestions on changing them back, except for killing them."

"That may be our only alternative," Robin sighed. "Or, it may be that I

simply do not have the right book."

Thad looked up from his paperwork and hit the record button on the remote as "America's Most Wanted" began. He may have had something currently occupying his mind and attention at the moment, but that did not mean that he was going to miss the show. After all, one never knew who was going to be on the show; it might be someone he knew. Once that was taken care of, he returned to his work. Spread out on the coffee table in front of him was clippings from the newspapers, a few departmental reports, and an area map. Systematic markings on that map showed the locations of all of the recent "Killer Dogs" attacks along with the date and approximate time of attack. Peeking out from under the map was the upper corner of an old leather bound book. He picked up a copy of the most recent departmental reports and studied it. Unlike most of the others, this one had nothing to do with killings of any type. Rather, it referred to a loose dog in the area of WO&D bikeway, in the general area of Claude Moore Park. The dog was described as rather large, greyish in color, and looked as if it did not have tags. The complainant had claimed that the animal had tried to attack her when she attempted to approach the apparently lost dog. There was a second report of a stray dog, with a similar description, that had attacked a child, but had run away when the father charged the animal. This report had the animal located a few miles northeast of Fairfax Lakes Park. So far, Animal Control had been unable to locate the dog in question.

Picking up his pencil, Thad drew a line connecting the two locations, noting that the path almost exactly connected the sites of two of the last three deaths and followed very close to the WO&D. On a whim, he dragged the pencil tip westward, following the bikeway to Purcellville, where it ended. To the west of that was the Shenandoah Mountains, beyond that ridge line was Winchester and access to the Appalachian Trail. Between that last reported sighting and Winchester lay over a dozen miles of open land with a couple of small towns, if he followed Route 7, and possibly hundreds of civilians, any one of whom could be the next victim. If he turned southwest, he could reach the Shenandoah River and follow it deeper into the Shenandoah Mountains, with its campgrounds and parks. If Rodrigues were allowed to reach either the reign of death would continue, and the Amulet would probably be lost forever.

'He's running scared, not sure of what has happened to him. He thinks if he has time, everything will right itself. He wants to be alone, but where he can also hunt. He doesn't appear to know the area well, so he is following obvious trails. If I were him, I'd turn stay close to route 7, then turn south at the river.' Thad softly mused, lifting the book from beneath the map and flipping open to the marked page. 'Which means, he'll have to go around Sleeter Lake. That is where he has to be stopped.'

Thad scanned the marked pages one more time, then carefully put the book and his papers, away. He took his jacket and car keys out of the hall

closet and headed out the front door. Sunset was nearing, and he wanted to be at the lake before Rodrigeos was.

"Jim?" Winnie walked into the den. She paused and quietly studied the man standing next to the wall map. He was barely thirty, but his receding hair line made him look years older. That there was no grey showing in that closed cropped brown top kept him from looking too much over forty. He turned to look at her, his smile lighting even his eyes.

"Hi. Any news?"

"Uhum," she walked over and slipped an arm around his waist. "The boys say it is the same person that killed the professor. Would not go so far as to say that it has been the same person all along, but implied that they did believe that to be the case."

Ducking his head a fraction, he kissed her forehead. "So, what did our other terror twosome have to say?" Joyce released Jim and stepped back a half pace to look at the map.

"That if a counter to the blood induced transformation does indeed exist; Robin does not have a book containing the formula."

"And, without an alternative detransformation method, we are going to be forced to kill him."

"So, what are we looking at here?" she indicated towards the pins stuck in the map.

"I expanded a bit on the other night's observations. Each pin marks the location of one of the kills. If you look, you can see the probable course of travel."

"The bike path. And it does look like he is trying to head for the mountains, just as you surmised."

"It's the only logical thing he could do."

"Okay, now what?"

"Now, we stop him. Using what ever means necessary."

"Where?"

"If I'm right, he went to ground around Paeonian Springs this morning. He's been making roughly seven to ten miles a day; apparently hiding during the days, hunting at dusk and traveling at night. So we start here, around the Bluemont and the Snickersville areas, which should be in front of him, and work our way eastward. Pray we find him."

"That's a bit of ground to cover. You're not suggesting that just the two of us attempt the search."

"No, I intend to call some of the gang. I plan to have four teams. Star can work with Robin; they are already used to working together. I'll ask Misty to work with the twins. We can put Charlene with Storm; she can handle her mood swings better than the boys could. Each team will have a Talent that is either Empathic or Clairvoyant and an Adept. And all the Adepts can handle the binding spells."

