

Pack Rules

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The dirt road led to a chain link fence, ten feet high, topped in razor wire. Harvey didn't think it looked strong enough to hold the kind of creature he had come here to hunt. For the hundredth time that day—and the thousandth time since he'd booked this weekend outing—he wondered if the whole thing was an elaborate ruse.

For what purpose? he thought, and the answer was obvious: he had thirty thousand dollars with him—more than enough money to be killed for. Behind that fence there could be men waiting to shoot him, take his money, bury his body. The idea seemed obvious, he felt stupid for not thinking of it sooner. He'd been so enamored with the idea of hunting a monster, he'd failed to see an obvious trap. He was as dumb as the lustful fools who answered internet ads for anonymous sex, only to end up chained to a wall in some serial killer's basement with a car battery clipped to their nipples.

Harvey held his foot on the brake pedal and considered whether he should turn around and go home. The idea that he was walking into a trap seemed far more plausible than the idea that he was actually going to hunt a werewolf.

He considered the fence another moment. It was probably only an initial layer of security, intended to keep people from walking onto the reserve.

Harvey moved his foot from the brake to the gas. Even if he was walking into a trap, there was the submachine gun in the trunk of his car, and silver bullets would kill a human just as well as they were supposed to kill a lycanthrope.

He'd driven all the way out here. He wasn't going home without shooting something.

Harvey was a bookseller, and he looked like a bookseller. He was tall, with a slight build, sharp but delicate features, feathery brown hair. For this trip he'd dressed in brown cargo pants and a thick, dark green sweater that buttoned closed at the front—no zipper that could jam, reflect light, or make noise if the garment had to be removed. Harvey looked out of place in these clothes, like someone who was venturing out of the city for the first time. But to him the outfit felt like a second skin. He might not look like a seasoned hunter, but Harvey had spent countless hours in the wilderness. He knew how to move silently in the brush. He knew how to track. He was a good marksman, and familiar with a wide variety of firearms.

Harvey wasn't his real name. It had been given to him when he signed up for this trip. The whole process had been clandestine: a series of calls to an unlisted phone number that went directly to voicemail; replies in the form of text messages, from a different unlisted number; a single face-to-face meeting in a public location, with a man who wore sunglasses indoors, who had explained the conditions of participation.

(1) Anonymity. If your application was accepted, you would receive an alias. Use the alias at all times, don't use your real name, ever.

(2) Price. Bring thirty thousand dollars cash, in hundred-dollar bills.

(3) Weapons. Guns, ammo and knives would be provided. No outside weapons were allowed.

Condition (3) was why he'd stowed the submachine gun in the trunk of his car, and not an assault rifle. An assault rifle would have been preferable, but impossible to hide without disassembling. The submachine gun fit perfectly into a hidden compartment under the spare tire, no disassembly required. It had a folding stock and was chambered for .45 caliber rounds. Harvey rarely went anywhere without a gun, and he felt better knowing one was nearby. The next best thing to having a weapon in your hand was knowing where you could find one if you needed it.

Along with the gun, three thirty-round clips were stashed in the hidden compartment. The bullets were silver. He'd made them himself.

The road led to a gate guarded by a man with long black hair and a face like a bare-knuckle boxer. The barrel of an assault rifle showed from under the man's green poncho.

Harvey pulled up and lowered the window.

„Can I help you sir?“ the man asked.

„I'm here for the hunt,“ Harvey answered.

„You bring your invitation?“

Harvey had. It was a single, folded piece of yellowed stationary with a symbol drawn in black ink. It had arrived by mail two weeks after his face-to-face meeting with the man in sunglasses, along with his »Harvey« alias and directions to the reserve.

The guard looked the invitation over, then handed it back to Harvey.

„Need to see the money too?“

„I just check the invitations. You pay inside. You can't pay once you're inside, that's your problem.“

„That won't be a problem. What now?“

„Follow the road. You'll see a lodge, park there. You're the first one here, so you might have to wait a few minutes. Hunt starts at full dark.“

Harvey raised the window. The guard opened the gate and let Harvey's car pass through.

