

MY WEREWOLF HAND

By

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I should have known something was very, very wrong from the start. The itching. The *itching!* Like I was being smacked by a halibut with a pirate's beard.

The itching woke me from a dream, most *strange*. Woody Allen was encouraging me to write a story about werewolves. I chuckled as I awoke.

But the joke was on me when I went to scratch my nose and almost ripped my face off. I gasped when I saw thick, matted brown

fur covering my entire hand and forearm, from the tips of my fingers straight up to my elbow.

Was I still dreaming? No! To my horror, my nails, usually so expertly manicured, were now long, ragged and razor sharp. And my palm, my palm, yesterday so soft and supple from a lifetime avoiding manual labor, was now a shockingly hard calloused pad.

I looked at my hand and unholy, yet still girlish shrieks came out from deep inside me and echoed across my studio apartment walls.

Oops, did I wake the neighbors? I tried soothing my frayed nerves by telling myself someone must be playing a joke on me. But who? Or was it that damned chihuahua who bit me last night? That little bastard!

No, I must still be dreaming. I laughed. *Ha! Yes, I was dreaming!*

But when the beastly thing lunged for my throat and almost choked me to death, I knew this was no sleep dream. I grabbed it with my good hand and just barely wrestled the hideous hand to the ground. But then the beast shoved me over, yanked me straight across the room, smashed a hole in the window and tried to dive outside. My life flashed before me. The windows! My security deposit!

Terror-stricken, I just managed to wedge my shoulder against the wall next to the window and stayed there until I could yank my angry arm back inside.

The hand then wrenched me across the room and in a fit of rage, smashed my lamp, dining table and brand-new electronic

drum kit! I was surely dealing with a demonic power direct from the depths.

It grabbed for my privates but, thank God! I lurched left and swiped my metal water bottle off my desk and smacked the hell out of my rude attacker. I didn't feel a thing, but the paw paused. It hung limp.

I wasn't going to wait for applause. I quickly grabbed a bed sheet and wrapped it around my dangling hand and forearm as tightly as I could until it looked like a giant Q-tip.

If somebody walked into my apartment now, what would they think? If it was my mother, she would, no doubt, blame "marijuana."

Before I could catch my breath, the hand burst to life again. It tried to stuff its sheet-covered fist in my mouth and when I brushed it away, bashed what remained of my rickety wooden coffee table to smithereens. But it also felt like the hand was running out of steam.

With a little effort, I was able to wrestle my feral forearm to the floor, where I sat on it. I bent my wrist to cut off the blood supply, like I put it in a headlock, and sure enough, the hand slowly went limp.

I collapsed on the floor, sweating and exhausted. I then dragged myself onto my shredded couch and breathed a huge sigh of relief. My heart was still madly pumping, my hand was burning, I was drenched in a cold sweat, but I was alive.

I was able to catch my breath. But soon, the hand started to twitch again. *What if...?* I ran to the refrigerator and pulled out some raw hamburger. I tore open the plastic wrap and devoured the bloody meat as fast as I could.

A warm, soothing wave washed over me. The wolf-hand shuddered and then it relaxed and soon stopped twitching altogether. *Red meat! Yes, red meat is what you like. You were hungry.* My human mind now returning, I reached for my golf club, but the hand curled up on my chest, it seemed...satisfied.

My arm was drenched in sweat, so I took a chance and unwrapped the bed sheet. I grabbed a golf club and braced for the worst.

But my werewolf paw was calm. What the hell was happening to me? Should I call the police? A veterinarian? My ears were ringing and I noticed several smells I hadn't before. Was that tomato sauce cooking from the apartment across the hall? Was that mouse pee in the corner of my apartment?

I passed out wondering what to do. When I woke up, it was still dark. The hand was scratching me behind the ears. I jumped, ready for a fight, but the hand was scratching me playfully.

It tickled. I laughed, a hearty longshoreman's laugh. Tremendous energy coursed through my every cell and fiber. Now instead of fighting the wolf hand, I felt connected to it.

