



The following is a progressive story, as told by nine authors and presented via blog posts on 2/2/10.

A Corpse, a Cop, and Canines

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Chapter One

By Alanna Coca

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“We can’t walk away.” Jessica held a hand over her nose and mouth. The stench of the bloating body was nothing like she’d ever encountered before. She’d already emptied her stomach behind a stump, but she had to swallow a few times to keep from gagging.

Casey had wrapped herself as tightly as possible in her denim jacket, as if that were the only thing keeping her from falling apart. “I just don’t want to get involved. You know they look at the people who discover the body as possible suspects.”

“And if they find out we were here and didn’t report it, we’d look even guiltier.” Jessica spun around and pinched her eyes shut. She couldn’t look at the naked corpse any more. The girl looked to be in her early twenties, her blond hair tangled in the tall grass and twigs. “Stay here. I’m going for help.”

Jessica ignored her friend’s protests, and hoped her legs would carry her back up the incline to the highway before she collapsed. She’d never seen a dead body before, and now her first happened to be a murder victim. It would be a long time before the vision of that girl’s death mask would leave her memory, and she’d never forget that smell.

She steadied herself on the still-warm hood, but before she could even get inside and to her cell phone, she looked down the highway to see a police car heading her way.

Thank God.

Jessica scrambled into the middle of the road, and waved frantically. Her heart drummed in her ears as she watched the cop pull over, his car facing hers on the shoulder, and flip on the flashing lights.

He was out of the car before she could reach him. “Car trouble?”

“Uh...” Good Lord. Jessica had to crane her neck in order to see his face. Broad shoulders, thick neck...damn. This had to be the hottest cop she’d ever seen. Black hair cut short, and thick dark eyebrows framing a set of gorgeous blue eyes.

She bit her lip, and let her gaze travel down his delicious-looking body, then back up, lingering on the handcuffs dangling from his utility belt. Before her imagination could get too far, she met his eyes.

Now, one of those brows had raised in amusement. "Need a jump?"

Oh yeah. She needed a jump all right. She knew her wicked thoughts showed, because He grinned, flashing a set of white teeth. She was mesmerized by his teeth for some reason. Almost like they were sharper than normal...fangs? Not likely. Snap out of it, Jess. Fangs. Ha.

"I've got a cable," he continued, those blue eyes shimmered naughtily.

"A cable?" Jessica's mind cleared, and she rushed back toward the incline. "No...no...we didn't have car trouble. We found a body. My friend and I were gathering limestone for an art project and we pulled over..."

Her words rushed out, and she only hoped she made sense. She must have, because she could hear him following her down the incline while she spilled everything.

Chapter Two

By Dee Carney

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“My friend tripped, literally tripped on the body. I mean, one minute we were walking along minding our own business, and the next, Casey’s ass over elbows, and splayed out only inches from this...this person!” Her voice rose in pitch as she spoke, panic and shock causing her voice to waver.

He smelled the sweet hint of coagulating blood long before they reached their destination. It overrode the clawing odor of decay and death lingering in the air. “How did you manage to be down here again, Ms...?”

“Singer. Jessica Singer,” she supplied after taking a deep breath. Big brown eyes turned to him before leaving just as quickly. “My friend and I are looking for limestone. She’s down there.”

That story was all well and good, but they walked well away from the highway, the fading twilight not sufficient enough lighting for her kind. Officer Anthony Sixkiller waited for her to continue the explanation, while taking in the dense shrubbery and trees surrounding them. He gripped her by the arm, pulling her close to him when she almost stepped into a circle of flowers.

“What the—”

“Fairy ring. Bad luck to cross.” Magic crackled in the air, but Jessica’s nearness teased that observation right out of his mind. Yeah, he should be focused on a dead body, or perhaps the thick perfume of energy hovering like a mist, but instead he found himself trying to ease closer to her.

She snorted. “A little late for worrying about bad luck. Besides, I wouldn’t figure you the type to believe in that sort of stuff.”

“What sort of stuff?” His grin widened, knowing damned good and well at her height she had a perfect view of teeth that weren’t quite human.

She marched forward, not noticing. “You know, fairies. That kind of thing.”

“And you don’t?”

“If I admit to believing in fairies, I’d have to admit in believing in all sorts of otherworldly creatures.”