Beyond the gate, it was already night. The day had been overcast from the start, and the canopy of branches overhead blotted out what little light permeated through the clouds. Fog rose from the forest floor. Harvey turned on his headlights, and kept his foot light on the gas pedal. After two uneven miles, the road widened. The lodge was on the left. A light was on inside, a blue SUV was parked outside. Harvey parked alongside the other vehicle and stepped out.

Foggy, crepuscular forest surrounded on all sides. There was no movement, no sound. He started toward the front steps of the lodge, then stopped. The idea that he was stepping into some kind of trap had abated, but something still felt off. Harvey stood a moment, acknowledging the feeling. Then, he went back to his car and popped the trunk.

„Door's open!“ a male voice shouted.

Harvey twisted the knob and stepped into the lodge, a black bag slung over one shoulder. He was greeted by a white-haired man dressed in camouflage pants and a denim jacket. „I'm Teddy,“ the man said. „You are... wait let me guess.“ Teddy consulted a piece of paper. „Harvey?“

„That's me.“

„Wasn't a hard guess. You're the only lone gunman for the evening. No one else is here yet, but you probably figured that out yourself. I just got here. Quentin'll be along soon. We've got about an hour, hour and a half till full dark. You can have a seat if you'd like.“

„Thanks. I'll stand for now, stretch my legs. Long drive.“

„That the cash payment in your bag there?“

„Yes sir.“

Harvey lifted the bag off his shoulder and handed it to Teddy.

„Want a drink? The bar is over there. Help yourself if you like.“

„I'll pass on the alcohol, but do you have coffee.“

„I'll put a pot on. Cream? Sugar?“

„Black.“

While Teddy made coffee, Harvey acquainted himself with the lodge. He could have been standing in a four-star chateau in Utah or California. In the center of the room cushioned benches circled a large fireplace. A metal chimney extended down from the high ceiling, like a giant black funnel. The bar was against a wall. Doors led to other rooms. The walls were finished wood, and decorated with a variety of curio. There were at least a dozen different mounted skulls—some from creatures recognizable, others less so—along with antique guns, indigenous weapons from various countries, photographs, framed magazine clippings.

Harvey walked along the walls, getting a closer look. Some of the photographs were black and white. These showed a young man with a lantern jaw and a thick head of dark hair. In some he was dressed in safari-style clothing. In others he was bare-chested, showing off a thickly muscled upper body. The newest photographs were in color, and showed the same man, decades later: thinner, leaner, but still strong; long silver hair and a matching silver musketeer-style goatee; creases around steel-gray eyes that hadn't lost any of their intensity with age.

Old or young, in nearly all of the photographs the man was holding some sort of weapon—a gun, a knife, a tomahawk.

Harvey looked over the photographs with fascination. His eyes moved from the photographs to the framed articles, which had titles like „Dagger in the Heart of the Dark Continent“ and „Dagger Slays Vampire Cabal in Eastern Europe.“

„Are you a fan of Mr. Dagger?“ Teddy asked. Harvey had been absorbed in what he was looking at and hadn't heard the man re-enter the room.

„Isn't everyone who signs up for one of these hunts?“

„You'd be surprised,“ Teddy said. „Some of our younger clients haven't even heard of Quentin.“

„I read all of these articles growing up. The books too.“

A gravel-voice boomed from behind them. „Glad to hear you calling them articles, and not stories.“

Harvey turned. The man in the photographs stood by the front door. Quentin Dagger. Adventurer. Globetrotter. Monster hunter. He was dressed in boots, filthy jeans, a leather jacket over a dark shirt. His long silver hair hung from a black bush hat atop his head. A thick gunslinger's belt wrapped around his waist, revolver holstered at the right hip, a tomahawk holstered at the left. The belt was cinched with a heavy silver buckle shaped like a skull.

Harvey was lost for words—he was actually standing in the same room as the legendary Quentin Dagger.

Quentin stepped forward. „Would you believe that some people have the nerve to doubt every word in those articles is one-hundred percent true? I mean, it says so at the beginning of each, 'This is a true story of adventure and monsters.' But some people thought that was some kind of gimmick.“ He extended his hand. „Call me Quentin.“

It wasn't like meeting a celebrity. Harvey had met a celebrity once, a movie star. That had been a chance encounter in a coffee shop in New York City, where Harvey had been visiting friends. In person, the movie star had seemed normal, human. In person, Quentin Dagger seemed exactly what he was—a living, breathing legend.