The wolf hand tugged me towards the door. This time I wanted to go outside. *Had* to go, to get out of the four tiny walls of my apartment and *live*.

"Walk?" I said to my hand.

The hand pawed my front door vigorously. I did briefly consider going outside was a really bad idea, but the hand kept scratching at the door and a short walk at 4 a.m. with no one around, seemed like a good idea at the time. A short walk and come right back.

I shoved a few more handfuls of raw meat. Ski gloves, just in case. The hand needed no encouragement. It led me like it was looking for *something*. And I was all too happy to follow. It was like my first day in the city I'd lived in my whole life!

Ah, the night! My mind, usually an endless jumble of anxieties and worried thoughts, was now crystal clear. I had no thoughts. Just senses. I was in the moment. And I was *alive!*

And I could smell *everything*. Usually, that's a bad thing in New York, but now I was *curious*. What was in the garbage pile? What just jumped into the street? A rat? Is that poop? I was fascinated by poop.

The moon was full, silvery and high as the hand led me straight to Central Park. I felt fearless, and strong. So *Alive!* Go ahead mess with me. I *dare* you somebody!

We explored every tree and bush, touching, rubbing. The hand pawing at the ground underneath a large linden tree like there was buried treasure. Was there?

My new buddy could do no wrong. I took off the glove, and the hand went nuts. It dug furiously. The hand was going to make me rich. Yes! Finally, my ship was coming in. *Rich, I tells ya, rich!*

But my heart sank when the hand dug up a partially decomposed squirrel. I wanted to retch, but the hand grasped it like it found gold. Then it tried shoving the squirrel bits in my mouth.

“No!” I said knocking the rotting rodent to the ground. “Bad hand, bad!”

My hand drooped sadly, then tried to pick up the squirrel and tried to do it all over again. I grabbed the squirrel with my human hand and tossed it. For a moment, I hesitated. Maybe going for a walk wasn’t such a good idea.

But the hand, perhaps reading my mind, leaped up and grabbed a tree branch several feet up. But the branch snapped, and we fell to the ground with a thud. Everything went blurry, then it went black.

When I awoke, the sun was bright in my eyes and a cop was kicking my leg.

“Are you alright?” asked the bulky female officer. She smelled—tasty.

I hid my werewolf hand under me, but I needn’t have worried. My hand was back to normal. Nice and normal. My palm buttery as ever. But my throat was dry, and I spit out a feather.

“I’m fine ma’am,” I said. “Couldn’t be better.”

“*Mmhmm*,” she said skeptically. “You got somewhere to go?”

“Yeah,” I said. “I’m not homeless. I just...needed a nap.”

She eyed me suspiciously and walked on.

I sat up and looked around. I was still somewhere in Central Park. I felt something in my pocket. I reached in and pulled out three coins, a piece of wet newspaper, a dirt-covered wheel from a toy car, a bottle cap, and a half-eaten pigeon.

I seriously needed some help.

I locked myself in my apartment. I was a menace to myself and society, not to mention the local wildlife. Was the entire city next? Would I have to take myself out for walks twice a day? Would I soon crave liver treats and greet people by sniffing their butts?

I've seen enough werewolf movies to know how this all ends. I called in sick at my job arranging flowers at the flower shop. My boss Darlene told me not to come back until I felt better. Was that some kind of veiled threat? Or was I just paranoid?

I binge watched bird videos and nature channels. I heard every pipe creak and mouse scurry in my apartment. I could feel and hear the buzz and zap of the electricity in my lights and computer.

And I never realized what a thoroughly heart-warming and delightful movie *American Werewolf in London* is!

My hand stayed normal for several days. Yes, perhaps my grave affliction was just a passing thing. A wisp of a fancy. But still, I stayed indoors and crouched low when I passed the window, lest a revenge-laden pigeon spotted me. I researched my miserable disorder on the internet, but I grew lonely and my disease took a backseat to many dating apps.

Unburdened by the need to be appealing, I found many female fans. Of course, I could not date any of them, until...my desire for human contact overwhelmed my aching loneliness and reluctance

to commit horrifying bloody multiple murder, I agreed to meet a woman for drinks. In person.

