



Fool Moon (The Dresden Files, Book 2)

By Jim Butcher

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“One of the most enjoyable marriages of the fantasy and mystery genres on the shelves,” (Cinescape) the Dresden Files have become synonymous with action-packed urban fantasy and nonstop fun. *Fool Moon* continues the adventures of Jim Butcher’s most famous—and infamous—reluctant hero...

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Just when it looks like he can't afford his next meal, a murder comes along that requires his particular brand of supernatural expertise. There's a brutally mutilated corpse, and monstrous animal markings at the scene. Not to mention that the killing took place on the night of a full moon. Harry knows exactly where this case is headed. Take three guesses—and the first two don't count...

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for the Dresden Files

“Think *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* starring Philip Marlowe.”—*Entertainment Weekly*

“Fans of Laurell K. Hamilton and Tanya Huff will love this series.”—*Midwest Book Review*

“Superlative.”—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

“One of the most enjoyable marriages of the fantasy and mystery genres on the shelves.”—*Cinescape*

“Butcher...spins an excellent noirish detective yarn in a well-crafted, supernaturally-charged setting. The supporting cast is again fantastic, and Harry’s wit continues to fly in the face of a peril-fraught plot.”—*Booklist* (starred review)

“What’s not to like about this series?...It takes the best elements of urban fantasy, mixes it with some good old-fashioned noir mystery, tosses in a dash of romance and a lot of high-octane action, shakes, stirs, and serves.”—*SF Site*

“A tricky plot complete with against-the-clock pacing, firefights, explosions, and plenty of magic. Longtime series fans as well as newcomers drawn by the SciFi Channel’s TV series based on the novels should find this supernatural mystery a real winner.”—*Library Journal*

“What would you get if you crossed Spenser with Merlin? Probably you would come up with someone very like Harry Dresden, wizard, tough guy and star of [the Dresden Files].”—*The Washington Times*

About the Author

A martial arts enthusiast whose résumé includes a long list of skills rendered obsolete at least two hundred years ago, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author **Jim Butcher** turned to writing as a career because anything else probably would have driven him insane. He lives mostly inside his own head so that he can write down the conversation of his imaginary friends, but his head can generally be found in Independence, Missouri. Jim is the author of the Dresden Files, the Codex Alera novels, and the Cinder Spires series, which began with *The Aeronaut’s Windlass*.

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Table of Contents

Title Page

Copyright Page

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-one

Chapter Twenty-two

Chapter Twenty-three

Chapter Twenty-four

Chapter Twenty-five

Chapter Twenty-six

Chapter Twenty-seven

Chapter Twenty-eight

Chapter Twenty-nine

Chapter Thirty

Chapter Thirty-one

Chapter Thirty-two

Chapter Thirty-three

Chapter Thirty-four

ALSO BY JIM BUTCHER

THE DRESDEN FILES

STORM FRONT

GRAVE PERIL

SUMMER KNIGHT

DEATH MASKS

BLOOD RITES

DEAD BEAT

PROVEN GUILTY

WHITE NIGHT

SMALL FAVOR

THE CODEX ALERA

FURIES OF CALDERON

ACADEM'S FURY

CURSOR'S FURY

CAPTAIN'S FURY

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Chapter One

I never used to keep close track of the phases of the moon. So I didn't know that it was one night shy of being full when a young woman sat down across from me in McAnally's pub and asked me to tell her all about something that could get her killed.

"No," I said. "Absolutely not." I folded the piece of paper, with its drawings of three concentric rings of spidery symbols, and slid it back over the polished oak-wood table.

Kim Delaney frowned at me, and brushed some of her dark, shining hair back from her forehead. She was a tall woman, buxom and lovely in an old-world way, with pale, pretty skin and round cheeks well used to smiling. She wasn't smiling now.

"Oh, come on, Harry," she told me. "You're Chicago's only practicing professional wizard, and you're the only one who can help me." She leaned across the table toward me, her eyes intent. "I can't find the references for all of these symbols. No one in local circles recognizes them either. You're the only real wizard I've ever even heard of, much less know. I just want to know what these others are."

"No," I told her. "You don't want to know. You're better off forgetting this circle and concentrating on something else."

“But—”

Mac caught my attention from behind the bar by waving a hand at me, and slid a couple of plates of steaming food onto the polished surface of the crooked oak bar. He added a couple of bottles of his homemade brown ale, and my mouth started watering.

My stomach made an unhappy noise. It was almost as empty as my wallet. I would never have been able to afford dinner tonight, except that Kim had offered to buy, if I’d talk to her about something during the meal. A steak dinner was less than my usual rate, but she was pleasant company, and a sometime apprentice of mine. I knew she didn’t have much money, and I had even less.

Despite my rumbling stomach, I didn’t rise immediately to pick up the food. (In McAnally’s pub and grill, there aren’t any service people. According to Mac, if you can’t get up and walk over to pick up your own order, you don’t need to be there at all.) I looked around the room for a moment, with its annoying combination of low ceilings and lazily spinning fans, its thirteen carved wooden columns and its thirteen windows, plus thirteen tables arranged haphazardly to defray and scatter the residual magical effects that sometimes surrounded hungry (in other words, angry) wizards. McAnally’s was a haven in a town where no one believed in magic. A lot of the crowd ate there.