He was well over six feet tall. His grip felt strong enough to bend steel. His presence seemed to shrink the room around him.

Harvey was so taken aback, he almost gave his real name. „I’m Harvey,“ he said. „Our lone gunman for the evening,“ Quentin grinned, showing a row of solid, white teeth. „Well Harvey, it’s always a pleasure to meet a fan.“

The rest of the hunters arrived in two groups of two.

One was a couple in their twenties, tan, well-groomed, boring. They had the look of people who came from families with deep pockets. Their hiking boots were brand new, like they’d been purchased the day before. Ditto for their green cargo pants and black fleeces. Their aliases for the night were »Barbie« and »Ken«. They seemed like the type of clients who had never heard of Quentin Dagger before signing up for this weekend walkabout.

The other pair was a father and son. They introduced themselves as »Homer« and »Bart«. Homer looked to be in his forties, and had a body like a defensive lineman. A full beard covered his face, and he was dressed in a camo jumpsuit with an Iron Maiden t-shirt underneath. Bart was young—Harvey would have been surprised if the boy was even out of high school. His forehead was pimples and his fatigues looked a size too big for his lanky frame.

Quentin did a quick meet and greet with each of them, then announced, „Full dark is a few minutes away, and we’ll be heading out momentarily. You folks sit tight for a minute while Teddy and I prep a few things, then we’ll bring you outside for weapons check.“

Barbie and Ken sat on one of the cushioned benches, whispering to one another. Barbie had removed her fleece, revealing a low-cut shirt. Bart stood next to his father, silent and staring at Barbie’s cleavage.

„I can’t believe I’m really here,“ said Homer. „I can’t believe I am going to hunt a werewolf with Quentin Dagger.“ He sounded like an excited kid, and Harvey was glad someone else appreciated how epic this was. Getting to hunt down a monster with Quentin Dagger was like getting to toss a baseball around with Mickey Mantle, but this fact seemed lost on the others in the group.

Harvey smiled. „It’s good to know someone else here is a fan.“

„Yeah, I was afraid I was going to be the only one. Quentin’s lost of the younger crowd. Junior... I mean, Bart here, I’ve tried to get him to read the books and stories, but he’s more interested in video games. I can’t complain though. He’s a good kid. Good hunter too. You do any hunting, Harvey?“

„Plenty. Boar, bears, a few big cats out in California. Some deer and duck too.“

„Ever hunted any kind of monster before?“

„Can’t say that I have.“

It was full dark, weapons check.

The hunters were lined up outside the cabin. Floodlights provided illumination. Quentin paced back and forth in front of them, like a sergeant before his troops. Harvey was struck by how strong Quentin appeared—the man was nearly seventy, but every movement of his body conveyed physical prowess and confidence, athleticism that could react with speed and violence at a microsecond’s notice. Harvey remembered a rumor that had briefly appeared a few years back, a report

that Quentin Dagger was crippled with a degenerative bone disease, bed-ridden and dying after four decades of traveling the world and killing its most dangerous creatures. That rumor had left Harvey depressed for days. Standing here now, it seemed laughable.

The hunters had been outfitted with web belts and padded H-suspenders that had pockets for ammo clips, sheaths for their silver hunting knives, and holsters for their sidearms. Each hunter also had a walkie-talkie.

The guns they'd been supplied looked like something out of a science fiction movie—not like Star Trek, more like Aliens. Harvey examined the assault rifle in his hands. It was tactical-black and had a bullpup configuration, with the ammo clip behind the grips and trigger. A black tube was mounted underneath the barrel. Wires extended from the tube to a small black box mounted next to the trigger guard. A pinhole-sized green light glowed on the side of the black box. The sidearms they'd been given were outfitted with similar devices. It looked to Harvey like some kind of targeting system. He wasn't that far off. Quentin explained:

„Some of you might have no doubt been wondering why we don't let hunters bring their own weapons to this reserve. You'll find the answer to that question by looking at those curious thingamabobs attached to your guns. These are custom-built safety systems that prevent you from shooting one another—even though you all signed death waivers, we like to keep the accidental shootings to a minimum.