Rebecca was kind, funny, and gorgeous. We met at a trendy restaurant in the East Village. She smelled of lilacs and jasmine and a tiny drop of urine.

I relaxed. It had been nearly three weeks since my hand went bonkers, *if it really did happen*, maybe I made the whole thing up.

“You look beautiful,” I said.

“Thank you,” she smiled. Her bangly necklace made a slight *klink-swish-sklink* sound as it rubbed against her bare neck when she sat down. I noticed a short, single white curved hair on her shoulder.

“You like cats?” I asked.

“Yes,” she said surprised. “How did you know?”

Ah yes, the urine, it was cat.

“Lucky guess,” I said. “I like cats too. Animals in fact. I’ve even been appreciating squirrels lately.”

“Squirrels freak me out,” she said with a shiver.

“Really?” I said. “I find them quite delicious.”

She half smiled.

Was it hot in here, or was it just me? My hand twitched.

“I’m starving. Let’s eat,” I said, grabbing the menu.

“That’s a really nice necklace,” I said, trying to change the topic from my strange behavior and also keep my hand from twitching. “Very shiny.”

“Oh, this thing? Thanks. I got it on sale.”

“Yes, terrific,” I said, managing a waxy smile. But now I was sweating like a donkey. I wiped my forehead with my napkin. I waved for the waiter with my good hand.

The guy sauntered over like we were interrupting him from something better. The jerk.

“Yesss?” He drawled.

“We’re ready to order,” I said. I felt my anger starting to boil.

“Oh,” said Rebecca. “I didn’t even look at the menu.”

“Everything here is great,” I rushed. “Oh sorry. I mean. What would you like to order? Would you care for a glass of wine?”

I turned to the waiter. “Two salads and a raw pork chop. Now! Go! Hurry, you fool!”

The waiter sneered at me, actually *sneered*, then rolled his eyes and sauntered away. I had the overwhelming urge to strangle him and gnaw his face off. My eyes tensed. My hand squirmed. I caught Rebecca’s glance. She looked nauseous. I exhaled.

“Oh, *ha*,” I said, wiping my sweaty brow. “I missed lunch. I’m hypoglycemic. Don’t want that blood sugar to drop. Please look at the menu. Everything is fine. Let’s have a drink. I feel great! How ‘bout you?”

Rebecca picked up her menu. I could hear her blood coursing through her veins. Her breath increased with her heartbeat. I could hear her thoughts.

Raw pork?...What's up with this guy...maybe he's just hungry...why is he sweating so much? Red flags, Beck. Too bad, he was kinda cute.

“Oh thanks,” I said.

“What?” she said.

“I think you're cute too,” I said.

“Y'know, I'm supposed to babysit my friend's cat,” Rebecca said. “So, I'm going to have to leave soon.”

“No, don't go,” I pleaded. “I'll be fine. The salad is great here. You're a corporate attorney?”

I felt something furry brush against my leg. I glanced down. My hand was changing into a werewolf.

Oh, God! No! Not now! Not here!

“Is that fun?” I asked, my voice strangled.

“It can be.”

“In the old days, they would just rip each other's throats out for power,” I laughed. “Today they just fire you. Too bad. I mean good! That's progress, right?”

The waiter dropped the salads and the pork chop. He gave me a dirty look, so I snarled at him. The waiter jumped. Rebecca jumped. People were staring. Why were they staring?

“I can be a beast when I’m hungry. *Ha ha. HA!*”

I wish I could have called it a night right then and there. Instead, I dove my face into the pork chop and started tearing at the raw meat with my teeth.

When I raised my head, meat was hanging out of my mouth and blood dripped down my face in satisfying rivulets.

“Heh, I shouzha gottit medium,” I quipped. “Howhz your saladhz?”

My palm felt like it was boiling and the hairs coming out of my skin felt like needles shooting through my arm.

“*Aagh!*” I shouted. The wolf hand grabbed the pork chop and waved it in the air.

