

August's Doom

FPD Case File: August Middleton

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"By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes."
From *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

"that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all—here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come."
From *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

Hunting

"August!" she called. I forced a smile, recognizing the voice even from a distance. Turning, I faced the girl- no, she really was a woman- and started walking towards the source of the sound. She stood with her father, one hand draped through his arm. The young woman looked so much like her mother who on her other side, back stiff and chin up. Really, for a young farmer, I couldn't do much better than Miss Henrietta Miller.

"How do you do, Miss Miller?" I asked, removing my hat. I liked Henrietta, really I did. I absolutely loathed her uptight parents. "Ma'am, sir," I continued, nodding to both parties. Her father nodded back while her mother pretended I didn't exist.

"I am well," Henrietta replied. "Would you be so kind as to escort me home?"

"Of course," I said, putting my hat back on and offering her my arm. She removed her hand from her father's arm and laced it through mine. When I started walking, she kept pace. I had to slow my pace and shorten my stride to walk with Henrietta. Her long skirts and fancy shoes didn't allow her to walk faster. Besides, it wasn't seemly.

Yesterday, I'd finalized the marriage negotiations with her father. We were now officially betrothed. Yet, my mind wandered more towards the hunting trip with my brother Ned later that night than towards the lovely young lady at my side. The moon would be full, so we'd have plenty of light while hunting this evening. We were going deer hunting, trying to feed our family for the winter.

Of course, that's why I had to marry Miss Henrietta Miller. My family would starve if we didn't have some more help or less

mouths to feed. Ned, my younger brother, was eighteen and courting a woman himself. Our younger sister, Margaret, at twelve was still only a girl. George and Martha were still children. With our father so sick, his time in the fields was limited. He did what he could, but most of the work fell to Ned and me.

We arrived at the Miller's home in the center of town. No long wagon rides for them just to get into town. Mr. Miller owned the single store in town, which sold everything from flour to needles and thread. Other than the mayor, he was probably the most important man in town. I'm still not totally sure why he agreed to allow his daughter to marry into a family like mine, but I was grateful.

"Would you care to stay for dinner?" Henrietta asked.

"I can't," I said. "I'm sorry. My mother is counting on me to watch the children today so she can go visit her sister." Ned would be away with his own girl and Margaret couldn't do the heavy lifting needed to keep the fire burning. She'd broken her wrist only last week, and the doctor said she couldn't use it.

"Next week, perhaps?" she asked. There, in that moment, the look in her eyes showed me why her father had agreed to her marriage with me. Henrietta loved me. I liked her, we were friends, and I wasn't at all upset about marrying her. I thought she'd make a good wife and a good mother. But I'd never tried to be in love with her, my family was too much on my mind. The same could not be said of Henrietta.

"Of course," I told her, smiling at her. Truly smiling, perhaps for the first time. "I would like that. And I'll still come tomorrow evening to call, if you'll have me."

"I'll be waiting," she answered. "Goodbye, Mr. Middleton."

"Farewell, Miss Miller." When I kissed her hand, I actually meant it.

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Ned and John were waiting for me when I came into the barn that night. John, Ned's best friend, carried a rifle slung over his shoulder. Ned had both mine and his in the crook of his arm. He handed me mine as I set down the hoe I'd been using in the fields.

"Ready?" Ned asked, excitement in his voice.

"Sure thing," I answered. "Let's go."

The three of us trooped out of the barn and into the nearby woods. For a time, we walked together through the trees. None of us said anything, because what was there to say really? John's family wasn't much better off than ours. His sister's young husband was killed while out in his boat on the river. She and her young son had moved back into their father's house. John was the only son in his family, and now had to help support his sister and nephew as well.

"I'll head this way," Ned said, pointing. "John, you go that way. August, you keep on straight ahead. If you catch something, holler."

"Sure thing," I answered. We split off, each to find a separate place to sit quietly and wait for a deer's appearance. Ned's favorite tree worked well but that was off in his direction. I kept walking, searching the ground for prints to see where deer had traveled and might return.

A sudden gap in the trees allowed me to look up at a tiny bit of the sky. I could see the moon, shining full and bright. I liked the moon this way most of all. When its light shines down through the trees. Everything is so crisp and clean in the light of a full moon. I especially liked it this month, my birth month, my namesake month. August.

That's when I heard the first howl. We don't normally have a big problem with wolves out here; so even though my thoughts immediately raced to wolves, I dismissed the thought. Probably just a dog.