„That black tube underneath the barrel is basically a long-range digital thermometer. Lycanthropes have a much higher body temperature than humans—ten to fifteen degrees higher. Your guns are programmed to fire only when aimed at targets with body temperatures that high. Aim your gun at a lycanthrope, the safety clicks off and stays off for five seconds. You can fire on semi auto, or open up on full auto. Your choice. That light green light next to the trigger? You'll know your safety is off when that light switches to red.

„Now this system is designed to minimize your chances of shooting each other. Noticed I said *minimize* and not *eliminate any chance of*. These safety systems work well, but they don't work perfectly. So you should still exercise the same caution you would handling any other firearm.

„Now all this fancy technology might give you the impression that these weapons are delicate. Let me assure you, they're not. They can take a lot of abuse, so don't handle them like they're going to break.“

Harvey removed the clip on his rifle and cleared the chamber before raising the gun to eye level and checking the sight through the night scope. It was an unfamiliar weapon, but he'd had practice with similar firearms before. He reinserted the clip, which was packed with 5.56x45mm rounds with gleaming silver tips.

Once they'd been introduced to their guns, they met the evening's prey.

They brought her out on a chain, which was affixed to a collar around her neck. Teddy held the end of her leash. Two men with assault rifles stood to either side, barrels raised, keeping their distance. Tiny dots of red glowed from the safety mechanisms on their trigger guards.

„Hunters, meet Kaliska. Your quarry for this evening's hunt.“

Harvey was surprised. He hadn't expected they'd be hunting a woman.

No, not a woman, he thought. A girl.

Because she couldn't have been more than twenty years old—nearly half Harvey's age. She was naked. Black hair, thick and dirty, hung down to her waist. Her skin was dusky, and covered in a sheen of sweat that dampened the fine covering of dark hair on her calves, forearms, and feet. Her buttocks, thighs and abdomen were thick with muscle that rippled as she walked forward. She kept her eyes aimed toward the ground in front of her.

Harvey felt a stirring in his groin, but it wasn't from the sight of her lithe body, or her small dark nipples, or her short mohawk of jet-black pubic hair. It was from the effluvium of sex that seemed to waft from her glistening skin.

Homer let out a low whistle. „This night just keeps getting better.“

Harvey didn't share this feeling. He didn't like the idea of hunting this girl. This wasn't what he'd signed up for—at least it wasn't what he'd thought he'd signed up for.

More details revealed themselves as the girl moved under the floodlights. Her fingers and toes were clawed, the nails a half-inch in length and thick, like shards of glass. Her nose, mouth and jaw protruded forward, forming a snout. The feature wasn't as pronounced as that of a wolf, but it was far more pronounced than that of any human. She had lips like a fashion model, and behind them, fangs.

The wolf-girl raised her eyes from the ground and looked at each of the hunters in turn, with eyes that were no doubt those of a predator—pale blue all around, with only a tiny sliver of pupil at the center. Harvey felt the skin on the back of his neck horripilate as those eyes connected with his for a moment, before they moved on to Ken and then Barbie.

She's sizing us up, he thought. This is her hunt too.

Still, he felt no desire to shoot her.

That feeling would change drastically an hour later.

Teddy unhooked the chain from the back of Kaliska's collar. The girl took one last look at the hunters, then turned and sprinted into the woods with long, graceful strides. She was out of sight in seconds.

„How do you know she stays on the reserve?“ Bart asked. Harvey had been thinking the same thing.

Quentin answered, „That collar around her neck works like one of those invisible dog fences. You know, the ones that give the dog a little jolt if it leaves the yard? We've got sensors set up around the border of the reserve. She walks past those, that collar gives her a big jolt.“

„How big?“

„Enough to knock her off her feet.“

„Enough to kill her?“

Quentin laughed. „No, the only thing that'll kill her is putting a piece of silver in one of her vital organs. Of course, putting a few pieces of silver in a few of her vital organs is a lot more effective.“

They gave Kaliska a ten-minute head start, then they moved out in groups of two. Since Harvey was the only lone gunman, he paired with Quentin. This made him feel a little bit better about the whole evening. He had no intention of being the one to kill the girl, so this outing had been a waste of money in that respect.