Rebecca shrieked in horror and jumped up and ran out the door. I ran to the toilet, the pork chop dangling out of my mouth. People screamed. Ok, it wasn’t a good look, but didn’t they know not to anger me?

And would I be charged for Rebecca’s salad? *Noooo!!!* In the toilet stall, I choked down the bloody pork chop. It was wonderful! I was losing control over my mind. I thought I could still save the date.

I splashed water on my face and checked myself in the mirror. Except for some yellowing around my eyes, and a giant wolf paw instead of a right-hand, I looked fine. Handsome even. Virile.

“Everything is going to be great,” I told myself in the mirror.

But when I stepped out of the bathroom, I should have known my luck wasn’t going to last. The maître d’ and six staff of the restaurant were staring at me.

“Is everything ok, sir?” said the thin maître d’ in the black suit nervously. His heart was pumping over 120 beats per minute, he smelled like potassium and licorice. Note to self: kill first, devour last.

I grinned as wide as a politician. “Never better. Why?”

They kept staring at my hand.

“You’re staring at this?” I said waving Wolfie at them. “It’s called *Acute Lycanthropy*. And I didn’t know they discriminated against the disabled here.”

“Oh *no*, sir,” said the maître d’ suddenly changing his tone and demeanor to fawning and obsequious. “We would *never* do that. We were just concerned you were ok, that’s all. We would be happy to give you a to-go dinner, on us.”

“I’m fine,” I said defiantly. They were trying to get rid of me. But no one gets rid of me.

“It’s nothing,” I said. “I’m fine.”

I sat down at my table. “Waiter!”

Some guy in a suit came over. “Sir,” he said gingerly, but firmly. “We’re going to have to ask you to leave.”

I was being discriminated against. I felt the kettle boil inside me. I tried a breathing exercise, but the hand was more sensitive to micro-aggression than me.

It swiped everything off the table. Silverware, candles, glass went flying. Wolfie was in a rage, but I was calm. My mind was clear. I wanted *revenge*.

I flipped the table and threw my chair against the wall. Screams, people ducking for cover. Was anyone hurt? I spotted a therapy *shi-tzu* on an old lady's lap. I tore the leash off the peacefully sitting therapy dog.

"Be free!" I declared. "Go now! Be as one with your true nature. Re-join your wild pack!"

But the *shi-tzu* just sat there and looked at me with terrified eyes.

"Run!" I growled. "Now's your chance! Run, you fool! To freedom!"

But the dog cowered.

"Fine," I sighed. "Someday you will know true joy."

I lifted my head to the sky and howled. And then I ran out the door. I saw everything, I *smelled* everything. It was disgusting. But it was also glorious.

The hand had no regard for manners or traffic signals. It delighted in scaring passersby. We ran across the street, *I* ran across the street and almost got hit by a white delivery van.

I stared at the driver through the front window. He stared angrily at me. I snarled. My werewolf hand flipped him the bird and then smashed a hole in the front window. My hand grabbed his throat and started yanking him out the smashed window.

A voice came out of me but didn't sound like me, "pedestrians have the right-of-way. *Pedestrians!*"

I shoved the driver back in his seat and ran across the street. Then it hit me; *Jesus Christ! What am I doing?* That thought snapped my human brain awake.

“Help! Help me; I’m a wolfman!” I shouted at people on the street. In hindsight, I probably should have phrased my plea better, and also not tried to grab them with my hairy clawed hand.

I stumbled into an empty dog park. My werewolf hand dragged me to a fresh pile of poo. It yanked me to the ground and began rolling in the dog crap. My werewolf hand couldn’t be happier. I was nauseated but at least so far, I hadn’t killed anyone.

I slunk home in the shadows. Ashamed, depressed. My wolf hand still grasping a fresh pile of dog poo. But before I got home, I changed directions.

I dropped the poo and ran across town. To the flower shop. It was around midnight. I stared at the closed shop for hours. I wanted *in*. But before Wolfie could smash the window, I ran to the river and finally exhausted, passed out on a park bench overlooking the Hudson.

A phone call from my mother woke me up. I shielded the sun from my eyes.

