

HUNGRY LIKE A WOLF  
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He was getting that itch again. He always thought of it that way. *Compulsion* sounded far too clinical. As if he might be psycho. No, it was an *itch*. And it usually came this time of year, late October after a long summer season. It also came near the time of the full moon, something he had noticed several years ago. Whatever. He didn't get it every season. Sometimes years went by. Although he had to admit, it had been close to nearly every year for the last decade or something around there. He didn't keep track. He didn't think of it *liar* except when he itched.

Patrol Officer Daniel Jacksel put on his sunglasses and surveyed himself in the mirror. A *damn fine looking man*. And the shades were perfect. The mirrored lenses completely hid his eyes, not letting his prey see where he might be looking, and *professional*. These were the most expensive aviator sunglasses Ray Ban made. He didn't often get to wear them, but once in a while, and they looked great. His uniform was just back from the cleaners, fresh and crisp. His badge shone from his broad chest next to his medal for bravery, his sargeant's stripes balancing out his massive shoulders.

He took off his sunglasses so he could admire his ice-blue eyes. Clear and bright as ever. *Not so, they're getting milky, cataracts, you're losing them*. He blinked. The white glaze he thought he'd seen was gone. *My eyes are playing tricks on me*. He shrugged it off. No one looking at him would ever guess he had just turned fifty five. He didn't look a day over forty. *Except for that tic*. He watched his face closely, there was no tic. What had he been thinking? *Scratching the itch is catching up, its damaging us that's what we were thinking*. He hadn't heard himself think that. He dropped his sunglasses into his breast pocket and headed to the cruiser.

His captain had always wondered why he was willing to still work graveyard. Graveyard indeed, ha ha. If only the captain knew. Jacksel had enough seniority that he could insist on day shifts only. Sometimes he switched, usually in winter when the days were mild and the nights were cold. Then he could wear his sunglasses. But he preferred to work graveyard. He got more action at night, he had explained. Most police responses were needed at night and it kept him busy and made the time go faster. And besides, predators were nocturnal. He'd told his captain this more than once. The old fool had never understood.

He unlocked his cruiser but before getting in, checked his equipment belt. The gun of course, a nine mike, lightweight and rapid fire. He'd used it more than once. He had a taser strapped to the other leg. There was a baton in the vehicle. He seldom wore it anymore. Batons and heavy flashlights had gone out of style with the advent of the tasers. He had a can of mace and backup clips for the gun. And his handcuffs. He smiled to himself as he fingered his

handcuffs. They were his favorites. He had many fond memories involving them. And last, the small folding knife with its wicked sharp serrated blade in his lower pocket. He had many fond memories of that, too.

So, to what haunt tonight? He loved that word, “haunt”. He had read in some horror book, he thought it was Stephen King’s “It” that one definition of “haunt” was “watering hole or other area where animals gather where predators hunt them.” It was an excellent definition. He had a number of haunts. Which one tonight? He considered several and finally picked Eddie’s Gas and Goodies out near where the interstate exits turned traffic onto either highway 35 or Old Mill Road. Yes, that was where he would be haunting, he thought with a grin. He got into the car, turned on the ignition, put it into gear, and headed off towards the interstate.

He blinked. He’d missed his turn. It was as if he’d fallen asleep at the wheel. He was on McCloughlin Road, and had just driven past the turn off to Eddie’s. Automatic driving, he thought. Happens all the time. You head out towards a usual destination and your mind goes on automatic pilot and you just don’t pay attention to where you are going. *Except we never go this way.* And he was probably just tired after a long work week. *It’s happening more and more. We’re losing our grip. It’s the stress of keeping all those secrets locked up.*

Cursing, he pulled into a driveway and turned around. At least he didn’t need to worry about being late. It’s not like he was on a call. It was barely after midnight. He had lots and lots of time. He got to Eddie’s and parked under the shadow of a large live oak that shaded the remote corner of the lot. The pumps were well lit, but this part of the pavement was in darkness. From here, he could see whomever drove in to fill up on gas. Eddie’s was pay inside, so any driver stopping to fill up would have to get out of the car and go into the store, giving him a good look. His ideal target would be someone pulling off the interstate to fill up on gas, who had no reason to be stopping in Oakdale, Louisiana, who was from somewhere else and going somewhere else.