But getting to spend a couple hours in the woods with Quentin Dagger? That was priceless.

With nightfall, the clouds that had covered the sky all day departed, revealing a fat, full moon. Rays of moonlight pierced the canopy of branches overhead and stirred the gauzy knee-high layer of fog that blanketed the forest floor. Quentin and Harvey moved among the trees. The floodlights outside the lodge had already disappeared in the distance behind them. Homer and Bart should have been somewhere off to their right, Ken and Barbie to their left.

„You do a lot of hunting?“ Quentin asked in a low voice.

„I try to get out whenever I can. There are a few good spots to hunt where I live, and I try to travel twice a year, to hunt someplace new.“

„I couldn't tell if you'd had practice, or you were just a natural stalker. You move well in the woods. A lot of people who come on these trips don't know what the hell they're doing. They trip, stumble, make a hell of a lot of noise. You're quiet, sure-footed. And you're a fan. I'm glad you're here, and I'm not stuck stomping around with that guy and his girlfriend.“

„Barbie and Ken?“

„It sucks getting old. People forget what you were. I'm just some silly old man in a hat to people like them. The things I've done, the places I've been, who the hell are they?“

There was genuine sadness in Quentin's voice, and Harvey felt it too.

Harvey said, „Can I ask a question?“

„Son, you can ask me anything.“

„What was the most dangerous monster you ever hunted?“

Quentin chuckled. „The second most popular question. But the one I never get tired of talking about.“

„What's the most popular question?“

„How many women I've bedded.“

Quentin grinned.

Harvey laughed.

The attack was fast and without warning. Like a shark attack. One moment Quentin was standing there, grinning. The next, Kaliska hit him with the force of a car crash, and he was dragged into the fog and underbrush.

It was another moment before Harvey's mind processed what had happened.

There was silence, and then screaming. Harvey registered the direction of the sound, then went running towards it.

A single sliver of moonlight shone through the canopy above, just enough light to see what was happening. Quentin was on his back, Kaliska on top of him, straddling him like a fighter in a mixed martial arts match. She was thrashing Quentin with her claws, tearing at his chest. Harvey felt flecks of blood hit his face.

She looked up, her blue eyes glowing. She smiled.

Harvey raised his rifle, felt the safety click off as it registered Kaliska's body temperature. He pulled the trigger but she was already lunging for cover, for the safety of the fog and darkness. Bullets shattered tree bark and splintered low branches. He glimpsed movement in the muzzle flashes—only a blur.

And then, darkness. He was still holding the trigger down, but the clip was empty. The red light on the safety mechanism blinked to green. Harvey quickly pulled the clip from the rifle's stock and inserted a new one. Then slowly, he pivoted in a 360-degree turn, keeping the barrel raised and aimed at the darkness around him, waiting for the light on the safety to turn red. It didn't.

He lowered the gun and pulled a flashlight from his belt.

Quentin was barely conscious. His eyes had rolled back in his head and his body shook in a convulsive fit. Harvey examined the wounds under the light. *Mauled* would be the best word to describe Quentin's condition. The blood on the ground around his prone body was an inch deep, and more was running freely from claw and bite wounds.

Quentin's body stopped shaking. His head lolled to the side.

He's dead, Harvey thought.

It felt like the temperature outside dropped thirty degrees in an instant. Harvey's bladder felt as if it hadn't been drained in days. His knees shook as he stood. He clicked off his flashlight and waited for his eyes to readjust to the darkness. Then he raised his rifle, and retreated into the surrounding trees.

He didn't go far. The other hunters would have heard the gunshots, the screams, and they would be working their way through the woods, toward the direction of the attack. If they knew what they were doing, they would make their approach slow and cautious—rushing blindly towards armed men was a good way to take an accidental bullet. Harvey figured Homer and Bart would approach cautiously. He was less sure about Barbie and Ken.