“Is that you on the Internet?” she said. “Myrna sent me a video.”

“What? Huh?” I groggily replied.

“How do I forward a text? I think my phone is broken. I have to go to Verizon. Just look up ‘wolfman goes crazy.’ It looks a lot like you. Do you want me to get you a psychiatrist?”

WI froze. “Uh, I’ll call you back.”

I searched. There it was. “Real Life Wolf Man Goes Wild.” There I was, punching through the front window of the truck and grabbing the driver’s throat and then me running down the street like a lunatic, my wolf arm waving around for all to see. The video had 86 million views. I searched the local news. Yup, I was there too.

I texted my mother back. ‘This is not me.’

I slumped on the bench. My secret was out. My life was over. And to make it worse, no matter how hard I tried, my hand would not go back to normal. It was at least five times bigger than my other arm now and covered in fur. Werewolf man. That was me, my new normal.

I stared at the river. What if I just jumped in and made it all go away? My mind wandered and raced. But when I thought about the flower shop, I calmed down. Flower arranging. My old job.

The smell and texture of the flowers. The happy faces on the customers. Ha, now I’d probably just rip them to shreds, both the flowers *and* the customers.

I walked a few blocks. It was a wonderful day. Sure, some people stared, but this is *New York*. Everything was fine, until I crossed in front of a class of preschoolers out on a walk.

The children! Ah yes, children. That’s what I needed. They would understand.

“*Look at that man’s hand,*” squealed a five-year-old girl.

“*Cool,*” said a boy.

“What’s wrong with him?” asked the girl.

Of course, I must have looked like hell. The teacher looked at me like she was sizing up exactly what kind of weirdo I was. Dangerous, crazy or just mischievous.

“Children, we don’t make fun of people who are different,” the teacher finally said in that condescending/educating, teacher sing-songy way.

I appreciated the sentiment, but I wanted to die. I was scaring the children.

“Just a prank hand,” I said. “I’m...acting in a play. Nothing to be afraid of. Just pretend.”

“Can I touch it?” asked one boy.

“Me too!”

“Me too!”

I smiled. The teachers smiled. I was winning the children over! Turning my poison into my medicine. For a moment I even thought, *I could entertain at children’s parties.*

And everything would have been fine except, at that moment, a pigeon decided to fly directly in front of me. Wolfie grabbed the bird and stuffed the flapping thing into my mouth.

The children screamed. I desperately tried to wrestle the frantically flapping fowl from my mouth as Wolfie kept shoving the bird deeper.

I finally tickled myself under my arm and Wolfie let go just enough for me to spit the pigeon out. The bird tumbled, righted itself, and without another hesitation, flew off.

Great. I probably got typhus or typhoid, *or worse*. And, the children were gone, too. I mean, rightly so, but oh, the shame. I really wanted to apologize to them.

I was busy spitting out feathers when I heard, “hey, that’s the guy from the internet!”

I wheeled around. People were staring. Wolfie’s hairs raised.

“There’s a reward for that guy!” said the squat muscle man. Four equally squat and muscular friends stood next to him. They approached me.

“Fellas, this is a really terrible idea,” I said. “I cry easily.” But Wolfie wasn’t afraid. He made a menacing gesture.

“C’mon, how tough can this guy be?” one of the men asked.

“It’s ten grand,” said another.

“Really?” I said, amazed. “I’m worth ten thousand dollars?”

“A TV show wants you,” said another guy. “You coming with us peaceful?”

I snarled. *Snarled!*

The next minute was a blur. Two guys reached for me. There was blood, screams and I wound up with someone’s pants. Why does the monster always get blamed?

Police sirens. I ran. One thing New Yorkers get out of their way for is a lunatic on the run. And I was definitely on the run.

I covered several blocks in an instant. People were staring as I ran past. Staring at the freak. I had to get out of the public eye. Had

to hide myself away. I knew where I *had* to go. The only place I *could* go.

I must have walked past my old flower shop a hundred times. The intoxicating allure of the sweet jasmine, the orchids, orange blossoms and peonies, all so luscious and sweet. I was drunk on floral perfume.

