

SIN CITY WOLF: HOWL by January Bain

EXCERPT

Cristaldo

As Everly lost herself on stage, I clenched my hands into fists, claws digging into my palms. I fought the urge to transform, making the air around me shimmer in alarm. My eyes burned with the desire that would turn them incandescent and expose my wolf. *Che diavolo sta succedendo?* Never had I been affected like this. An alpha male always in control, was what I prided myself on being.

I couldn't wait until after the concert, though the group had just begun their set. It had to happen now. My skin rippled visibly with the need. The only way to bring back control was to give in to the wolf. I left the auditorium and took the flight of stairs from the penthouse leading to the rooftop and my favorite toy, a Bell-Boeing 609 Tilt-Rotor straight from the factory in France. I jumped in behind the controls and set a course for our nearest compound in the desert. Ten minutes to freedom.

No sooner had I landed the helicopter—and with the blades still rotating—than I was out and running. Mid-stride, I entered another realm, a parallel existence, invisible from Earth, and my body underwent the change. On the other side, through the shimmering portal, the sensation deepened until all my cells had transformed, aligned in a new form. Then I was back in the present, a wolf. The world had mutated to an array of colors unknown to the human eye, blacks and browns and grays with subtle shadings that my brain converted to what my human side saw—blues and greens, yellow and reds. I breathed in deeply, my olfactory nerves sharpened by the cool, dry air of the desert at night. The odor of dust among the cactus, scrub and clumps of grass filled my nostrils.

I picked up the scent of fast game and gave chase. Bounding along, the wind to my back, twisting and turning as I easily followed my prey, I savored the strength of the wolf. My large paws ate up the distance, the shadows of the Joshua trees familiar forms mimicking humans and moving past me at lightning speed as I continued my pursuit.

The scent of fear ahead span my brain out of control. My prey knew I was close. I redoubled my efforts, imagining the takedown. The satisfaction. Then the creature found his burrow all of a sudden and went to ground. No matter. I streaked by the spot, needing the run far more than the catch.

The dry land slapped against my paws and the wind sliced across my muzzle. Time had no meaning in the desert. The longer I ran, the lighter I felt. Expending such energy increased my strength, mile by mile, each muscle quivering with adrenaline.

A new scent drew my attention. Wolf. I swung my massive head to the east. The interloper was not of the Luceres pack. My brain sharpened and the thrill of the chase intensified. I covered ground quickly, totally focused on the enemy. I needed this, to show the curs their place.

I raced to the farthest section of my land and confronted the Ribelle dog. My fur rose as my tail bushed out behind me. He was hellbent on getting away, circling back and forth like a prisoner in a cell, preferring to cross over the electric fence rather than face me. I snarled my disdain at finding the coward trying so desperately to escape.