

Stars hover longer over St. Elspy's Mountain. The moon makes its fickle rise and fall every twenty-eight days, but the stars? They're immutable. They stay where they are.

Not many notice any more. They did, once, though—the seers, sages, and people of old. They watched the stars and wondered, waited.

Then the time of horrors came and left no window for stargazing. No thoughts of romance or peace. No thoughts of anything, truly, but survival.

Few made it through. Those who did scarcely spoke of the short realm with its grizzled days and horrific nights. But every generation had a whisperer, one who passed the story along as a warning to those yet to come.

## Chapter One

*Wolf eyes*, thought Gideon, meeting the young woman's gaze head-on. Pale gray leached to ivory, surrounded by a dark blue rim.

Some mountain-dwelling elders still whispered of long-ago horrors, when wolves ruled with snarling throats and bared teeth, changelings that won trust before annihilating unsuspecting inhabitants.

*Foolishness, of course.*

Her eyes beseeched him to see beyond what others suspected—to see her heart, her soul. Her fear blocked his intuition, while her eyes tugged at *his* heart—maybe his soul.

Wolf's eyes. Were they? Yes. No. Couldn't be—could they?

Mental protests rose, but Gideon had been a cop a long time. Not much scared him, but this time his internal warning system suggested otherwise.

"Have a seat, please," Gideon said, indicating the chair facing him.

She hesitated.

Gideon looked to the chair with an easy nod, hoping his calm reassured her.

She sat. But on the chair's edge. Watching. Listening. Apprehensive.

Gideon sat and leaned forward, bracing his elbows on his thighs. "What's your name?"

She eyed him, silent.

Great. Gideon drew a breath, clenched his jaw and met her gaze. "You scared people."

Indignation raised her jaw. Cool fire flashed heat into her nearly translucent eyes. "A woman alone? In the woods? Unarmed? *I* scared *them*, Sheriff?"

Her arched brow said she wasn't buying it.

"A woman alone by a fire, wearing..." He scanned her cape, "a Wiccan cloak."

She leaned closer, her look direct. "I would call it a classic wool cape because the morning air chilled, Sheriff." She leaned back into the chair. "But weave the story as you choose."