The moon was full, and tonight a harvest moon. He loved those, although several years ago its bright light almost gave him away. It had been a close call. But, he thought with a grin, close only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades.

His quarry showed up just slightly after two in the morning. He was actually out of his car stretching his legs when the Buick drove up. He thought it was a Buick. It was so old, circa 1950’s that it was hard to tell. He didn’t actually see any car symbol on it. He couldn’t make out from the plate where the car was from, not enough light, but he could tell from the colors that it wasn’t local. A woman got out, a Negro. He had never changed to calling them Black. The perfect quarry.

He had learned this starting at the age of twelve. His mother had described him as “high spirited,” at that age, his father used the phrase, “a hand full.” The result was summer stints with his uncle Lester in the small rural county Sheriff’s office. It was supposed to keep him out of trouble. If only his parents had known. The office was an ancient brick building from the last century that had housed half a dozen holding cells, office space, “interrogation” rooms, a

dispatch center, slightly removed from the rest as it was for females, and general equipment area with the cruisers parked in a dirt lot in back under four ancient live oaks.

He would come in and stare with fascination at the equipment involved in “sheriffing” which included shotguns, long guns, pistols, handcuffs, batons, handcuffs (still his favorite) shackles, leg chains, “black betty” saps, ropes, and back by the cell block, a razor strop which his uncle told him was still employed on occasion but “unofficial.” He had also been exposed to the use of a polygraph machine, in and out of favor, and just once, a traveling electric chair that had been used to execute the most famous occupant of their locale, a Negro named Big Mike accused of strangling Miss Betsy Simpson, for her jewelry. To Jacksel’s everlasting satisfaction, he had been allowed a peak at the condemned man, a look at the murder scene photos, and the awesome machine itself. He had not been able to actually see it in use, since the event took place one minute after midnight and he had been only fourteen at the time. His father considered his request to watch, thinking it educational, but his mother had vetoed the idea.

And then there had been what happened to Melvin Drower. Melvin had been a Negro. Jacksel had been seventeen that year, old enough. Things in the south had been changing. The NAACP had been coming up with money to represent the indigent, which was, of course, every Negro in the county who got arrested. Federal judges had started meddling in local affairs. A man could no longer count on things being the way they’d been, meaning, open and shut jury verdicts. Once a case got to court, anything could happen. The locals decided that Melvin Drower wasn’t going to get that chance. Lacey Corbett had said it was rape. Never mind that her hulking husband Brad would have beaten her to a bloody pulp if it had been anything else. Everyone knew Negroes just waited their chance. It had been explained to him that it was up to the men who maintained order in the county to make sure the right thing got done. They got a rope. They also used the razor strop to good effect before anyone got around to using the rope. He’d been able to participate, being nearly a man at his age. His father had known, but looked the other way, and his mother had never been told.

Back in those days, there was no risk. People didn’t even bother with masks or hoods. He had recognized every man who had participated. The group, he refused to think of it as a mob, had included every member of the sheriff’s office, as well as the local municipal judge, and old man MacIntyre who owned more land than everyone else in the county put together. A very respectable group of the county’s leading citizens. It had been explained to him that the fate of the Negro was up to the Whiteman. It was how God had ordered things, and how they did things in the South. God Bless Dixie.

And all these years later, that basic fact hadn’t changed much. Law enforcement in rural counties were still pretty much beholden to no one but themselves. If a Negro woman left one place to go to another and never arrived at her destination, not much happened. No one went looking. And the bodies had never been found. *Not yet, but it’s getting close. You’ll go to the well once too often. They find one, they’ll find them all. They’ll know it was you.*

He shoved the nag out of his head and walked closer to the car to see if he could make out what state it was from. There was too much mud on it for him to get much detail, but he

could clearly make out the words, “Lupus”. How like a Negro to put vanity plates on a junk heap. And why would anyone put the name of a disease on their car? Probably because the wreck looked like a disease, he thought with a grin.

