

1034

Janice's voice dripped with honeyed insincerity. Meryl glanced in the other direction. There was a trailhead about a dozen yards further on. It was a side path. The sign read, "Hotel Royale - . 7 miles." She cast an apprehensive glance toward the area where the foliage had moved, drew in a deep breath, then hurried on and cut down the branch toward the pool.

Janice Curtiss strode up the trail, clad only in her reclaimed white bikini and a pair of "aqua socks." All of the delightful parts of her lithe body were in sensuous, undulating motion. It burned her ass that the other girls had ganged up on her and forced her to come up here to find the little auburn-haired slut and apologize to her! Meryl was going to be trouble, she could see that. Her sweet, "Little Miss Innocent" expression had the boys wrapped around her pinkie -- and the other girls liked her, too. It pissed her off; she craved being in the spotlight, and she was damned if she was going to relinquish it to Meryl Shuman!

"Mer-yl!" she called, forcing as much sweetness into her voice as she could.

The underbrush quivered off to the side of the path. So the little bitch wanted to play games, did she?

"There you are!" Janice cooed as she ventured off the path. She pushed aside the undergrowth and walked right into the outstretched arms of the werewolf.

Janice flailed in helpless terror, but her piercing scream died in her throat almost as it was born. The beast's long ivory fangs sank into the soft flesh of her neck like a hot knife slicing through butter. He sucked and tore at her ravaged throat while one huge paw ripped open her belly, then sliced through her face and breasts. Her struggles excited him; he could feel his burgeoning erection swelling, standing up hard against his abdomen. The girl's frenzied kicking quickly subsided. He tore away her bloodied bikini, completely stripping her, slashing her tender flesh, shredding the limp body with his claws in a bestial fury.

The werewolf licked her blood from his muzzle. There was a fullness in his chest; he wanted to howl, to proclaim his victory over his helpless prey, but some instinct told him no... It would be too dangerous. Instead, he reached down and grabbed one of the dead girl's bloody wrists. There was a copse of trees nearby where he could ravish her, and then enjoy his grisly feast in peace.

He dragged the mangled corpse toward the trees, leaving in its wake a horrible, gory stream of blood and entrails.

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Judy Rifkin had her eye on a cute blond lifeguard who was trying not to stare at her from behind his mirrored sunglasses. She wanted to put the moves on him before Janice and Meryl got back, so she smiled seductively at him as she massaged sunscreen into her full breasts. Then her fingers dipped under her skimpy white bikini top, and she teasingly smeared some of the cream on her nipples. She ran her tongue across her upper lip and moaned for the boy's benefit as she tossed her long black hair over her shoulder.

Then she stiffened and sat up straight.

"What is it?" asked Tara Kepler, a buxom redhead who had just lay down next to her on a beach towel and unfastened her top.

"I... I thought I heard a scream. It sounded like Janice."

"Damn, you have good ears, girl!" Tara exclaimed. "I can't hear anything for all this commotion!"

Judy frowned.

"I don't hear anything now. Maybe it was a bird."

"Or maybe Janice got scared by a snake!" Tara grinned wickedly. "You know how she hates snakes!"

The two girls laughed, and Judy resumed her conquest of the blond lifeguard.

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The werewolf bent his back and climaxed; slowly his spasms subsided, and he pulled out of the dead girl's gutted body. He turned over her bloody corpse and lifted it toward him, almost drooling at the sight of her succulent breasts.

He bit deeply into one of them and was rewarded with a gush of brackish fluid.

The beast dropped the girl's body as if it were electrified and spat out the stinging, briny liquid, coughing almost uncontrollably as the salt stung his sensitive taste buds. He stared through streaming eyes at the slashed breast and saw what looked like a torn, bloody plastic sac embedded in the midst of the mangled flesh.

Implants!wWw.NoveLw0rM.coM

He hooked the shapeless bag with a talon, and the last of the sodium solution dribbled out. Then he yanked it out and flipped several thousand dollars' worth of a plastic surgeon's art into the weeds.