I kept walking, not finding many traces of deer in this part of the forest. Angling north, I kept going. Another ten minutes brought me to a promising-looking clearing. Kneeling in the undergrowth, I studied the signs.

Another howl split the air. That stupid dog would run off all the prey in this area. If he kept going off like that, there'd be no game at all tonight.

The growl stopped my thoughts mid-track. I whirled, still on my knees, and brought the gun up to my shoulder. Sighting down the barrel, I searched the semi-darkness for the source of that sound. For a frozen moment, I stared down the length of my gun in perfect stillness. Nothing moved in the dark. Inexplicable terror filled my body.

Slowly, I stood to my feet. Out there, somewhere, was something I didn't want to meet face-to-face. I began to back away from where I'd heard the sound. My brother was out there somewhere, and I had to get him out of the woods.

And then ... there it was.

The huge shape prowled the edge of the darkness just under the trees. The faint moonlight in the clearing couldn't touch whatever was growling there. Instantly, I brought my gun back to my shoulder, barrel pointed at the object, finger on the trigger. But I didn't know what it was, I couldn't shoot it. If it was a bear, my shot could just make it angrier.

I began to edge away, still moving slowly. My whole focus was on that darker bit of blackness so I didn't see the tree branch I tripped on. I strained my eyes to see into the utter blackness on the other side of the clearing, but to no avail. In the moment I fell, the thing moved. I got off a shot before I landed on my back, but it went wide and never reached its target. As I hit the ground, all the air whooshed out of my lungs.

The thing wasn't a bear, it was a wolf. But this wolf had drool running down its chin and madness in its eyes. Its dark brown fur was matted and clumped. All this I noticed as it crouched above me. Not attacking, but boasting, I think. Boasting in having bested me. Its snarling teeth in my face were a sickly yellow and its breath smelled of rotting things I didn't even want to consider. The growl emitted from low in its throat.

"What do you want?" I asked it, like a fool. As if this slaving monster of a wolf could answer me. My gun was trapped under its body. To shoot now, I'd risk hitting myself as much as it. The thing growled at me again. Deep, menacing, and slowly building. I glared back at it, but the growl truly scared me. The worst part was that there wasn't anything I could do.

Then, it began to bite.

The first ripping sensation hit my shoulder. I screamed with the blinding pain of it, but the thing did not stop to feed. Again, it ripped at my other shoulder. I could feel its claws in my arms, my sides, my stomach. Feel its teeth sink into the meat of my flesh. I could hear the sound of my muscles ripping away from bone. Smell the blood pooling around me.

Overwhelming, deep, and red. The pain flashed before my eyes, ate at my skin, and stole my world. I heard ... something.

The growling stopped, instead replaced by a whimpering. A shot rang through the clearing, loud and stark. That one sound brought me back better than anything else. A shot. My brother. Ned. Ned was in the clearing with *that monster!*

"No!" I screamed. I tried to get up, to move. Tried to do anything, something! I couldn't let that *thing* get my brother. I screamed with the pain that ripped my body in pieces. I couldn't move. I couldn't save him!

"Hush, August, hush," Ned's voice. His face, before my eyes, was the greatest relief I'd ever had. I could see his blue eyes, just a shade lighter than my own. "Just hush now, I'm here. I'm here."

Another, darker, figure behind him. This one still had the gun raised to his shoulder. John. John was here also, watching over Ned. Good. If I couldn't watch his back, John would take care of him.

The pain washed over my vision. I saw red. Then black. Then nothing.

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I opened my eyes. Everything came back to me in a rush and I sat up quickly. I felt no pain. No pain?

The room was dark. Room? I recognized this room. I'd only been here once, when John's brother-in-law died. He'd come to check the coffin, and needed moral support. I'd been the one, since Ned had a weak stomach.

Yes, there they were. The coffins of all sizes along the wall. Just waiting for death. For someone to come, claim one, and be lowered into the ground. I looked down. Someone had dressed me in my best suit. The one I wore when going to church or calling on Henrietta. But the scariest part... *nothing hurt.*

Where my wounds should have been, there was no pain. I could use my arms, sit, even stand. No ripping sensations as my muscles stretched over bone. When I climbed out of the coffin, there was something different. Something foreign.

Looking out the window, I could just barely see the sun. In just a few moments, it would vanish beyond the horizon and true dark would fall. I wondered how long I'd been in this room. What

day was it? Why had my family left me here, rather than at home in my own bed?

That's when I knew. They'd thought I was dead. Dead from terrible wounds. Wounds that should have killed me. I should be dead. Yet here I stood. Why?