He debated going into the store to get a closer look at the driver. The clerk would see them in close proximity and might actually remember if anyone asked questions later. What was he thinking? Eddie hired teenage tardos who spent the shift stoned to get them through the night shift. He wouldn't be remembered. *Stupid stupid risk. Your judgement's going to hell because of this compulsion.* He walked into the store without looking around, no point in acting suspicious, and went to the back to the beer coolers. He was about to pick up a six pack when he remembered that he was in uniform. Would NOT do for a uniformed officer on duty to be buying beer. *You're losing your grip.* He shut the cooler door and went over to the dairy section and selected an old pre-wrapped sandwich that held no appeal. Oh well. He wasn't here to get food, anyway. He was hungry, but not that way.

He turned around and froze. POLICE. A local sheriff was staring at him. He reached for his gun the same time the other man did, and relaxed. He was looking at his own reflection in the cooler glass. Hey, I look pretty official. *You're losing it. You've got to stop this. Buy the sandwich and get back to work. Check in with dispatch and head back to town.*

He walked slowly up to the counter and saw his quarry was still there, counting out change from an ancient change purse. He could have sworn he wasn't making any noise but the woman suddenly heard him in back of her and looked up and over her shoulder at him. She smiled. My, what big teeth you have, Grandma. He blinked. What had looked like huge teeth had reassembled to a slight over-bite with mildly pronounced canine teeth. He smiled back. She turned away, finished her purchase and left.

Nice and small, he thought as the clerk rang up his purchase. That's how he liked them, nice and small. And tight jeans. Had she been wearing jeans? He tried to think. He looked over at the door, but he couldn't see anything. She's gotten back to her car-that was fast- and the lights were in his eyes. What had she been wearing under that fur coat? No, she couldn't have been wearing a fur coat at this time of year. The temperature was still in the low 80's. Why had he thought she'd been wearing a fur coat? Must be some type of association, he told himself as he walked back to his cruiser. She must have reminded him of someone he remembered as wearing a fur coat. That type of association was how the mind commonly worked. *No it's not. You thought you saw fur.*

He started the cruiser and headed out down Larson road, suddenly realizing that she'd gotten to her car so fast that he might lose her. He thought she'd headed out in the direction of Larson road, but maybe not. There were other places to turn off. She might, in fact, have looped back and gotten back on the interstate. Fuck, that clerk must have taken forever to ring him up. Damn pothead.

He hit the gas and thought about activating his over-heads and siren to slow her down, but that would never do. Someone else might take note of it and he hadn't checked in with dispatch in two hours and couldn't afford to attract attention to himself. He saw tail lights ahead

of him on a car low to the road. That might be hers. Hopefully, it would be. Not too many people were out and about at this time. Another hour and the drunks would be headed home, but not yet

As he gained on the other car, he slowed down. If it wasn't her, he didn't want to draw attention to himself. *Let's hope it's not. Then we can give this up and be safe, or someday you will look up to see the police and that will be that.* It was her. He could make out her snob plates, LUPUS. He slowed and fell back a little. This was not a good place to pull her over. Larson Road held most of the traffic in the area and anyone could come along at any time and spot him. There also weren't too many places for her to pull over since much of the shoulder dropped down into a steep ditch. The last thing he needed was for her to stop in the middle of lane and force him to block it, making it impossible for anyone driving by to not notice.

He liked this part of the game. He could pull her over at any time, but there was no hurry. There were better places than here, but either way she was already in his sights, already in the trap. He whistled a tuneless song, thinking happily of what lay ahead.

And then he got unbelievable lucky. She pulled off onto an old side road that went up to the park. No one would be along on this old road, not at this time of night. Most of the road was shaded with live oaks as well, almost completely hidden from view. Perfect. He activated his overheads knowing there was no one to see them, but he didn't use the siren in case someone was in earshot. The ancient Buick, if that's what it was, slowed, crawled, and then stopped. He pulled in back and stopped. He got out of the car, dropping the baton into its ring on his belt. Not that he'd need it. This was just an old habit. Once out of the car, he realized he'd stupidly left his over-heads on. He didn't need them now and someone might see them. But he couldn't go back and turn them off, she would realize something was up.

They must be near some crops that had been watered recently. There were shallow ditches filled with water near both cars. His red lights made the water look like blood. He stepped gingerly, grimacing that the thought of his polished boots getting muddy. He took his flashlight out of its holder and clicked it on as he got closer to the car.

She had already rolled down her window, although the car was so old it might not even have a window. Big brown eyes. The better to see you with, my dear.

"Is there something wrong, officer?"

