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The werewolf of Winslow Junction claims two more victims.

For all its affected luxury, the Hotel Royale offered a merely adequate breakfast. Derek Talbot resolved that he would find a nicer place for lunch. Bow Hill -- the alleged resort town where he was staying - boasted one street, a strip that was a half mile long, burgeoning with all manner of restaurants, taverns and hotels. The place reminded him of Gatlinburg. As he drove his rented BMW out toward the main road that led to Winslow Junction, he noted a likely candidate -- Marlowe's Restaurant. Several people had recommended it, and he thought he'd check it out. It appeared to be fairly upscale, which was always reassuring.

Talbot made the short jaunt into Winslow Junction in less than ten minutes. Now this was more like it -- a small town of 15, 000 nestled in one of the majestic forests the Northwest was famous for.

Prime hunting grounds.

As he cruised slowly down Aspen Street, he noticed Castellini's Gun Shop on the southeast corner of the intersection with Walnut. He saw a police cruiser with sheriff's department markings. Sheriff Jeff Tomlinson climbed out of the car and went inside the gun shop. Interesting.

Talbot pulled two spaces ahead of the cruiser and parked. He strolled casually up the sidewalk, a copy of the Wall Street Journal tucked under his arm, and sat down on a bench outside Castellini's. The door was open; he could easily hear every word of the conversation between Tomlinson and the owner.

"Let me get this straight, Jeff," George Castellini said. "Silver bullets?"

"Yeah," Tomlinson answered. "I read a journal article that reported they flew truer than lead slugs. Thought I'd check it out."**Ww@VfWOr@.Com**

"Uh huh," Castellini returned, skepticism in his voice. "So happens I have a couple of boxes -- one for a .38 caliber handgun, and the other for a .3030 rifle. Made 'em up for this nutcase big game hunter who said he was tracking down a werewolf. Never saw him again." He paused. "You wouldn't be gunnin' for a werewolf, would you, Jeff?"

Tomlinson chuckled. "Come on, George -- there are no such things as werewolves!"

"Right."

Castellini was silent for a moment. Then he bluntly asked, "By the way -- what happened up in the woods last night? Heard that two kids and a ranger girl got mauled and eaten by some kind of animal."

Tomlinson didn't answer right away, and Castellini just waited. The sheriff sighed. "We think it was a grizzly. Can't talk about it too much yet."

"Well, that's a dirty shame." He paused, somewhat embarrassed. "Jeff, I know you're the sheriff and all, but I still gotta ask you some questions...."

"It's okay George -- it's the law. I'd have to run you in if you didn't. Jeffrey A. Tomlinson, 53 Trailridge Way, Winslow Jun..."

"Okay, okay," Castellini said. "Same info?"

"Yeah."

There was a rustle of paper, and the store owner said, "Say hello to Susie for me."

"Will do. I'm going home in an hour and a half for an early lunch."

Castellini guffawed. "Oh -- one of those lunches, right? No wonder you're always smiling in the afternoon. See you later."

"Bye, George."

Talbot watched the police car pull away, then he hopped into his BMW and consulted the GPS system. He smiled. 53 Trailridge Way was nestled in the forest only about two miles from his hotel. He drove back to the Royale as quickly as he could and stripped naked, then donned a pair of running shoes and shorts. He jogged easily up the trail, but as soon as he got out of sight in the deep woods, he put on a blazing burst of speed and sprinted through the undergrowth, far faster than a normal human being could possibly run. He wasn't even breathing hard as he came to the hillock that overlooked the Tomlinson property. It was rustic, a nice place carved out of the forest and overlooking a tumbling stream. Secluded, with no neighbors in the immediate vicinity. The house had an almost log cabin feel to it. A woman dressed in tight shorts and a tube top was hanging up laundry in the back yard.

Susie Tomlinson appeared to be in her late thirties. She was a blonde, a little on the high side of voluptuous -- not fat, but fleshy. What was the word -- Rubenesque? She was the kind of woman Italian men would love. She was pretty, even sexy, but definitely not model material. Talbot could see her being passed around like a bottle of wine at a drunken frat house fuck party during her college days.

He stripped off his shorts and kicked off the Nikes as she went inside. He had come to kill the sheriff. The wife was the proverbial "innocent bystander." She might make a nice appetizer, though.

Talbot willed the Change to begin; he managed to stifle his cries during the most painful parts of the transformation. Hair sprouted and muscles bulged. Finally he stood up, massive and lethal now, and he snarled. His keen ears picked up the sound of a shower running. He loped down the hillside to the house.

The prowling creature paused, sniffing the air. The back door would not budge at first, but powerful muscles easily forced and destroyed the knob and the lock. The werewolf stealthily slipped inside and stood in the shadows of the darkened house. Its shaggy fur stood on end, tingling in anticipation of the kill. He crept quietly up the steps and waited just outside the master bedroom.