The sun. I glanced out the window again just as it vanished. Something about that sky. The full moon, but not quite, was already high in the sky. Somehow, I knew it was the night after the full moon. One night beyond that perfect roundness. My body twitched.

And I begun to Change.

I leapt through the window, growling my joy. My body twitched, spasmed, and convulsed, but somehow I kept moving for the forest. I didn't know why, but that open space drew me in. Drew me towards it like a river moving downstream. I had to go.

Then I was running, but on all four legs. My body fell over, just inside the tree line. I could hear the bones crack, tendons pop. I could feel my skin rippling, like waves in the lake. The pain laced up my back, down my limbs, shot through my head like a shotgun blast. A prickling sensation crept along my skin until I felt ready to burst.

I screamed, but it wasn't my voice that came out. Something between a human scream and that pitiful sound a dog will make when you hit it too hard. A whimpering sound. Fur sprouted on the back of my hands, my legs, and grew in clumps and patches, covering parts of me, then fading away.

Suddenly, the bones stopped crunching and the fur grew evenly. All at once, everything seemed to fall into place. When the pain faded, I could stand. But not on two legs, like before. Now I walked on four. The posture was as instinctive as it was unnatural. My four-footed gate was clumsy at first, but gained confidence as I moved. Once around the clearing at a walk. Again, faster. Soon, I was running full out.

Then I stopped. What was I doing? I had to go home and tell my family I was alive. They'd be worried sick when they couldn't find my "body." Losing me would break my Mother's heart. Ned would have to take over all the chores alone.

I looked down at my body. Covered in fur, running on four feet, a tail wagging behind me. And suddenly, it hit me. I was a

wolf. A strong, sandy brown wolf. Lifting my muzzle to the sky, I screamed. Only, that's not what it sounded like this time.

My mournful howl split the night in two.

Wolf

The days were the worst. Mostly, I was human during the day. Sweltering heat poured down on my head. A whole month had passed since my family saw me die. I know because I felt the horrible pull of the moon for five nights only last week.

The first weeks were the worst. I would wake up, naked in the cold. The Change was so exhausting that I couldn't even stand for a days at time. Hunger gnawed constantly at my belly.

I endured still more painful Changes into the wolf whenever it wanted out. Hunger, pain, anger. Any strong emotion or feeling brought the wolf to the surface. Then I, August, would be gone. Only the pain, the wolf, and the HUNGER remained. Always hungry.

Back into human, but I never remembered what I did as a wolf. I lost time, direction, even emotion. I just know my belly wouldn't be quite so empty, my anger quite so pressing, or my pain quite so real. The Change robbed all my emotions, all that was *August Middleton*. The Change ate the world.

But I had been human for three days in a row. Three whole days and two nights between. I needed to find a way out of these woods. I needed food and clothes. I wanted to go back to my family and help on the farm. I didn't want to be this anymore, so I need control. I needed a way to make myself human and forget the wolf inside me.

So I stood just beyond the edge of the woods to watch a man tend his fields. I had no idea where I was, but this man lived away from the nearest town I could find. He lived alone and worked his fields every day. He had what I wanted: consistency, control.

The human-me wanted to walk up to that farmer and beg for help. Human-me wanted to see other humans, have someone assure me this was all a dream, and eventually point me in the direction back home. Human-me wanted to sleep in a bed and eat at a table. To work in the fields again, and court my betrothed. To wear clothes and hold a gun.

The wolf inside didn't like any of these options. Wolf-me wanted to run, tear, and howl my pleasure to the moon. Wolf-me liked the freedom of the woods and the bounty of the hunt. Wolf-me wanted to eat, sleep, and eventually find others of my kind.

Right now, the wolf was winning. Human-me was too scared of the wolf, too scared of Changing in front of the farmer because I lost control of what the human wanted. Control. A funny word in a mind like mine, split down the middle. Divided. Uncontrollable.

The farmer came closer to where I hid in the trees. Wolf-me snarled challenge, but human-me was enough in control that no sound passed my lips. All it would take was a few short steps and the man would see us. He'd come running to help. He'd take us into his little farm house and feed us. He'd let us help him in the fields to pay for our food.

We could almost smell it. The smell drew us forward. Three short steps. We were out of the woods. We heard the farmer gasp as our shaky legs gave way and we went to our knees. Wolf-me had much sharper ears and could hear his footsteps coming closer. Wolf-me wanted to run. Human-me was too grateful to the man, to enamored by his smell of dirt and sweat.