He discerned the pacing figure of a slender woman further down the incline. Something about her set his teeth on edge, but he tucked the sensation away for scrutiny at another time. The scent of rotting meat took center stage, and commanded his immediate attention instead. "Would that be so bad?"

Jessica slowed and turned. "You're doing a good job of distracting me, you know."

"Feeling better, then?"

"Yeah. A little."

Not by a long shot, but he let her little lie go. He felt her fear, tasted it on his tongue and despite every instinct within him demanding he take her away from here, or at the very least pull her into his arms where he would protect her against the horrors of a cruel world, he withdrew a mini Maglite from his belt. "I'm surprised you didn't kill yourselves getting down here. Take this."

"Don't you need it to search for clues or something?"

"No. Take it." He'd already been scanning the area, the way clear as if the sun shone overhead. Heightened hearing picked up no unusual sounds, and so far, he couldn't see anything out of place. Except, he kept getting a whiff of something he couldn't quite put his finger on. A distinct odor he should be able to place, but kept eluding him.

Jessica tilted the light to her friend, still pacing a good fifty feet away from the body. "Casey, I brought help. Officer..."

"Sixkiller."

"Sixkiller," she repeated slowly. Anthony loved the way she said it. Testing the syllables. Seductive.

Shit this was going to be hard if he kept letting her distract him from the job he'd sworn to do. But those lush curves, her hypnotic eyes...

"Case?" Jessica swung the light into his eyes, and he winced against the glare. But then she swung it back around, landing with uncanny accuracy on her friend's face.

His nerves went on screaming alert. Every hair on the back of his neck stood straight on end. Some instinct made his top lip curl, baring teeth against an age old enemy. One whose scent he should have known from the very minute he stepped out of his car.

The friend. Casey. The woman pacing with a feral grace, whirled and faced

him, her back arching. A low rumble climbed through her belly and clawed its way into the air, morphing into a very pissed off sounding hiss.

Anthony Sixkiller stood his ground, unwilling and unable to stop the growl spilling from his own lips.

God damned cats. They were everywhere.

Chapter Three

By Juniper Bell

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Katherina felt the purr begin deep in the base of her spine. Come closer, dirty dog. A little closer.

The wolf paused, sniffing the air. She heard his hiss. Curses. After all she'd done to lure him here. What had given her away? The girl, Jessica, continued stumbling down the dark hillside. Katherina sighed in exasperation. Humans. How did they get from one day to the next?

"Casey," panted Jessica. "There's an officer here to help. We should make sure not to disturb the crime scene."

"Of course not, hon. I haven't touched a thing."

Jessica reached the ditch at the bottom of the incline. The wolf, Sixkiller, still stood halfway up the hill.

"Weird, I thought he was right behind me."

And then, suddenly, he was.

Jessica gave a little shriek. "How did you...?"

The wolf—admittedly a fine-looking man in his current incarnation—growled low in his throat. "Jessica, right? I suggest you step away. No need for you to get in the middle of this."

"In the middle of what?" Bewildered, the girl looked from one to the other. "You're freaking me out, Mr. Sixkiller. I mean, Officer. Casey, do you know what he's talking about?"

Katherina had had enough of the tiresome girl. Besides, she'd served her purpose. In a motion too quick for either Jessica or the wolf to catch she whipped out her long black tail and snaked it around Jessica like a lasso. She lifted the girl into the air.

"First of all, I'm only known as Casey to those I intend to toy with like little mice. Horrid name."

She shook the girl until her teeth rattled. "Now why don't you listen to the nice officer and step aside. This doesn't concern the likes of you." With that, she tossed the girl into the air once, twice—hey, a cat deserved a little fun after so much hard work—until the third toss sent her flying through the air in a perfect arc.

Katherina, whose eyes were fixed on the watchful blue gaze of Officer Sixkiller, didn't have to watch Jessica to know where she landed. Her cat ears twitched as she heard the dull thud of one body landing on another. She rolled her eyes as the inevitable mewling and retching followed.

"Humans," she murmured to the wolf. "Honestly, how do they manage?" With the tip of her tail, she flicked a strand of hair from her face.

"They manage quite well when left alone," said the wolf in a deep voice that made the hairs on her neck prickle.

She didn't like the feeling. Didn't like how still he stood, how he watched her so carefully, as if he was learning everything about her. She tossed her head. "I have to amuse myself. And you've been getting in my way."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"I demand that you stop."

"You're in no position to demand anything."