"Now, "he turned and tapped a spot on the map, "I figure you and I can handle Stoneleigh Golf and Country Club by ourselves. At its widest point, it is only slightly over a mile. I know for a fact that our combined ranges can exceed that distance. If he hasn't made it that far by then, we start moving back east. The others can start from Snickersville and Telegraph and work northeast. There is a lot of open lands there, so they should be able to get clean readings. Another group can start at Charles Town and Hillsboro and work south. If no one finds him, we meet up in Purcellville and do a small grid search."

"You are assuming that he will be sticking exclusively to the parks and open areas. He may decide to opt for the more direct course."

"Staying out of residential areas appears to have been his pattern up till now. Pray he follows it for one more night."

Joyce looked at the map, and did silently pray. There was no way they could hope to find him if he took the shortest path.

"Let's get moving, babe. We've got about an hour and half, hour and forty-five minute, drive, and the sooner we get there the better our chances are to actually catching him."

A waning crescent moon was rising as Jim and Winnie parked their car near the water treatment plant in Round Hill. The water plant put them about half way between the northern and southern ends of Sleeter Lake, on the eastern shore. Another team was on the west side while a third team was on the south side. The fourth team was north, in Round Hill proper. Jim and Winnie each grabbed a heavy maglite flashlight and a light jacket as they exited the car. Across the street, an 1850's farmhouse showed as a dark area against the trees. Before locking the door, Jim reached back inside, pulled out his cell phone, and slipped it into the pocket of his jacket. From the trunk, he withdrew a compact, large bore firearm.

"What in the Hell is that?"

"This, is a Maverick 12 gauge, called the Bull-pup."

"A Shot-gun? For a Werewolf?"

"Why not? It has takedown power. Plus I took the precaution of loading each shell with almost half a roll of old silver dimes."

"Just to be on the safe side, right?"

"You got it."

"Okay," Winnie shook her head slightly and started away from the car.

Jim closed the trunk lid after dropping a couple of spare shells into his jacket pocket. A few quick steps brought him alongside his partner. "Shall we get started?" She only nodded and flicked on her flashlight. A few short moments spent attuning themselves to the natural 'feel' of the park and the pair started walking in a southeasterly direction. The idea was to try and feel the presence of the werewolf as unnatural.

A few minutes later, as they passed a boat launch, Winnie reached out and tapped Jim's left hand. He stopped and followed the direction of the beam

of her light.

"Something, over that way." She flicked her wrist and moved the beam a few degrees to the left.

Jim nodded and flipped off the shotgun's safety. Their pace, already a slow walk, became more of a series of two or three short steps and a stop as they extended senses to the limit.

The question of the source of that "something" was answered with a series of loud snarls. Following those sounds, they came out from behind a small stand of trees and saw what looked like a dog fight.

The crescent moon, and their flashlights, cast the only light. Just enough to make out that there were at least three canines involved in the fight. The first, and most obvious, was a very large, dark animal. It easily matched the size of a Great Dane. Virtually no details could be seen; it appeared only as a shadow moving through the night. The second was smaller, had some paler areas and looked like it could be a good-sized German Shepherd. The third, the smallest of the group, was about the size of an average herding dog, and was the easiest to see with a light grayish coat. This third dog was trying to defend its-self against the other two. An act made difficult by the obvious size and weight difference between it and the first dog.

Jim swore softly and started to move as if to try to break up the fight. He stopped when he encountered Winnie's arm. She shook her head at him, telling him not to interfere.

He looked back in time to see the shepherd dart behind the victim and make a grab at a hind leg while the Dane made a pass for the chest and shoulder region. The herder turned as the Dane passed and lunged for its throat. A mid-body impact from the shepherd sent the herder tumbling to the ground. Darker patches on the coat showed where the two larger dogs had managed to score. If there were any wounds on the other two, the watchers could not see them. The smaller animal scrambled to its feet and dodged out of the path of the shepherd as it made a straight in charge. The watchers looked on as the larger dog moved up behind the herder, while the shepherd kept up a series of head rushes, effectively distracting the victim from any activities to the rear. Too late it realized that one of its two opponents was missing. It tried to turn out of the way, to avoid the worst of the anticipated attack, but was unable to move fast enough. A blind side dive for the neck connected. The Dane managed to grab hold of the back of the neck along with part of the shoulder. Using its larger frame and mass it hauled the smaller animal off its feet and drug it backward shaking it. The shepherd unexpectedly backed off, letting the first dog continue the attack undisturbed. When the Dane finally dropped the other dog, it lay limp for a moment then tried to stand up. It only managed to push the upper body part way erect, the left shoulder badly drooping. A glimmer of white suggested that it had somehow managed to find the strength to bare its fangs and growl at its attackers. An act of bravery, or stupidity, that was essentially useless. The

Dane allowed it to straighten up only a bit more then surged for the throat. A strangled yelp told that this time the attack was successful. The struggles ceased within seconds.