"Are you alright?" the man asked as he knelt on the ground beside our kneeling form. He put a hand on our shoulder and wolf-me wanted to shy away. Human-me couldn't disagree, so we flinched. The man's voice was gentle, soothing. "There, now, you come right inside and we'll get you all cleaned up."

The man took our arm, pulled us to our feet. We didn't struggle. He pulled us towards the small sod hut cut into the side of a hill. When he opened the door, we could smell food. The strong beefy flavor that used to fill the hut when our mother made beef stew.

"Sit down now," the man said, guiding us to the bed. Just a straw pallet on the floor with blankets, but we sank down gratefully. The man left for a moment, coming back with a bowl in his hands. We reached for it, our only thought of our hunger. Our hands shook and the bowl would have dropped through our fingers if the man hadn't caught it.

Gently, he fed us stew. We kept our hands on the bowl, partly because we didn't like to feel helpless and partly because the bowl was warm on our fingers. When our belly was full, we toppled sideways onto the pallet. We didn't remember closing our eyes, but the blackness swallowed us.

I woke suddenly and in panic. Where was I? I sat up, startled. And everything came flooding back. I looked for the man, but he wasn't in the small hut. The sun was out, so I knew it was day. I stood up, meaning to go find the man and thank him.

A shirt and pants were neatly folded and lying beside the bed. I was grateful for the clothes, even if they were almost threadbare. My fingers shook as I pulled on the clothes. Deep scars covered my shoulders and chest. White ridges from the damage the wolf had done.

When I stepped outside, I had to blink back the light. My eyes adjusted quickly and I found the man, again working in his field. I walked towards him. He waved cheerily as I approached.

"Good morning, sleepyhead," he said with a huge smile. I smiled back.

"Good morning," I croaked. My voice was a little hoarse, since I hadn't used it in almost a month. "Thank you."

"Of course, son," he said. "Mind telling me what happened?"

I froze. What was I going to say? I couldn't tell him that I had a wolf-me in my head. That I Changed. "I was ... attacked."

"Well, now," he said softly. "That sounds like quite a story. You'll have to tell me over lunch. My granddaughter is bringing some of her homemade fried chicken. Look, there she is now."

I turned to look where he was pointing. A girl of about fifteen was walking down the path, waving. The man waved back, the biggest smile on his face. I could tell he loved her just from the look on his face. He started back for the house with me trailing after him.

"Martha!" he called. The familiar name was like a spike through my heart. "Martha! Come inside."

I followed them inside the small hut, trying to keep the pain from showing on my face. How was my Martha, my sister? Would she ever forgive me for leaving them like I had?

"Grandfather," the girl said. Her voice snapped my attention to her. Her high and frightened voice made her sound much younger than she looked. Wolf-me perked up inside my head. She smelled good. Not like anything I'd ever smelled before. "Who is that man?"

"Well, now," the man said calmly. "I don't rightly know."

"August," I said. "My name is August."

"There, now, Martha, his name is August," the man said. "He came to me yesterday in quite a state. He needs some of your delicious fried chicken to help him get back on his feet."

"Okay," she said, but I could hear the fear in her voice. She began to set the table and the man helped. I stayed out of the way until they stopped moving. The kitchen was too small for so many people, but they made it look homey.

"Have a seat there, August," the man invited. He pulled up an overturned bucket and sat it on a crate. I smiled at his improvisation and sat down on the almost-chair. This man knew how to make the best of anything.

But sitting down brought me closer to the girl. She smelled almost better than the chicken. Wolf-me could smell the scent of flowers, dirt, and milk that was her. But there was another scent over that. Sharp and almost overpowering. I didn't know what it was, but it was intoxicating.

"August?" the man asked. I turned, realizing that I'd leaned close to the girl in an attempt to smell her.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled, sitting up straight.

"Quite alright," he said as he placed chicken in front of me. The smell of the chicken was too much for me. I was so hungry. My stomach growled and I reached for the chicken. But the chicken wasn't what I wanted. Wolf-me protested that there was something much better than chicken at this table. My hands clenched on the edge of the table, my knuckles turning white.

"Mr. August?" the girl asked. "Are you well?"

The growl that trickled out of my lips was not human. The girl smelled so good! Human-me protested. There was enough chicken. I didn't want the sharp, spicy smell. But wolf-me wanted it. We reveled in the scent, even as it spiked. That smell got stronger, and our stomach growled.