"Oh no?"

She prowled a step closer. How large he was. How broad across the chest, his muscles bulging inside the dull uniform. Even his thighs wanted to burst the seams. A prime hunk of animal trapped in clumsy human clothing. Again the purr rose through her body, her sensual side making itself felt. Maybe she could have a little fun with the wolf before shutting him down. Twine herself around him, let his big hands stroke her, rub her head against that fascinating lump in his uniform pants. Wolves and cats could mate when they took human form. She'd heard a few stories.

"Perhaps we should try a friendly negotiation. Put our...heads together." Her purr filled the velvety night air and mingled with his growl. His wolf scent, smoky

and harsh, made her head spin.

"I'm all for peaceful negotiations." He sounded amused. Her hand brushed the massive outlines of his arousal. "As long as you don't mind an audience."

From the trees, a wolf loped toward them. Then another, and another. Until Katherina realized they were surrounded. The pack had arrived.

Chapter Four

By Ann Marie Gamble

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Anthony growled a low warning and hoped the wolves would keep their distance. It would be scary enough for any human to have the pack circling. And this one was a nonbeliever—if anybody decided to shift before taking on the cat, Jessica's night was about to get even more difficult.

Unfortunately, a lot depended on Katherina. She backed off when she realized how many wolves there were, but she hadn't hidden her tail. The way she purred and spat as she taunted Anthony, he wondered how tight a grip she had on her form; she'd made it clear that she didn't care about Jessica.

He mirrored her movement around the clearing, circling so Katherina was no longer between him and the human. Katherina's eyes flicked from side to side, in counterpoint to her tail, locating the wolves who hadn't yet shown themselves.

"So luring humans into the woods is how you amuse yourself?" he pressed. There was a choked sob from the vicinity of the body; Jessica was conscious after the throw but not missing the import.

Katherina bristled at his accusation. "This mess has been left by amateurs. They don't know when to stop, or how to keep from drawing attention to us."

"Shifters did this?" Had someone gone rogue?

Katherina wrinkled her nose. "Your attributes are neither your brain nor your nose. Shifters are the target, Fido. And these junior mages finally got one." She stepped toward the corpse until a couple of growls warned her back.

Anthony mentally thumped his forehead. The edge of a smell he'd noticed but hadn't identified—the corpse was human now, but it hadn't always been. Wolves released a blast of pheromones and adrenaline when they shifted. In the presence of a human corpse, he'd unconsciously attributed the scent to the woman, or to the arrival of the pack. Before she'd died, this unknown woman had tried to shift; why hadn't she succeeded?

As he put the pieces together, Katherina's eyes glowed ice blue. He'd guess Siamese, but then checked his stance. Cats moved fast enough that they could

survive on birds; it didn't pay to underestimate them. "Why are you dragging a human into it?"

"She has a car," Katherina purred. Her circles were bringing her within touching distance again. "And are her art student friends"—she said it as one might point out cockroaches, or bacteria—"looking for sculpture supplies or mage stones?"

"There're channels for threats like this. You haven't engaged any of them." One of the wolves howled in derision when Anthony invoked shifter law and he growled back. It wasn't going to be rogue mages or modern life that did in shifters, but frickin' cats versus dogs.

Adrenaline rolled off the cat and his body was tightening in response. The air shimmered around both of them. He either had to get Jessica out of here—let the pack deal with Katerina and the body—or let her see one of them change. He stepped forward and Katherina fainted left but then sprang for the body. He was steps behind her and not nearly as light on his feet.

But Jessica hadn't just been cowering in the brush. As the others sprang into motion, she stood and hurled a stone that gleamed in the moonlight. Her aim was more than perfect; the rock lodged in Katherina's shoulder. The cat screamed and staggered back, caught or tripped by a couple of wolves.

As she writhed and howled, clawing at her shoulder, the hillock where Jessica and the corpse had lain shattered into flakes of something—light, he thought, but now the air was filled with silver leaves swirling through the clearing. A faint tinkling like bells cut through the barks and growls of the pack as they secured the space. Anthony swatted bits of silver aside to get to the human, but the hillock had been obliterated.

And Jessica had vanished.

Chapter 5

By Barbara Sheridan

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"Shit."

"With observational skills like that you'll make detective in no time."