But still, I couldn't go in. I wanted to go in. But what would my boss Darlene say? Would Wolfie rip into a rage? I peeked in the window. There she was, very pretty, peacefully pruning a large floral arrangement.

I licked my lips. My loins stirred with desire. Wolfie shook with an excited fervor. The next thing I knew, Wolfie had burst down the door and we were standing inside.

Darlene looked up startled. Horrified.

"I'm baaack!" I exclaimed. Wolfie waved to her. Darlene screamed.

"Albert?" she shook. "Is that you?"

"Say hello to my furry friend!" My animal and human minds were melding. Wolfie yanked me towards Darlene. Closer to my one goal.

"What are you *doing?!?*" she shrieked.

My good hand grabbed a nearby table and tried to slow Wolfie. But it was no use. *Oh God, he's going to rip her throat out! Or worse!*

Wolfie darted to Darlene, and before I could stop him, he grabbed the pruning shears out of her stunned hand. Quicker than if

he was hunting rabbits, Wolfie started pruning the peonies into perfectly coiffed cones.

My feral hand then grabbed several plump hydrangeas, rich roses, ranunculus, lisianthus and an assortment of baby's breath, curly twigs and other flowers and pruned, twisted, and shaped a delicate and delightful, yet powerful and strong, eye-catchingly wonderful scented show-stopping floral arrangement.

When he finished, he gently placed the pruning shears down.

Darlene and I stared at the massive and gorgeous flower arrangement, too stunned to move or speak. Then we looked at each other, then Wolfie, who was resting limply by my side.

"I wasn't expecting that," I finally said, cracking a weak smile.

Darlene was sheet-white. She looked at the arrangement. She was astounded and amazed. "That's...Are you on crystal meth?"

A great elation poured like a refreshing and welcome wave over and through me.

"I'm high on flowers!" I said beaming.

"How did you...why did you...?" Darlene stumbled for words. "That's the most beautiful flower arrangement I've ever seen."

I nodded in agreement. But I hadn't *done* anything. It was all Wolfie. I noticed how calm and confident I felt. And Wolfie was downright cuddly.

"I know," I said, almost as astonished as Darlene, maybe more. Well, maybe not. "I know. It's a lot to take in, but..." Strangely, I wasn't ashamed anymore. I held up Wolfie proudly. "This is the truth of me!"

I explained the whole thing to Darlene, who nodded politely but probably thought I was making it all up or nuts or both. But after I made three more equally astonishing arrangements, it didn't matter. Darlene offered me my old job back there and then on the spot.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "He can be a little, *unpredictable*."

"Aren't we all?" she said. "And after those arrangements, I'm willing to take a chance."

It was a good decision on Darlene's part. That day wasn't a fluke. Wolfie was a much better flower arranger than I ever was. It chose colors and flower combinations I never would have considered.

I was soon made Chief Florist. I won competitions. I made several videos for the store's internet channel and now I have thousands of followers. Some weirdos, but mostly flower lovers. They're an amazingly tolerant bunch.

The cops never stopped by and neither did those guys. Eventually my "Real Life Wolf Man" video got replaced with "Foxy Flower Arranger."

Wolfie hasn't changed back to human form, but I don't mind. In fact, I like the attention and business has been booming. Sure, I still feel the occasional murderous rage, who doesn't?

To keep Wolfie peaceful, we're learning *Ikebana*, the Japanese art of flower arranging, the soul of the flower. He's only flung a vase across the room a few times. He's happiest at the shop, doing what he loves.

Most days I sit in the flower shop window as Wolfie arranges flowers and draws a crowd. Most people insist my werewolf hand is fake.

Oh, and, a few days ago, I met someone. Alana came into the store for a simple rose arrangement, as a “gift” for herself.

“I’m tired of waiting for a guy to buy me flowers,” she laughed.

She smelled like sage and orange blossom and a whiff of canine pee.

“You like pets?” I asked as Wolfie shaped and made the arrangement just so for her.

“I’m a dog person,” she replied.

We’re going on our first date tomorrow.