Jim and Winnie were trying to understand exactly what they had seen when the Dane turned and looked at them. Seeing the sudden, direct, attention from an animal that he had just seen kill caused Jim to bring his Bull-Pup up in-line with that dog. For several heartbeats, he stared into the dark face. In the dim moonlight, all he could see was a black face and yellow glowing eyes. But he could tell that, despite the frame size and apparent mass, this was no Dane gone rogue. This was something far more deadly. It reminded him of old Nordic legends that spoke of a Great Wolf.

Neither party moved for several seconds. Man and beast staring at each other until the shepherd let out a soft bark that distracted the monster canide. With eye contact broken, Jim looked over at Winnie. She also had noticed that the dog had been watching them. But she was not watching it, she was looking at the body of the victim. Jim looked to see what had attracted her attention. The body lying there was not that of a dog, but rather one of a man. Surprised, Jim turned to look at the dog that had killed the werewolf. Both it and the shepherd were gone.

Jim finally shook off the shock and walked over to the body. What he saw almost made him loose what ever he had for dinner. The throat of the body was torn out, leaving part of the spine visible. A large puddle soaking into the ground told him that most, if not all, of the victims blood was drained from the body. After a pause to study the face in the light beam, it became obvious that it was their werewolf, Rodrigeos.

Winnie walked up and looked over Jim's shoulder. "He's dead, Jim."

"No kidding!"

"So, what do we do now?"

"I'd suggest we, as they say, remove the evidence."

"Why? Why not simply leave him here? Be a lot less trouble."

"Uhun, we have enough unexplained deaths in the area right now. Do we really want another one? Especially one that does not fit the M.O. of the previous "killer dog" deaths."

"Okay, so what do you suggest?"

"Load him into the trunk, take him up to the back country, and bury him."

Winnie looked at him for a long moment then decided that he was not kidding. "You really want to carry this," she pointed at the near headless body, "to your car and put it in the trunk."

"I've got a gut bag in the trunk. We can put him in that."

"Okay. You can go get that bag now, cause if you think I am going to help you carry that thing exposed all the way to the car, you are out of your mind. In the mean time, I'll see if I can find the Amulet."

Jim nodded, turned and set off at a trot for the car. He returned a few

minutes later carrying the bag in place of the shot-gun.

"Any luck?"

"Nada. Hard to really see right now though. You think that other "dog" swallowed it?"

"I doubt it, but anything is possible. I'll have Robin and one of our other Clairs come in and have them go over this area just to make sure. I don't want to take any chances."

"Good idea."

Once they had at the body loaded into the bag, and the bag zipped, Jim placed the call. A brief conversation later, he closed his cell phone and looked at Winnie.

"Robin said she and Star could be here in a little while, Charlene will be here in slightly less than an hour."

"It's going to be a long night," Winnie sighed.

Half a month had passed since the last of the so-called "killer dog" attacks. No one had been able to locate the dog, or anyone who knew what might have happened to end the attacks.

Thad quietly slipped through the trees of Prince William Forest. He was off duty, so the night was his. And he intended to have some fun, as soon as he took care of a little business. Spying the one he sought, he altered his course a fraction and slowed to a trot. Coming up to the County Councilman, he silently nodded his head in a deferential greeting.

"You have the item?" Thad nodded and turned over the Amulet he was carrying. "Good work."

"I had a little help."

"Any trouble?"

"No," he shook his head, "I have good reason to believe that everything was taken care of. There were others hunting him, apparently."

"Very good," the councilman nodded, dismissing him.

"If I may?"

"Yes?"

"What happens now?"

"We have a new Guardian waiting in Mexico. A courier is coming to take the Amulet to them. He should be arriving soon."

"Good. I am glad that it will not be in our area any longer. Too many have learned of its existence." Thad nodded once again to the councilman then started to turn away. Pausing, he looked up at the full moon, took a deep breath, feeling and smelling the air, and glanced back over his shoulder. "It's a good night for a hunt."

-Finis-

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