Stifling a growl Sixkiller turned to face the owner of the softly accented snark. It would be his dumb luck to be saddled with playing host lackey to the current high priestess of the international shifter community. The decennial status check of shifter species couldn't begin on her home turf in Japan, no, it had to kick off in his backyard. Wonderful.

"Why, yes it could be, if we could spend the rest of the evening quietly discussing, pack matters in a relaxing private environment." Matsu breathed a perturbed little sigh then studied her pointed, lacquered red fingernails. "However, you've gone and cocked it all up—and not in the fun way." She stared at him, her eyes shimmering here and there with unearthly golden highlights in their umber depths.

The fox spirit was powerful, no doubt about it, and he had more than a passing supposition that she could solve his current dilemma and find the murderous mage. But she wouldn't.

Her low sultry laugh was like a slap to the face. Dammit. He'd best stop forgetting she could read his mind.

Matsu reached up and trailed her fingertips along his shoulder then down, circling the badge pinned to his crisp shirt. She peered just past his shoulder and he knew she was once more making eyes at his best friend and pack beta, Luke. She leaned in, "I shouldn't show you any favoritism but you and your friend remind me of a couple samurai I knew back in the Mibu days."

The kitsune's eyes were piercing in the darkness. "You clear this thing up tonight and I'll leave it out of my official report. And, if you're very quick about it, I just might be impressed enough to lift every one of my nine tails for you and your friend..."

As her words faded so did she and Sixkiller ran his hand through his close

cropped hair. He adjusted himself, willing his libido into submission then turned to Luke who'd approached but remained a respectful few paces behind.

"What do we do now, boss?"

"You split the boys and try to pick up the mage's scent. I doubt that car of hers will help but I'll toss it and run the plates just in case."

The car was a rental, big surprise there, but Sixkiller gave it a cursory inspection just in case. He'd checked it inside and out to no avail and was about to call a tow truck in when the crescent moon peeked from behind a cloud to hit the driver's side mirror.

Mentally kicking himself for not noticing the oddity sooner, he went round the car and pried the faux mirror from the mounting on the door.

Miss Jessica would be looking for this before too long.

Chapter 6

By Christopher Daley

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Sixkiller walked down the incline. He held the mirror in his hand and wondered how he had managed to miss every single clue. This was not going to go down as one of his proudest days. He knew something was still off. Some piece of the puzzle he was missing. Too many coincidences to lead them all here.

He looked over at Katherina. She was sitting on a rock licking the blood off her shoulder. Sixkiller snarled in disgust. He hated cats. Katherina looked up and smiled. Her tongue licked her lips.

"It looks like the stupid fox thinks we should be nice to each other," said Katherina.

"If by nice you mean not kill you today, than yeah."

"How sweet. It is refreshing to know I get to live another day."

"At least one, but there is always tomorrow," said Sixkiller.

Sixkiller walked back towards the body and sniffed the air. The smell of magic hung there. There were so many threads, he wasn't sure he would ever be able to sort it out. He decided it was time to start acting like a cop and trust his instincts.

"You can show yourself Jessica. I won't hurt you."

Sixkiller waited. There was powerful magic at play. He knew she was here somewhere, but he also knew he was probably not going to be able to force her out. The air in front of him began to shimmer and Sixkiller smiled. He would have to slow play this. He could smell her fear in the air as she blinked back into existence.

Jessica stood in front of him with tears streaming down her face. Sixkiller didn't know what magic she possessed, but she was in way over her head. Whatever she thought was going to happen out here tonight, this wasn't it.

"You're a mage." said Sixkiller.

"Sort of," said Jessica

"What do you mean, sort of?" asked Sixkiller

"I guess my dad was and he thought I might be one. I don't know. He died

years ago.”

“I am still not following.”

“I found his books and diaries. I didn’t really believe any of it. Then I started trying the trigger words on his trinkets and it worked,” said Jessica.

Jessica reached inside her blouse and pulled out a necklace. She put her hands around it and brought it up to her lips. She whispered something softly in the air and was gone. Sixkiller was impressed. Whoever had made the invisibility charm had been quite powerful. The air shimmered and Jessica’s tear streaked face reappeared.

“And this,” said Sixkiller holding up the mirror.

“It was my dad’s spell. His books said it could locate other mages. Tonight was the first night I have been able to make it work.”

Sixkiller tensed as he felt Katherina walk up next to him. Her tail still waving softly in the air began to curl around his waist. He knocked it off and stepped away. He was going to have to get rid of Katherina as soon as possible.

