

“Must be wolves,” Brad confirmed, emphasizing the plural while patting Sally on the head. “Has to be more than one to have spooked Sally so badly.”

Sally suddenly let out a low growl and Brad would have reached down to try to calm the Alpha, his favorite girl...but he was sailing through the air now, his body slamming head-first into a tree before he could even begin to understand what was happening.

The constable barely saw the shadowy form that had rushed in and thrown Brad Samson like a sack of bread and by the time he heard the sickening crunch of Brad’s head caving down into his spine, it was too late to react.

There was just enough light, and just enough life left in Constable O’Reilly’s body for him to get a good look into the huge, maddening yellow and black eyes of the monster that stood before him, pulling the entrails from his overweight body. Blood splattered across O’Reilly’s face and eyes, and he would have fallen to his knees but the black-furred terror was not finished ripping at him. Finally, after a horrendous hand filled with razor-sharp claws tore the heart from his chest, the constable fell to his knees and collapsed. His face pushed into cold, damp fur and the last thought that he had was whether or not the stench that he smelled was coming from the thing that attacked him or from his own intestines as they were torn from him.

Elmert had staggered back and somehow managed to keep his footing long enough to turn and run. He didn’t even think to aim and fire the rifle. Instead, he pulled at his radio-holster, finally freeing it and bringing it to his mouth.

“Oh God help us,” He moaned as he pushed the talk button. “We’re attacked....we’ve been attacked...Oh Jesus God!”

Not waiting for a reply, he pushed the talk button once more, panic rising to the highest threshold, settling in his throat. “It’s not a bear!”

He heard something beside him and he forced himself not to look. And then he did look. He felt a momentary relief

seeing that it was Sally, running up beside him and now passing him and leaving him behind. He wanted to call the dog back...to yell 'wait' as if she might comfort him or help him.

Why was no one replying to his radio call?

"He's locked the talk button and can't hear me," Seffert said to Jaffey and Alan, who stood, their faces pale and mouths open. "He doesn't know he's locked the damned button."

The three men stood in the kitchen, staring at the radio. They heard only the occasional squawking that must have come from something hitting Elmert's radio. Elmert was obviously running, but from what? Where were the constable and Brad?

As if Elmert had read their minds, a panting, exhausted voice huffed over the radio. "I think their dead...Christ...I think it killed them. It threw Brad into a tree and it...it ripped open the constable's guts. God...his guts were flying out..."

"We have to do something," Alan said, the frustration and fear evident in his voice.

"We can't do anything until Elmert tells us where the hell they are."

It was Jaffey who spoke up. "We can get the pilots to search. Remember the transponders in their radios? They need help *right now*, corporal!"

Seffert leaned forward, grasping the edge of the counter with both hands. He shook his head. "Why the hell did the constable not wait until morning? It made no damned sense." He stepped back from the counter and avoided Alan and Jaffey's stares. "Damnit!" he yelled. "Damnit!"

Just then, they heard Elmert's voice. He sounded exhausted and as if he were in pain, barely getting in words between the deep breaths. "I'm putting the radio away so I can shoot. I haven't heard the thing behind me yet, but I am sure it's coming. It...it's not human...but it's, it's a nightmare...oh please God...please send help. Wake me up!" Elmert suddenly whispered. "Please God it's just a dream. If you can hear me...if anyone can hear me...please help."

Elmert put the radio in his Gore-Tex jacket pocket and held the M-16 to his shoulder. He clicked the selector switch to *automatic* and wrapped the sling around his elbow for support, and then he started running again. The night seemed to have become even darker since the attack merely minutes earlier. He was having more trouble seeing the trail in front of him and it was harder to see the trees. He feared tripping or running into one of the trees, but his fear of the monster he'd seen kill his two companions was much greater.

Monster...it was a monster. That Travis guy...he'd said the tracks were like a werewolf. Elmert felt a dull, slow pain in his stomach as he realized that Travis had been right. *Werewolf...there was no other way to describe it.* He switched hands so that he carried the rifle in his left, so he could dig into his right jacket pocket. He found the radio.

"It's a werewolf," he whispered, loudly, knowing how crazy it sounded. "It's just like Travis said....it's a no-shit, real werewolf." He ducked just in time to miss a low branch, and then found that he had entered a thicket. Brambles tore at him from all sides, slowing him to a walk as he tried to fight his way through. He could not turn back. The werewolf would be on its way now...surely having finished its killing of the other two men. Elmert said a silent prayer, asking that the mythical creature lose interest in him and go some other way...maybe after the dogs instead.

His hope died with the howl that came from so close behind him, maybe twenty yards away. Too close. Elmert put the radio back into his pocket, and an instinct other than flight finally began to kick in. *I have to fight!* There was no choice but to make a stand. If he wanted to live, he would have to confront the thing. With a heavy sigh, he stopped and turned, twisting away vines that pulled at his Gore-Tex jacket and hood. He crouched down and tried to catch his breath as quietly as he could. He had an M-16 and three, thirty-round magazines. No animal could withstand that firepower, right? He'd blow the things head right off its shoulders.

The young officer was tangled in the remnants of a massive thicket of summer vines. Though the blooms and green leaves were gone, the vines still carried their prickly thorns and hundreds tugged at him as he crouched and waited. The thicket would give him an advantage, he knew. He had made it perhaps two hundred paces deep into the brush...and if the creature followed, he would hear it coming long before it was close enough to attack.

Elmert's military and police training began to surface as he was forced to wait for his pursuer. He didn't consider that he had fled, leaving men behind. He did not feel guilt and he was controlling his fear. *He* had the weapon. He had an M-16 with 30 rounds locked and loaded, never mind the other loaded magazines in his Gore-Tex jacket. The creature could not possibly win now that Elmert was ready.

Was it truly a werewolf? Could it really be? How is it possible? A snap of a branch jolted him far away from his thoughts. The thicket was too dark for him to see more than perhaps ten feet, but surely he would hear the thing coming *long* before it reached him. He did his best to control his breathing...to slow down and keep it quiet—but he could do nothing to stop his trembling.

He heard it moan. The sound wasn't a howl like before. The sound was even spookier...a high-pitched moan. Elmert squinted in the dark as he tried to see...the damned thing sounded...human. Another snap in the brush as the bite of the chilled night air came back to Elmert's senses. He had been oblivious to the cold ever since he ran, but suddenly he felt ice from head to toe. So cold. The thing grunted ...maybe twenty feet away as Elmert strained to get a glimpse of the being. He slowly, ever so gently, pulled the M-16 into a better firing position, bracing the stock against his shoulder.