Suddenly, we knew what we were smelling. Fear. The girl was afraid of us and it made her smell so good. We stood from the table. The bucket and crate crashed to the floor and we winced at the sound.

"August!" the man was saying. He put a hand on our shoulder. Now he smelled sharp and spicy too. Our fur prickled just beneath our skin. This form didn't have teeth that could rip and tear. We wanted the taste of blood and fresh meat in our mouth. "Sit down!"

The more then man said, the more he smelled of fear. We were going to lose control of our human form. Our teeth were already elongating. Our fur felt soft against our skin. Our fingers felt too long and clumsy. We growled in frustration.

"What's happening?" the girl was terrified and the sound was sharp in my ears.

"Martha! Get back!" the man shouted. The sound of the familiar name brought us back to ourself, just a little. We knew we didn't want to hurt Martha. Wolf-me knew this was bad, but didn't know why. Human-me knew that Martha was special to us, that we should protect.

We raced outside just as the Change began. We could feel the sharp pain in our spine that signaled the transformation. With all our remaining strength, we held onto our human form and sprinted for the woods. We kept running until the pain of the Change was more than we could bear.

Our bones cracked. Our tendons popped. We howled, growled, and whimpered with the pain. Our fur sprouted in patches, then all over. Our tail shot from our spine as our fingers retracted into our paws.

When the Change was completed, we ran. We had no sense of direction, just urgency. We had to escape, and both human-me and wolf-me were in agreement. Away. Flee. Run. Escape.

For hours, we ran with no thought but the movement of our body. Our muscles finally gave out just as the sun set. We lay down, the Change taking us by surprise. We whimpered and sobbed as our fur receded and our human form emerged.

We lay on our back, sobbing. We had lost everything. We could not keep our human form even to protect innocent lives. We would never go back. Never see our family again. Wolf-me mourned the loss of our pack as human-me gave up.

We were a monster caught somewhere between man and wolf. Not enough man to live as one, but not yet enough wolf to stop remembering. We howled our pain into the night sky, our voice a mixture of a wolf's howl and a human's keen.

Despair took us, and we gave up. Darkness was everything.

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Six full moons. Or at least, that's what we thought we remembered. Six painful Changes into wolf form as the moon rose. Days we didn't remember. Nights of blankness. Six painful Changes back to human form when the moon released us.

Now, we stood inside the trees, staring at a town we didn't know. We had no idea where it even was or how far we'd run in the last agonizing months. This town was bigger than any we'd come across yet. At least, any that we could remember. Houses stood two stories tall and painted a crisp white. Flags flew on the large front porches and we could even see the steeple of a church.

We knew we couldn't go any closer. We remembered the farmer and his granddaughter. Human-me was still present enough to stop us from hurting anyone in that town. Whenever we almost forgot, human-me would remember the faces of those we'd loved and lost. Mother. Father. Ned. Little Margret, Martha, and George. Henrietta.

But we wanted to watch them coming and going, just for a little while. We knew this was as close as we'd ever come to living among them again. So we watched whenever we were close enough to a town.

We looked down at our reflection in a small puddle under a tree. Our sandy brown hair was too long and uncombed. Our mother would frown if she saw us. Our beard was the same color and just as unkempt. Our eyes were the color of the midnight sky, or that is what Margret would tell us. Sky eyes, just like our father. Just a little darker than Ned's. We wore no clothes because we lost them whenever we Changed into wolf form and we'd stopped caring a long time ago what we looked like. But we knew that our looks alone would keep us out of the town, even if we were brave enough to go closer.

"It's possible, you know, to live with them," said a voice behind us. We whirled. No one and nothing had snuck up on us since wolf-me was born. Wolf-me could see, smell, and hear the slightest movement or sound. Any change in our environment, and wolf-me had known.

But here was a stranger behind us. He came out of the woods, his hands raised in a gesture meant to reassure us. A small growl trickled out of our mouth. Human-me screamed at the wolf-me to stop, *stop!* We would scare the man away! We wanted to watch him, at least. We wanted him to stay! But wolf-me was in

control, and we didn't like this stranger in our space without our knowledge.

"Whoa, I mean no harm," the man said. "Curb your wolf. I'm here as a friend. I'm like you."

The words startled human-me so much that I was, for a moment, in control. I straightened, pretending I wore clothes rather than nothing but the skin I was born in. I looked this man in the eyes, just like my Mother taught me to do.

Wolf-me in my head snarled challenge. I did what I'd learned to do over the past months. I succeeded control. We were strongest when we worked together, wolf-me and human-me.