“How come I couldn’t sense your magic,” said Katherina.

“I don’t know.”

Something was still missing and it was going to drive Sixkiller crazy. Someone had killed a wolf. He moved back towards the body. It was ravaged. What had the power to do this to a wolf before it changed?

Katherina sensed it first. Every hair on her body began to tingle. She spun around and looked up the incline. Sixkiller and Jessica joined her staring up into the night sky. A low howl was hanging in the air as the body plummeted down smacking the ground a few feet from them.

Sixkiller ran forward and kneeled next to Luke. His friend was missing a big part of his neck and his right eye had been plucked from his face. His entrails spilled out onto the ground. Luke’s chest took one last shuddering breath before he died.

Jessica’s scream shattered his calm. Sixkiller growled as the figure of a small man moved to the edge of the hill and looked down. Walking up behind him was the biggest hell hound Sixkiller had ever seen.

“Oh, fuck!” said Sixkiller

Chapter 7

By Ray Garton

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Over the years, many people had told Dexter Manning that he had a drinking problem. He strongly disagreed. He was an alcoholic and he knew he was an alcoholic, and he didn't have a problem with it. Now, as he stood in the woods peering through bushes and branches, he wondered if his drinking had become a problem, because he wasn't sure if he was seeing what he thought he was seeing.

He'd been watching these people for a little while. He lived on the other side of this patch of woods in what amounted to little more than a shack. He regularly walked through the woods to go to the Hideaway, a little dive of a bar on this side of the woods. He'd left the bar at dusk and had been weaving and staggering his way home when he heard voices. There was never anyone in these woods besides Dex, so his curiosity won out. He'd found the source of the voices and watched from a safe distance.

He'd seen the body on the ground. What was left of it. And he'd seen a woman appear out of nowhere. Out of nowhere! Now, having followed some of these people a little deeper into the woods, he saw the body that had just been thrown to the ground from a distance, bloody and ripped open.

Dex watched long enough to determine that what he was seeing was real and not the work of Jack Daniels. He had to report this. He couldn't ignore something like this going on in what he'd come to think of as his woods. He walked away from the strangers as he removed his Jitterbug cell phone from the pocket of his denim jacket and punched 911. He cleared his throat and hoped he didn't sound as drunk as he felt.

"Nine-one-one. What is your emergency?"

"Well, it's like this ... "

* * *

Anthony watched the little man make his way down the hill. The hound followed him slowly, hanging back as its menacing eyes moved across their faces and scanned the surrounding area.

Xerxes walked with a wobbly sway, like a dwarf. But he wasn't a dwarf. His father was a leprechaun, his mother an elf. Xerxes himself was the Supervisor. His official title was Boundary Guard Supervisor, sort of like the chief of police, but instead of a gun, a taser and a baton, he was armed with magic. It was the job of Xerxes and the Guard to maintain the Boundary. As high priestess, Matsu had a lot of power in the shifter community, but Xerxes' jurisdiction included shifters, elves, sprites, sorcerers, vampires, and everything else in realm of the immortal, and his authority trumped Matsu's. The Boundary was the invisible barrier between them and the mortals with whom they shared the planet. The job of the Guard was to make sure the mortals remained unaware of them, to make sure the Boundary remained intact.

"Your friend gave me some trouble," Xerxes said to Anthony as he approached. "I've had a pretty shitty day, so I'm not in the mood for trouble. Okay?" His voice was a throaty growl. He had a broad face with a nose that ended in a fleshy bulb. His ears tapered to points on each side of the floppy knit cap he wore over his thick rusty hair. "This morning, I had to round up some werewolves who were scaring kids at a petting zoo in Arizona. Then I had to deal with a brawl started by a bunch of drunken trolls at a New Jersey flea market. Some smartass vampires got a little fuzzy on the concept of an all-you-can-eat buffet at a crowded Marie Calendar's in Toledo. Now I've gotta deal with you people." He looked at them, then his eyes settled on Katherina. "I understand this is your doing."

"That body?" she said. "I had nothing to do with it."

"Not the body. Her." He pointed to Jessica.

"Her?" Katherina said. "She's a mage."

"She's a mortal," Anthony said. "A dabbler."

The hell hound moved among them, sniffing, watching. As he neared Katherina, she lowered her head, stiffened her back and hissed.