He anticipated the noise from the attack would lure the other hunters, and their presence would lure Kaliska. They may have thought they had come out here to hunt her. But after that attack, only an idiot would cling to that illusion.

You're an idiot for even coming out here in the first place, Harvey told himself. This had about as much in common with a Quentin Dagger adventure paperback as an action movie had in common with actual war. And yes, he wasn't green when it came to hunting. He'd killed dangerous animals before. Large boar capable of goring a man with their tusks. Bears that could remove a human head with a single swipe of a massive claw. But those creatures were house pets in comparison to the speed and violence with which Kaliska had struck.

Quentin is dead. The idea was too big to digest. It wasn't that different than how the idea of meeting Quentin had been almost too big to digest. Even dead, Quentin still seemed larger than life. *But maybe that's just it. Maybe all that was left was the legend. The man in the stories, the photos back at the lodge, maybe that man had faded from existence a long time ago. Maybe Quentin was too old to be out here.*

And Harvey was the dumb schmuck that had the fortune of being out here with Quentin when the inevitable happened.

Had to be somebody. Might as well be me.

He moved from one hiding spot to another, far back from the scene of the attack, circling it from a distance. He had a natural sense of direction that had been honed during the hundreds of hours he'd spent in the wilderness. His footsteps were silent. He constantly kept the barrel of his gun raised, scanning the

woods ahead, keeping the green light next to the trigger guard in his peripheral vision, watching to see if it turned red.

A squawk and a muffled, staticky voice called from a pocket on his belt, causing Harvey to nearly jump out of his skin. *Walkie-talkie*. He'd forgotten about it.

He pulled the device from its pocket and lowered the volume, then held it to his ear. Bart's voice called through the speaker. He sounded like he was in shock, crying, on the verge of hysteria.

„Hello? Is anyone there?“

Harvey depressed the talk button and spoke quietly. „Bart? It's Harvey.“

„Who are you?“

„The tall man from the lodge. I was here alone. I talked to your dad.“

„My dad is dead.“ The voice sounded more like that of a scared child than a teenager.

„Did Kaliska attack him?“

„Who?“

„The woman. The one we're hunting.“

„Yes.“

„And you're sure he's dead?“

„Yes. She... she pulled out his insides. The way dad does to the deer we hunt.“

Shit, Harvey thought. *She isn't just picking us off one at a time. She's doing it in a way to maximize fear. Psychological warfare.*

He hadn't heard any gunshots, so he didn't bother asking if Bart had managed to wound Kaliska. „Bart, do you know where you are? Do you know how to get back to the lodge?“

„I... I think so.“

Then Bart screamed into the walkie-talkie. The outcry didn't last long. The noises that came after it—bones breaking, wet ripping sounds, snarling—lasted only slightly longer, a few seconds.

Harvey didn't bother saying anything else into the walkie-talkie. He turned the device off and slipped it back into the pocket on his belt. He reasoned out the direction that would take him to Bart and Homer. Then, he went the other way. He gave up on the idea of killing Kaliska. His new plan was to get to the border of the reserve. With that collar around her neck she wouldn't be able to follow him there. At this point, the only thing he wanted was to live through the night.

He heard the sobbing before he was within sight of the house. Or, what was left of a building that had once been a house. It was some sort of old hunting lodge. The wood that made up the exterior was warped and rotted with age. There was no front door, just an empty frame. Ditto for the front windows. Most peculiar was the roof—it was lying on the ground off to one side, a sight that would have, under other circumstances, made Harvey take pause and wonder, *What the hell?*

But there was no time for that now. A light glowed from behind one of the empty windows, the same direction as the sobbing. Briefly, Harvey wondered if it was a trap. He dismissed the idea. Something as deadly as Kaliska didn't need traps. The sobbing sounded like it belonged to a male. He had a good idea of what he'd find inside.

Harvey moved quickly from the cover of the trees, across the clearing that served as a front lawn, and up a set of crumbling stone steps.

Ken sat in the middle of the floor in the small filthy room. He was in a fetal position, hugging himself. His flashlight was on its side next to him. Barbie was all over the place. The bigger pieces were easy to distinguish—an arm, a hand, a leg, her head. The smaller parts, less so—scraps of skin, chunks of muscle, offal that had been torn out and tossed aside. Dark, wet blood covered every surface, glistening in the moonlight that poured down through the empty ceiling.