The man blinked, but he didn't look away from our eyes. For a long moment, we stared at him and he stared back. Finally, we had to look away. Something about this man, we just couldn't meet his eyes anymore. Wolf-me snarled, hating to back down. But we were in agreement, this man was dangerous.

"What's your name?" the man asked in a tone human-me labeled as kind and gentle and wolf-me labeled as weak. We only growled at him. We didn't like this man. We didn't like his interest in us.

"I'm Edward," the man continued. "I'm a werewolf, just like you. If you'll let yourself, you can smell it on me."

Wolf-me took a cautious sniff. Human-me waited, wondering if this man was serious. Werewolves only existed in legends. But human-me had used this word many times in the last months. Wolf-me growled a warning. This man smelled like us, but not like the other humans we'd come across in our wanderings. He smelled of wolf and of human, a mixture we'd only ever smelled on ourself.

"I can teach you control," Edward told us. "I can teach you how to choose when to be the wolf and when to be the man. I can give you back what you're missing: people, a bed, warm food."

Human-me leapt at the chance, but wolf-me was still cautious. We knew human-me could no longer survive without wolf-me. We were truly one. But human-me wanted some control back. Even wolf-me agreed that it would be better to chose, one form or the other, and not be stuck always Changing between the two. Control was important to us. But we didn't trust him.

"You Change constantly," he said. "One moment you're a human. Then something will make you angry or scared or

something will smell good. Before you can control it, you've Changed forms. The moon also pulls at you, here." He put a hand over his heart. "And pulls the wolf from you for five nights each month. I can teach you to choose, man or wolf. I can teach you to remember what happens when you are the wolf."

"How?" the first ragged word ripped from our mouth in six full moons. We'd howled, screamed, barked, yelled, and sobbed. But we'd never spoken since we ran from the farmer and his granddaughter.

"Come with me," he invited. "I can help you."

The man held out his hand to us, and we wanted to take it. We wanted what he offered, but we were wary. We had lived too long in fear. We didn't trust.

"Where?" the word was a little more recognizable than the first, but only barely.

"My house," Edward said. "I have one not far from here, and its well outside the town. You can sleep in a bed tonight, if you want."

We dragged our head down in an approximation of a nod. Human-me rejoiced, while wolf-me watched in amusement. Beds or the ground, it didn't matter to wolf-me. But shelter, safety, these mattered. We agreed, we'd go. We needed control.

We reached out our hand and tentatively touched his fingers. Slowly, Edward allowed his fingers to wrap around ours. The simple pleasure of the touch thrilled through us. We closed our eyes for a moment, but quickly snapped them open again. We jerked our hand away from him with a growl. Something was wrong. This was not how human-me remembered touch.

"It's okay," Edward reassured us. "The feeling's natural. We're werewolves, we need to touch. Natural wolves do it too. It makes us stronger. You'll get used to it in time."

Strangely, wolf-me accepted this easily. Human-me balked. In a strange role reversal, wolf-me wanted contact with this wolf-man and human-me hesitated. But the need in us won, and we reached for his hand again. He gave it, gently, never threatening.

The strange feeling of warmth shot through us again. We shivered with the pleasure dancing along our skin. The feeling was almost like the Change, the waves running up the body, but was not painful. We could feel our fur, just beneath our skin, like a

promising caress. But we didn't need to Change. We were content in our human form.

When we felt the tug on our hand, we opened our eyes but having no memory of closing them. The gentle tug led us forward, one small step at a time. Slowly, we went. Leaves crunched beneath our feet as we followed this strange man through the forest. After a few steps, he sped up to a normal human pace. He led us forward in silence.

"August," we croaked out through a dry mouth.

"No, it's March," Edward corrected. "March twenty-first. You must have lost time when the wolf was in control. Don't worry, that's natural."

"No," we tried again, shaking our head. We put our free hand on our chest. Wolf-me didn't know how to communicate it. For the first time, wolf-me surrendered readily to human-me in our desire to have this man understand. "I am August."

"Ah, well, nice to meet you August," the man said with a smile. He moved aside a tree branch and stepped into a clearing. We saw a small log cabin in the forest behind him. "Welcome home."

About The Author

Loren Weaver is an engineer for an oil company as her day job. Although she currently lives in Wyoming, she's a Georgia girl at heart. She loves crazy sports and has her black belt in Tae Kwon Do, master SCUBA diver certificate, and motorcycle license. Although engineering pays the rent, she writes because she loves to hear and to tell a good story.

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