"And you," Xerxes said to Katherina, "are messing with the Boundary. It's not the first time, either. You've been cited before, and this time, I'm inclined to take you in."

The other wolves were moving in slowly, intensely watching the hell hound. A low growl rose from the pack as they circled the small group, their orange eyes glowing in the dark.

It wasn't typical for a Boundary Guard to be accompanied by one of the hounds.

But then, Xerxes was more than just a Guard. Anthony guessed that Xerxes's day had been as bad as he'd described and he'd decided that having a hound along would be wise. But it wasn't wise in the presence of a pack of wolves. They did not get along. Bringing the hell hound was an invitation to more trouble.

To the wolves, Xerxes said, "You guys give me any trouble and I'll have a whole troop of Guards here in seconds and you'll all face a long detention."

Katherina yowled piercingly, then hissed. Anthony turned in time to see her swing a paw at the hell hound, which apparently had gotten too close for her comfort. Her claws slashed the hound's nose. The hound didn't make a sound, nor did it hesitate. It was on Katherina in half a heartbeat. Its massive jaws closed on her slender neck and it twisted its head with a jerk.

Katherina made a sound like a drain coming unclogged as her head flopped to one side and tumbled to the ground. An arc of arterial spray shot into the air as her body collapsed in a limp heap. The hound walked in a slow circle, licking its bloody snout.

Pointing at Katherina's body, Xerxes said, "That will go into my report as an act of self-defense. It will also make my report a good deal shorter, I'm happy to say. Now. Anyone else want to eliminate some paperwork for me?"

The growl from the wolf pack rose as they became more agitated.

Anthony turned when he heard another sound. It came from the road. Cars. He walked up toward the edge of the road and saw the red and blue lights of more police cars. The cruisers slowed to a stop, engines were killed and doors opened. By now they'd seen Anthony's cruiser and knew he was here. He turned to alert Xerxes, but the little man already knew.

Xerxes groaned as he scrubbed a palm down his face. Then he said, "Fuck me with a power tool."

Chapter 8

Heather Wildman

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The power tool came in the form of a high-velocity large-caliber silver bullet. It fucked Xerxes alright, fucked him straight to hell. He fell in a heap beside the corpse of the cat as a storm of bullets rained around them. The hell hound went down next.

Jessica sat huddled in a ball in the bushes. She knew better than to get in the way of a bullet doing its job, especially when surrounded by several tons of fur and teeth. She shuddered, hugged herself tight and watched the scene play out before her.

Wolves scattered in all directions, falling to the ground in lifeless heaps one after another under the expert marksmen on the bank above. A sudden rush of hot breath on her neck brought a scream to her throat, but the strong hand that covered her mouth stopped it short.

"Shhh," growled the voice in her ear. "It's Anthony. Be very quiet and don't move."

Her heart pounded. Anthony, sweet Anthony. She rested her hand on his leg and traced a nail over his firm thigh. His hand squeezed her cheeks then his grip loosened and he slid his fingers down her chest. Jessica turned in his arms.

"Oh, God," she murmured, burying her face in his neck and pressing close. "I thought I was going to die." She let out a quiet sob.

"Never." He stroked her hair and cradled her in his arms.

Her fingers wound round the hilt of the small silver dagger and slipped it from the inconspicuous leather sheath bound to her ankle beneath her sock.

"Oh, my sweet Sixkiller," she mumbled against his flesh, giving a gentle nip. "Don't ever let me go."

"I won't, once we get out of here." He held her out at arm's length, and in that instant, Jessica plunged the blade into his chest.

The man's scream echoed in the surrounding emptiness. She pulled it from

him, and plunged it deep a second time. The scream became a gurgling cry. Blood frothed on his lips, and he slumped into her arms, his mouth forming a single word.

“Why?”

Jessica grinned. Oh those poor pathetic beasts. They would never see humans as anything more than helpless beings. What had Xerxes said? A mortal? A dabbler? Who was the last one standing, now? Helpless? She laughed.

“Jess? Jessica?” The strong familiar masculine voice echoed down from the bluff. She smiled, her body reacting to his call. She pressed her legs together against her desire.

“Down here, Merle.” She called up to him.

Soon. Soon she would be at home, ravaging the man she had laid claim to, the man who shared her life and her passion for hunting beasts that thought themselves better.

Soon she would wrap herself around him, celebrate another victory for humankind. But first, they had to pay a visit to Dexter Manning.