Ken rocked back and forth, crying. His girlfriend's head was only a few feet away from him. He hadn't noticed Harvey come in.

„Ken?“ Harvey asked.

The younger man looked up. „She always told me I was too soft. That I needed to be more of a man. That's why we came here. So I could show her that I wasn't a wimp. That I could be a killer.“ He erupted into a fresh round of sobs.

„Ken, we need to get out of here. The others are dead. We need to get off the reserve. She won't be able to follow us that far.“

„I... I can't... can't leave her.“

„We can come back for her.“

Ken stopped crying, sniffled. „No. I can't do it man. Can't do it. Can't leave her.“

Harvey weighed his options. He could try to convince Ken to leave, but that plan didn't seem like it had a high chance of success. Even if it did, Ken would be baggage, slowing him down or giving away their position as they made their escape.

His other option was to continue to the border, leave the reserve on his own. But that meant leaving Ken here to be slaughtered.

Harvey didn't like either option, so he came up with a third.

There was an empty closet in one corner of the room. A dark, empty rectangle. Maybe a pantry at one time. Harvey stepped into the closet and looked out. It was perfect. Thick shadows kept him hidden, there was a wall at his back, and he had a view of the entire room.

And he had bait.

If he wanted a shot at killing Kaliska, he wouldn't find one better than this.

He settled into his vantage and waited.

She came an hour later. The attack was faster this time, more to the point. She leapt into the room through the empty window and landed with superhuman agility. Ken didn't even have time to scream before Kaliska tore his throat out.

Harvey took aim. The green light on the safety turned red. He pulled the trigger and stitched a line of gunshot wounds from Kaliska's left hip to her right shoulder. She dropped to the floor, howling in pain, choking on the blood that was already filling her lungs.

Harvey stepped from his hiding spot, over to where Kaliska lay on the floor. She whimpered as her chest rose and fell with short, rapid breaths. Harvey aimed the rifle at her face.

„You pull the trigger now, she won't make much of a trophy,“ said a voice just beyond the door.

Harvey looked up. Quentin stepped into the room. His clothes were torn, stained with blood. But the wounds underneath were already closed, nothing more than fresh pink scars. In his hand, Quentin held a small black remote control. When he pushed the remote's single button, something clicked and whirred inside Harvey's rifle. Harvey knew what it meant. The gun wouldn't fire at all now, no matter where he aimed it. He tossed the weapon aside and stepped back.

Quentin took a knee next to Kaliska, and put his hand near her snout. She licked his palm.

„I watched her kill you,“ Harvey said.

Quentin laughed, „Ha, this little pup here? Her and I play rougher than that when we're making the beast.“

„The bullets I put into her just now?“

„Fake silver. Will mess one of us up pretty badly, but won't kill us. We heal up real quick.“

„How long have you been one of them?“

„A few years now. I had a sickness in my bones. No cure.“

„So you became a werewolf.“

„Nothing kills a lycan but silver and old age, and we live a long, long time. But it wasn't about dying. That part didn't scare me. The disease was crippling me, kept me bed-ridden. I couldn't live with that. Not after spending my life proving I was at the top of the food chain. You see, this way, I still get to be a hunter.“

„But you've become a monster.“

„To the things I've killed, I've always been a monster. Only difference now is that I'm part of a different pack.“

„So what now?“

Quentin removed the collar around Kaliska's neck and stood. „Well, looks like she's going to be okay. So now the real hunt begins. If you head a mile north of here, you'll find another house, kind of like this one. In the main room there's a black bag. Inside that bag, guns loaded with silver bullets. Real silver. The kind that will kill me. If you can get to that, you've got almost a fair chance.“

„How much of a head start do I get?“

„Fifteen minutes. I usually only give'em ten, but you're a fan. One more thing though.“ Quentin tossed Kaliska's collar to Harvey. „Put that on. We don't want you losing your way, wandering off the reserve.“

Of course, when Quentin let him loose, Harvey didn't go for the bag of guns. He went for his own weapon, the submachine gun he'd brought in the trunk of his car. The one he'd almost left in the trunk of his car. When this night began, just before he'd entered the lodge and met Teddy, Harvey had taken the weapon from the trunk and walked fifty paces into the woods, where he'd stashed it in a hollow log. If he'd left the gun in his car, he'd have been a dead man. He'd scouted out the lodge, and found that it was guarded by other lycanthropes, all toting automatic weapons.