The werewolf settled back on his haunches. Killing the girl had released much of the tension that had built up within him. He could control the Change now. He was contemplating reverting to his human form when, suddenly, a familiar scent reached him, and his tingling fur stood on end.

Brianna Lang had entered the woods, about a mile and a half away!

With all the emotional turmoil he had been through this afternoon, he had totally forgotten about the beautiful forensic investigator! He could easily intercept her; he knew where she was heading, and he would arrive first.

He exploded into a blur of brown fur and sped off over the matted grass of the deer run, his latest kill lying torn and bloody on the grass, already forgotten.

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Sterrett, Kansas

Gabriel Van Helsing's breathing slowly returned to normal as he cooled down back inside the air-conditioned comfort of the doctor's office in the Eglon headquarters complex. The obstacle course was the last leg of the grueling Eglon physical fitness test. He had given it his best shot, but he was afraid he already knew the verdict. He could tell by the expression on Dr. James Collins' face. Collins resembled a wiry little bald cherub, his skin remarkably unwrinkled for someone his age. His blue eyes, which normally twinkled, were narrowed in concern just now. He shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Gabriel. You did quite well overall -- your performance was well beyond the best score a trained athlete ever received on this regimen -- but your score was 3. 69 out of 4. 00. The minimum is 3. 75."

"You're going to keep me grounded for a measly six hundredths of a percentage point?" Van Helsing exploded. "That's ridiculous! Who came up with those parameters?"

Collins smiled wryly over the top of his wire-rimmed glasses.

"Why, you did, Gabriel!"

Van Helsing sagged back against the wall, defeated. "Yes, I did, didn't I?wWw.NoveLw0rM.coM

"The biggest problem is that you haven't quite recovered your full range of motion in your back, turning and twisting," Collins continued. "A little more rest, and..."

"I don't have time to rest!" Van Helsing shot to his feet and urgently gripped the physician's arm. "Look, Jim -- we have evidence that there's a werewolf in this little town of Winslow Junction in Washington. I'm convinced it's the one we've been tracking for the last year and a half. Last night was just the first night of the cycle of the full moon. If I can get out there, I can catch the bastard before he leaves town and kill him!"

Collins removed Van Helsing's hand from his forearm.

"I'm sorry Gabriel -- my hands are tied. Unless you can get a waiver from the Vatican, you're still off the track until you make up those six hundredths of a percentage point."

Van Helsing pounded his fist against the wall in frustration.

"Damn it, Collins -- people are dying! And there will be more!"

"The Vatican, Gabriel. Remember -- they're your rules. I'm just the messenger!" He picked up his clipboard and left the room chuckling.

"Unfeeling bastard!" Van Helsing spat. He burst into the corridor, brushing past his assistant, Miranda Tyler.

"Uh, I take it that didn't go too well?" she queried.

"He's grounding me over six hundredths of a rating point!" he grated. "I've got to get hold of Cardinal Morelli; I need a dispensation from the Vatican!"

"Oh, that should be interesting! Cardinal Morelli thinks you're about as much fun as a canker sore!"

Van Helsing whirled on her furiously and leaned in nose to nose. Miranda backed away, startled by the towering rage in his blazing eyes.wWw.NoveLw0rM.coM

"Listen - I don't have any choice!" he shouted. "Everybody's treating this like it's some big, fucking joke! Ha-ha-ha! Well, you know what -- I don't think those three people who were killed last night are laughing very hard!"

He stormed into his office and slammed the door, leaving a stunned Miranda Tyler in his wake. He plopped down in a chair at his computer console, wearily rubbing a hand over his eyes.

"That had been uncalled for," he thought. He would apologize to her later. Right now he was on a mission. He cued up a satellite phone and punched in an overseas speed dial number. The speaker on his computer crackled as the connection was made.

"Get me Cardinal Morelli!"