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EGION SPECIAL FORCES, KANSAS SATRAP

"Van Helsing - do you have any idea what time it is?"

"It's around 5:00 PM here, Your Eminence," Gabriel Van Helsing replied innocently.

Cardinal Guiseppe Morelli stared, owl-eyed, from the monitor, his florid face redder than usual.

"It is 11 PM here, Van Helsing, and while it may not seem that late to you, I rise at 3:00 AM every morning! I have been asleep for two hours; you have awakened me from a very satisfying slumber, you Philistine!" He glowered from across the ocean. "What is it you want - and it had better be good!"

"A dispensation," Van Helsing said. "There's a werewolf I need to hunt in the state of Washington, and I can't get Dr. Collins to clear me for duty. I'm fine - I'm ready to go."

"I see." Morelli frowned. "So now, in addition to your other dubious talents, you've added M. D. behind your name. Request denied!"

"Damn it, Your Eminence!" Van Helsing growled. "I can kill that beast if you let me go! People are dying - more will die!"

"People die every day, Van Helsing," the cardinal said, his tone icy. "Request denied. Good night!"

The screen went dark.

With a howl of rage, Van Helsing smashed his fist completely through the monitor. Fat sparks spat and sizzled, and a puff of smoke wafted from the dying screen. Van Helsing stormed out into the hall, sucking on his battered knuckles.

"I take it that went about as well as expected?" Miranda asked.

"He said 'no'!" he snarled.

"We are therefore going anyway?"

He whirled on her, and she took a step back www.novetwo.com

"Captain Kirk in 'Star Trek III: The Search for Spock.' That's what he said when Starfleet Command refused to let him..."

"What do you mean, 'we'?" he asked coldly. "I'm going, but I need you to stay here."

"No," she said defiance in her voice. "You need me with you. If by some chance you aren't 100%, you'll need backup."

She wasn't going to budge. She stood with her hands on her hips, glaring at him. Van Helsing sighed.

"All right. We'll need...."

"I, er, appropriated a Jeep to get us to the air strip," she offered. "Two 12-gauge sawed-off shotguns, silver shot in the shells, silver nitrate in the powder. Two .45 caliber automatic pistols, two AK-47's. Silver ammunition, of course. Oh, and your crossbow with silver stakes, and those blade thingies you use. Silver-tipped, of course."

He stared. "O-kay. How will we get out there?"

"I've hired a plane."

"Reputable?"

Miranda smiled. "Let's just say he won't ask any questions. He's reliable, and he's got a Lear jet." www.novetwo.com

Van Helsing's left eyebrow rose "Really? I'm impressed. When do we leave?"

"Now," she said. "All of our gear is packed. The guard at the main gate likes me. We'll be long gone before anyone realizes what's happening."

He kissed her forehead. "Miranda, what would I do without you? I hope you realize what you've gotten yourself into, though. This is a werewolf - the most dangerous predator on earth. You'll need to watch your ass."

"I wouldn't mind it if you watched my ass, too, Gabe," she said. Her smile was coquettish.

He grinned. "I can think of less pleasant ways to pass the time!"

They walked outside and got into the Jeep, and then they drove, unmolested, through the main gate of the compound.

Where were the colors?

His world was monochrome, black and white, halftones under the pale white light of the full moon, and he wanted to fill it with color. Red, the color of life - and death.

The werewolf went down on all fours on the dew-dampened path. The trail glowed in the dark for him, lighting his way through the dense forest. He loped easily over the ground, a muscled bundle of frustrated violence and hunger and barely-leashed power. Trees drifted by as he ran. The night was still; even the crickets stopped chirping as he passed.

He was hunting, hunting something warm and soft.

The woods were thinning out now. He could see it in a clearing up ahead - a house, a neat, white bungalow with a black roof. He snarled.

Where were the colors? www.novetwo.com

Then he stopped. A familiar scent - a woman, in the house up ahead.

Liz!

The tiny human spark buried deep in his brain supplied the name. Yes, Liz! Soft, sweet, pretty Liz! He salivated, and the scent of her cunt brought a rush of blood - and desire - to his loins.

Yes - he would rape and kill her, the one he loved!

His lips writhed back over his fangs as he snarled. His sharp eyes could see her through the large picture window at the rear of the house. She was lying on the bed, asleep, the covers thrown back, clad in a clinging, transparent nightgown. She was small and delicate, like a little porcelain doll.

With a roar, he charged forward. He leaped; he felt a shock, like ice breaking, and the window shattered into a million silver splinters. Ebony talons flashed in the moonlight. She screamed. Her beautiful face and supple body were rent with deep, bloody grooves. Her nightdress was torn away, and now the color flooded his world. Red, everywhere! He exulted as scarlet soaked the bed, splashed on the floor, spattered the walls. He rolled her over on her stomach, pushed her face down in the pillows to muffle her screams. He entered her. He was too much for her; she was so tiny, and her insides tore apart under his brutal thrusts. His penis ripped through the top of her cervix and up into her body. More color gushed out onto the sheets.

He finished with her quickly, and now claws and fangs ripped and shredded. He gulped down chunks of her flesh as she screamed, until she finally screamed no more, and her body fell apart on the bed. He came up with a loop of intestine clenched in his fangs.

Then he threw back his shaggy head and howled...

"Liz! Nooooo!"

Derek Talbot flung himself from the bed. He was Changing!

No! It wasn't time - not yet! He glanced at the bureau mirror. Hair and claws had sprouted on his hands, and his eyes gleamed yellow in the semi-darkness.

Slowly he brought himself under control. The hair and talons receded, and his eyes transformed back into their normal blue color. He fought down rising panic.

Liz! He had to get out of here, go far away, before the full moon rose! The Wolf wanted

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If he stayed here, he would hunt her down and kill her.

He frantically packed a duffle bag with a couple of changes of clothes, bounded down the steps and out into the parking lot. He didn't have much time. Hopefully he could get far enough away from here so that he wouldn't be able to get at Liz. He climbed into the BMW and slammed the door.

The engine roared to life. Tires screeched and slung gravel in all directions, and Talbot slewed the car out of the parking lot and headed toward the main highway, leaving the cloying stench of burning rubber hanging in the air.