The log, however, was unattended. And when Quentin caught up with him—hours later, at dawn—the submachine gun was concealed inside Harvey's thick hunting sweater, tucked under his left arm.

Quentin's face had changed. His snout protruded, fangs had sprouted from his teeth, his eyes were pale green. Kaliska was with him, her wounds already healed.

„Harvey,“ Quentin said. „I hope you didn't think I was lying about the bag of guns. They're really there.“

„I believed you,“ Harvey said.

They were in a clearing, not far from the lodge.

„Maybe you thought our strength diminishes once the full moon goes away?“

„That thought had occurred to me, yes.“

„Well, sorry to disappoint you. We can pretty much change any time we want. We do like the full moon though.“

Harvey cut the conversation short. In a single, fluid motion he drew the submachine gun and opened fire.

Blood exploded from Quentin's chest. Kaliska darted for cover, almost dodging the burst of gunfire. Almost. Harvey had aimed for her torso, but the bullets struck her right leg as she moved and Harvey adjusted his aim. She hit the ground like a bag of dirt, howling.

Harvey walked forward.

Quentin was on his back, coughing blood. He eyed the gun in Harvey's hands.

Harvey explained, „Brought it with me. Stashed it in a log near the lodge. Bullets are real silver, made them myself.“

Quentin nodded, then lunged.

Harvey realized the mistake too late—he'd gotten too close. Pain surged up his leg as Quentin's maw chomped down on his calf.

Teeth sank into muscle, scraped against bone. Harvey screamed and held down the submachine gun's trigger, emptying the clip into Quentin's chest. Blood and mulched tissue sprayed from the wounds.

Quentin's jaw slackened. Harvey bent down and pried the dead man's teeth from the bloody bite wound. He could already hear others approaching through the trees behind him. The rest of the pack. He was outnumbered, outgunned, and he wouldn't get far on his wounded leg. He may have killed Quentin, but Quentin's bite had left him unable to run—it might as well have been a mortal wound.

Harvey estimated the rest of the pack would be on him in a minute. Not a lot of time to decide how he wanted to die. He bent down and pulled the tomahawk from Quentin's belt. There was one last thing he wanted to do.

His leg itched, but he barely noticed, the same way he barely noticed the crackling of burning wood in the fireplace, or Kaliska's soft snoring as she napped on a bearskin rug nearby. She was still recovering from the bullet wounds he'd given her that morning, almost a month earlier. In a while he would rouse her from her nap and they would rut in front of the fire.

But for now, he let her sleep. He was sitting in his favorite chair, deeply immersed in a paperback titled *Quentin Dagger: Chupacabra Sunrise*.

Teddy came in with a cup of black coffee.

„Enjoying the book?“

„Very much so. Thank you Teddy.“

Harvey returned to reading. He was at a point in the story where Quentin Dagger was stranded in a South American jungle, wounded, out of bullets, and surrounded by a tribe of cannibals.

On the page, Quentin said he was prepared to die.

Harvey knew the feeling.

The morning after the hunt, when the rest of the pack arrived, Harvey had been ready to die. They'd surrounded him. There were both men and women. All had protruding snouts, lupine eyes. They were armed, but none raised their guns. They just stood there, staring at him.

In one hand, Harvey had held Quentin's severed head gripped by a fistful of silver hair. In the other, Quentin's tomahawk, wet with Quentin's blood.

Finally, Teddy stepped forward and spoke.

„Welcome to the pack, Mr. Harvey.“

„What are you talking about?“

„Pack rules,“ Teddy said. „Quentin was our alpha male. You kill the alpha male, you inherit the job.“

The coffee was strong. The fire crackled. Kaliska slept. Quentin Dagger lived on the page. And Harvey liked his new job just fine.

