



Wolf Moon

Alice Nuttall

Action/Adventure, Animals, Supernatural

In the deep night, under the wolf moon, she ran.

The snow crunched underfoot as she flew through the forest, flitting between the trees. Running on human feet was always more painful, but she didn't want to shift. Not yet.

Her three cubs were back in the den, asleep in their wolf forms. They'd wake later, with empty bellies, and she needed to make sure she'd bring something home.

She paused for a moment, sniffing the air. The scents of the forest washed around her, pine and frost and the warm-flesh smells of birds and squirrels scuttling in the trees.

There! A mile away, deep in the trees. The earthy, savoury scent of a deer. She made herself as still as she could, but it wasn't good enough. Her human ears weren't powerful enough.

Taking a deep breath, she looked up at the moon and let the shift creep over her.

Her skin prickled, and then burned as the hair burst through. Her hands swelled into paws, and her face pushed out into a muzzle. Her teeth ached as they grew long and pointed, and she snarled, pushing through the pain.

And then it was done. She stood under the moon, full wolf, and pricked up her ears to listen.

Now, she could hear the deer's hooves, punching into the crisp snow. She could hear the rasping sound as it stripped lichen from the trees, and the crunch-to-squelch as it chewed. And, under it all, she could hear the thick, rich thrum of its heart.

She ran.

Before, the night had been silver-blue. Now it was black and white and grey, everything she saw muted, but that was more than made up for by the orchestra of sounds that swelled around her. She could hear it all – twitters and shuffles from the forest creatures, the playful shake of the wind in the last remaining leaves, the

cold, glassy creaking of frost and ice.

She was there in what felt like moments, and the deer didn't hear her until it was too late. Its head whipped around as she leapt.

Her teeth closed on its throat. Blood burst in her mouth, savoury-sweet, hot and thick, and she bit down hard. A few gurgles, a few kicks, and it was done. She stepped back, and then back again, pulling her body back to human as she went. The wolf was best for hunting, but if she wanted to carry food home, she needed hands. There was a zing and a crack, and then silence.

It took her a few moments to realise she'd heard it at all. It was so quick, and then over, and the sounds of the woods were back.

Then she saw the splintered hole in the tree next to her, just by her head.

Her legs dropped her to the ground before she'd even thought the word bullet. Crouching in the snow, hands buried in the dead leaves that lay beneath it, she sucked in a breath and tried to think over the hammering of her heart.

Accident or not? A second shot would answer that. Unless the hunter was clever. She stayed stock-still, as close to the ground as she could get without lying flat, and waited.

Her skin was prickling so angrily it felt like it was on fire. Her teeth ached, begging her to let them lengthen. She tried to slow her breathing. A knee-jerk change wouldn't do her any good. A hunter shooting a human shape by accident might shoot on purpose if he saw a giant wolf running through the trees.

And a hunter shooting at a human shape on purpose would have the perfect excuse if she was wolf when her body was found.

But if this was happening, if he was hunting her, she'd need all the help the wolf could give her. Speed, scent, and sharp, sharp teeth.

She clawed her fingers in the snow, waiting, waiting.

Crack!

Another shot. An explosion of splinters hitting her shoulder, right next to the place where she crouched. She pulled her lips back, letting her teeth lengthen. The change was easier this time, helped along by anger and blood, and the thought of her cubs at home. Without her, they'd starve, and the sheer offence at that idea carried her from human to wolf as smoothly as breathing.

She stayed hunched in the snow, waiting, listening. His heart, a little way off, was slow and strong. He wasn't afraid, wasn't confused. He knew what he was doing. She could almost hear his smile.

Her mouth curved in a smile of her own, her lips pulling back from her teeth. She bunched her legs under her,

poised herself, ready to run.

Let's see how he dealt with a real hunter.

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