

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. Unchangeable. Definitive.

They stay where they are.

Not many notice any more.

They did, once. Seers and sages and people of old. They would watch and wonder, waiting.

Always waiting.

And then the time of horrors came, a time that left no window for star-gazing. No thought of romance or peace on Earth. No thought of anything but survival.

Few made it through. And of those, scarce spoke of the short realm. Grizzled days, horrific nights. But every generation had a whisperer, one who passed the story along, warning those to come.

As if there was something to be done.

There wasn't.

Among the humans, that is.

## 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. Her eyes beseeched him to see beyond what others suspected.

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

*Foolishness, of course.*

He held the woman's attention, wanting to see her heart. Her soul. Her fear blocked his intuition, a woman dragged in because she had pale, unusual eyes. Eyes that tugged his breath, his heart. And maybe his soul.

Wolf's eyes.

Were they?

Yes.

No.

Mental protests rose within, but Gideon had been a cop a long time. Not much scared him anymore. But his internal warning system said maybe it should.

He ignored the prodding and indicated the chair facing his.  
"Have a seat, please."

Wary, she hesitated.

Gideon dropped his look to the chair with an easy nod,  
hoping his calm reassured.

She sat on the chair's edge and glanced around. Watching.  
Listening. Apprehensive.

With good reason if the deputy's report proved accurate.  
She'd been set upon by a hostile group in the hills, a hard-to-reach section of Colm County.

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

She eyed him, silent.

Great. Probably one of those tree-huggers that believed the  
mountains should be left unsullied by mere mortals.

The locals would eat her alive, figuratively, especially  
with the proposed mining operation slicing north from the south  
face of St. Elspy and the lumbering concern thinning the east  
side of Briar's Crossing. Gideon drew a breath, clenched his jaw  
and met her gaze. "You scared people."

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

Incredulity deepened her voice. An arched brow said she wasn't buying his declaration. She bristled and shoved back a hank of long, dark hair.

"A woman alone by a fire, wearing..." He swept her cape a quick scan, "a Wiccan cloak."

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