He looked down at her; petite, dark skinned, wearing a white t-shirt and jeans. Her radio was on. He recognized the song, but it took him a moment to place it; Hungry Like a Wolf. He smiled. He liked that song. *That was the one Diane Downs was listening to when she shot her kids. She's spending the rest of her life in prison.*

"I need to see your driver's license, insurance, registration," he said in a toneless professional voice; neither hostile nor friendly, just businesslike.

"Was I speeding?"

"I need to see your license, insurance, and registration. And remove your gloves."

"Excuse me? Remove my what?"

He blinked again. He looked at her slender hands resting on the steering wheel. Why had he thought she had been wearing gloves? Her hands were just brown. No, they had looked,

looked, furry. The overheads from his cruiser was playing tricks on his eyes. *Blue and red lights made her hands look furry?* The woman took her hands, which he noted were devoid of any rings, good, not married, off the wheel and she dug into an old brown bag on the seat next to her. Waiting for her, he noticed an odd smell coming from the interior of the car. He smelled the cars he pulled over as a matter of course these days, expecting marijuana. This wasn't anything like that. He didn't recognize it, but thought it most likely chicken bones several weeks old. Probably another Negro who loves KFC.

She handed him her license and he inspected it with his flashlight. The photo looked as if had been taken recently, but the license itself was so old that most of the print seemed to have worn off. He couldn't make out an address or a date of birth, but he could read the name.

"'Lu Garou,' What kind of name is that?" he asked with a smile. She smiled back. No, she hadn't smiled, she'd pulled her lips away from her teeth.

"It's French, officer. Is that pertinent to my driving?" He question came in a sharp tone of voice.

"Step out of the car."

"Why?"

"I don't like your attitude. Step out of the car."

"Does your procedural manual say anything about making decisions based on attitude?"

"Look, lady, I can't read a damn thing on this license. It doesn't even look like a real one to me, and you failed to produce either your insurance or your registration. You are not cooperating, and that indicates we have a problem here, so step out of the car."

"Why don't I just give you my registration and insurance card? I gave you my license because that's what I got first. I can get you the other documents."

"You've already clued me in to the fact that we have a problem here. When an officer tells you to do something, you do it. You don't argue and give me any lip."

"I am offering to cooperate. I am offering to get you the documents you need to have. Do you want me to get you my registration or not?"

"I want you to get out of the car. Now. Don't make me tell you again."

The woman sighed, took her keys out of the ignition and place them on the dashboard. Moving very slowly, she reached over and unfastened her seatbelt, and unlocked the door. She hesitated.

"You're sure we can't just work this out? I'll get you my registration," she offered again.

"Ma'am. Get out of the vehicle."

"We have all this nice portable steel between us, an incomplete, but still effective barrier, providing safety, and you want it out of the way, is that it?" she asked, finally opening the door and stepping outside.

"You worried about your safety?" he asked, reaching for his handcuffs.

"Oh, I'm not worried about *mine*."

The overheads were still flashing, still making the water near the roadway look like blood when a city police officer's cruiser drove up and parked behind Dan Jacksel's sheriff's cruiser.

Another sheriff's cruiser pulled over in front. One man got out of each car, automatically dropping a baton into the baton ring on the belt, and switching on flashlights.

"I see something brown over in that ditch, about fifteen feet over," said the deputy sheriff to the younger city police officer.

"Right color to be a uniform. Can't quite make it out though," said the cop.

The two slogged through the muddy ground to get a closer look at the object in the beam of their lights both wincing at the damage being done to the shine on their polished black shoes.

"Those damned lights are making all the water look like blood," commented the cop. "Oh my God, it's a body. It's his body! It is blood, he's got blood all over him."

"Check his neck for a pulse," instructed the older man, playing his light over the soaked and splattered brown and black uniform. The younger man kneeled down and reached forward.

"He ain't got no neck. It's like his throat's been ripped out."

The older man stepped across the body, which was lying on one side, to take a close look at the front. His light played over the bloody spot where the stomach had been and found intestines pulled out and scattered around the body, gashes visible in the fabric of the shirt around the wound.

"What the hell did this?" asked the young man in a quaking voice.

"If I didn't know better, if I didn't know it weren't possible in these parts, I'd say a wolf got him."