The translucent door panel of the shower stall swung aside, and Susie stepped out. She toweled off and padded across the bedroom carpet. Her naked body was pink and clean and dry. She lay casually across her bed, a contented smile on her face. Jeff would find her like this, hot and ready for him when he came home for 'lunch!'

She barely caught the movement out of the corner of her eye.

Something large, dark and furry leaped at her with incredible speed. Sharp fangs and claws gleamed in the sunlight streaming through the window as the beast's right arm began a deadly, downward arc.

Susie's mouth dropped open in terror, but before she could scream, she no longer had a throat.

'There's no such thing as a werewolf,' Brianna Lang told herself savagely. 'I don't believe in that superstitious shit!'

The building had emptied out; everyone had left for lunch except for her and Steve Dante -- Sam D'Amato had announced that he was going to take an extended liquid lunch. It had become eerily quiet in the lab, which gave her the creeps.

She gazed at the image on her laptop screen again, the image of the creature that had slaughtered the three luckless victims in the wilderness area. She wanted to pee in her pants from sheer fright every time she looked at the picture of the beast.

She wanted to scream every time she consulted the results of the DNA testing of the semen sample that had been rushed through for her.

'Unable to find match.'

Brianna read further down on the screen and swallowed hard.

'Closest matches: Homo sapiens, .573; Canis lupus lupus, .427.'

Her sample was similar to human semen, and also similar to wolf semen. A blend of both - and neither. Definitely a mutant.

Werewolf?

She recalled the words of Sheriff Tomlinson, and could not repress a shudder.**Ww@VfWOr@M.cm**

'This thing looks like a werewolf, walks like werewolf, and howls like a werewolf. I'd call it a werewolf. What would you call it?'

"God," she whispered. It was almost a moan. "It's got to be some kind of mutation."

"What is it?" Steve Dante queried.

Dante leaned over Brianna's shoulder and peered at the screen. He couldn't speak for several long seconds, and when he finally did, his voice sounded tight.

"Sheriff Tomlinson was right. It looks like a werewolf, walks like a werewolf, and howls like a werewolf - it is a werewolf!"

"Bullshit!" Brianna snapped, visibly shaken. "All the test results are saying is that the sample has characteristics of both human and wolf semen."

"Yeah -- a werewolf!" Dante gritted. "Whatever you want to call it, it's deadly!"

"There's got to be a plausible scientific explanation for it," Brianna said. "If we could've just finished investigating the area..."

Brianna let out a slow breath as she turned back to the computer. She downloaded a disc which contained the autopsy reports of the victims and photographs of the remains, and she added it to the DNA report and the dash cam recording. She saved the file; then she brought it up and clicked on it.**Ww@VfWOrM.com**

"I'm going to post this on the web, on the F. I. Network," she said with a yawn. "Maybe somebody else has run into something like this. We'll see if we get any bites. I'm curious."

Brianna turned toward Steve Dante and frowned. He was tense. She could see it in the tight lines around his eyes, in his hunched posture.

"Hey, Stevie -- you okay?"

She was shocked to notice there were tears in his eyes.

"Bri -- please don't go back up there -- to that parking area."

She was touched at his concern. This guy actually gave a damn about her! She smiled.

"It's okay, Stevie. There will be rangers and deputies all over the place. What are they going to do -- make me walk back out? Besides, if I get into trouble, I've got this!"

She pulled a government issue .45 automatic pistol out of her backpack.

Steve Dante gasped.

"Holy Christ, Bri!"

"It has specially-made .45 hollow point hunting slugs in it," she said. "It'll drop a grizzly bear; makes an exit wound the size of a softball at ten yards. And I know how to use it. I can show you the marksmanship trophies and ribbons I've won at the gun club. So don't worry -- I'll be fine."

She caressed his cheek.

"It's really sweet of you to be so worried. Thank you."

He smiled softly, and Brianna looked at him as if she was seeing him for the first time.

He was actually kind of handsome under all that hair. And he was so sweet and considerate. He would do anything for her. She read the logo on his tee shirt: 'SELF-PROFESSED GEEK.' She smiled ruefully.

She had wasted so much time in bars and clubs cruising for jocks and hunks, and what had she gotten from it? She had gotten her tits mauled and her ass pinched. She had gotten catcalls and obscene remarks. "Hey, baby -- back that ass up over here so I can lay some pipe!" "Are those real, honey, or do you have stock in Dow-Corning?" Once she had bagged a Seattle Seahawks quarterback -- or so she thought. When she went to suck his cock, she tasted the juices of another of his conquests from earlier that evening.**Ww@VfWOrM.com**

Brianna later found out that she had been his third girl of the night The son of a bitch hadn't even had the decency to wash his prick!

She pursed her lips. She'd been looking for Superman, and maybe she should have been looking for Clark Kent!

Assuming Clark Kent had a beard and a modified Afro, anyway!

She kissed him.