Chapter 9

By Saranna DeWylde

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Anthony Sixkiller was dead--for all of nine minutes.

Letting that witch off, or getting her off rather, after pulling her over for speeding on the I-90 last year had been a boon. A blowjob from a woman that could suck-start a Peterbuilt and an invincibility spell? It didn't get any better than that. She was at home waiting right now for the third he was supposed to be bringing. Jessica seemed perfect until the cunt stabbed him with that silver pig-sticker.

No, he wasn't dead, but it still burned like a hooker with a yeast infection. So did this mess that the state cops were stirring up like gumbo. He'd heard her call out to Merle, a statie he'd played darts with at Hideaway on Tuesday nights. That two-faced son of a whore. He'd been a candidate for the pack. They would still turn him; they needed to replenish their numbers, but it would be the hard way. He'd be playing bitch.

People were dead, mortal and sup. The only way to clean up this raging shit pile was more blood. Not only so Matsu wouldn't crawl up his ass, but so he could get up hers.

Then there was Luke. His pack brother would never run with him beneath the kiss of the gravid moon, the pads of his paws would never again mark their passage through the soft-turned earth and his tongue would never again taste the joy of the hunt. He would also never challenge him for Alpha. So, he'd have to thank the meat bag for that.

Yet, rage still shot through his veins like molten lava. It was primal, territorial. It was an acid tearing at the meat of his façade, ripping away his mortal guise and as his already defined muscles tightened and twisted, Anthony Sixkiller shed his humanity with his skin beneath the dark arch of the night sky.

The scents and sounds of the night bombarded his senses. The fox scurrying back into her burrow, the owl swooping from his perch and the rancid stench of the young bipeds mating in the backseat of an old car. None of these

interested him, none but the pheromones of the mage-woman and her mate.

They'd joined, high on victory and bloodlust, rutting like the sub-creatures they were there in the woods with the blood of his pack still on their hands.

He caught the male alone. Merle was taking a post-coital piss and humming a soft tune. Sam the Sham's Little Red Riding Hood. He'd have to kill him on principal now anyway.

Sixkiller waited, rising up on two legs behind the human. He opened his jaws and dripped saliva down onto the man's bare shoulders, breathing hot, fetid breath against his ear.

That's how they did it in the movies, after all.

Merle's mouth opened and he screamed like a bitch. Sixkiller clamped his massive jaws around his thigh, predator's teeth crunching through fascia and bone. Merle struggled, the high-pitched sound still screeching from the tightening vocal cords.

It made Anthony's dick hard, so he close his jaws until those brutal teeth met in a facsimile of a smile. Then he frowned. There would be no rising for Diana's Kiss for this one as in his glee, Anthony had torn the femoral artery.

Merle was dead.

The beast used his claws to sever the head from the body. His little witch didn't like to eat anything with a face. He didn't understand it, but that didn't mean he wouldn't do as she asked.

Now, for the female.

He could hear sounds of a struggle and smell the sweet musk of her adrenaline coming from inside the nearby cabin. Dexter Manning's cabin. Anthony hoped he wouldn't have to kill Dexter--he could be turned. Such a gift he was going to give the unassuming little hermit.

Sixkiller crashed through the door, the wood splintered beneath him. He slammed right into the silver pigsticker again. He was going to cram that thing up that bitch's ass before he was done.

Anthony swiped at the woman before she could use her magic and sent her sprawling.

Dexter lay in the corner, blood oozing between his fingers as he tried to staunch the flow of blood from his shoulder.

"Please, I'm sorry!" He held up his hand.

Sixkiller bit the hand that the man held up in his face. What else was he supposed to do, anyway? He wasn't a dog.

The stench of urine filled his nostrils and he wrinkled his snout at the offensive stench. Maybe he hadn't been such a good addition to the pack after all. They'd deal with that later. He still had a long night ahead of him.

He turned his attention back to the woman and stood on two legs as he hauled her over his shoulder. He had a pair of magical cuffs in his cruiser that would keep her from doing anything that he didn't want her to do. His claws scored the prime bits of her ass as he held her anchored there and he found he quite liked the shape of her. He even liked it that she'd tried to kill him.

His cock was hard again as he thought of the room in the basement and all of the magnificent toys that they would use on her. He hoped she'd last longer than the previous mage-woman.

Sixkiller was sure they'd get at least two days out of this one.