“Look, Harry,” Kim said. “I’m not using this for anything serious, I promise. I’m not trying any summoning or binding. It’s an academic interest only. Something that’s been bothering me for a while.” She leaned forward and put her hand over mine, looking me in the face without looking me in the eyes, a trick that few nonpractitioners of the Art could master. She grinned and showed me the deep dimples in her cheeks.

My stomach growled again, and I glanced over at the food on the bar, waiting for me. “You’re sure?” I asked her. “This is just you trying to scratch an itch? You’re not using it for anything?”

“Cross my heart,” she said, doing so.

I frowned. “I don’t know . . .”

She laughed at me. “Oh, come *on*, Harry. It’s no big deal. Look, if you don’t want to tell me, never mind. I’ll buy you dinner anyway. I know you’re tight for money lately. Since that thing last spring, I mean.”

I glowered, but not at Kim. It wasn’t her fault that my main employer, Karrin Murphy, the director of Special Investigations at the Chicago Police Department, hadn’t called me in for consulting work in more than a month. Most of my living for the past few years had come from serving as a special consultant to SI, but after a fracas last spring involving a dark wizard fighting a gang war for control of Chicago’s drug trade, work with SI had slowly tapered off—and with it, my income.

I didn’t know why Murphy hadn’t been calling me in as often. I had my suspicions, but I hadn’t gotten the chance to confront her about them yet. Maybe it wasn’t anything I’d done. Maybe the monsters had gone on strike. Yeah, right.

The bottom line was I was strapped for cash. I’d been eating ramen noodles and soup for too many weeks. The steaks Mac had prepared smelled like heaven, even from across the room. My belly protested again, growling its neolithic craving for charred meat.

But I couldn’t just go and eat the dinner without giving Kim the information she wanted. It’s not that I’ve never welshed on a deal, but I’ve never done it with anyone human—and definitely not with someone who looked up to me.

Sometimes I hate having a conscience, and a stupidly thorough sense of honor.

“All right, all right,” I sighed. “Let me get the dinner and I’ll tell you what I know.”

Kim’s round cheeks dimpled again. “Thanks, Harry. This means a lot to me.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I told her, and got up to weave my way toward the bar, through columns and tables and so on. McAnally’s had more people than usual tonight, and though Mac rarely smiled, there was a contentment to his manner that indicated that he was happy with the crowd. I snatched up the plates and bottles with a somewhat petulant attitude. It’s hard to take much joy in a friend’s prosperity when your own business is about to go under.

I took the food, steaks and potatoes and green beans, back to the table and sat down again, placing Kim’s plate in front of her. We ate for a while, myself in sullen silence and she in hearty hunger.

“So,” Kim said, finally. “What can you tell me about that?” She gestured toward the piece of paper with her fork.

I swallowed my food, took a sip of the rich ale, and picked up the paper again. “All right. This is a figure of High magic. Three of them, really, one inside the other, like layered walls. Remember what I told you about magical circles?”

Kim nodded. “They either hold something out or keep it in. Most work on magic energies or creatures of the Nevernever, but mortal creatures can cross the circles and break them.”

“Right,” I said. “That’s what this outermost circle of symbols is. It’s a barrier against creatures of spirit and magical forces. These symbols here, here, here, are the key ones.” I pointed out the squiggles in question.

Kim nodded eagerly. “I got the outer one. What’s the next?”

“The second circle is more of a spell barrier to *mortal* flesh. It wouldn’t work if all you used was a ring of symbols. You’d need something else, stones or gems or something, spaced between the drawings.” I took another bite of steak.

Kim frowned at the paper, and then at me. “And then what would that do?”

“Invisible wall,” I told her. “Like bricks. Spirits, magic, could go right through it, but mortal flesh couldn’t. Neither could a thrown rock, bullets, anything purely physical.”

“I see,” she said, excited. “Sort of a force field.”

I nodded. “Something like that.”

Her cheeks glowed with excitement, and her eyes shone. “I *knew* it. And what’s this last one?”

I squinted at the innermost ring of symbols, frowning. “A mistake.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that it’s just gobbledegook. It doesn’t mean anything useful. Are you sure you copied this correctly?”

Kim's mouth twisted into a frown. "I'm sure, I'm sure. I was careful."

I studied her face for a moment. "If I read the symbols correctly, it's a third wall. Built to withhold creatures of flesh *and* spirit. Neither mortal nor spirit but somewhere in between."

She frowned. "What kind of creatures are like that?"

I shrugged. "None," I said, and officially, it was true. The White Council of wizards did not allow the discussion of demons that could be called to earth, beings of spirit that could gather flesh to themselves. Usually, a spirit-circle was enough to stop all but the most powerful demons or Elder Things of the outer reaches of the Nevernever. But this third circle was built to stop things that could transcend those kinds of boundaries. It was a cage for demonic demigods and archangels.

Kim wasn't buying my answer. "I don't see why anyone would make a circle like this to contain nothing, Harry."

I shrugged. "People don't always do reasonable, sensible things. They're like that."

She rolled her eyes at me. "Come on, Harry. I'm not a baby. You don't have to shelter me."

"And you," I told her, "don't need to know what kind of thing that third circle was built to contain. You don't want to know. Trust me."

She glowered at me for a long moment, then sipped at her ale and shrugged. "All right. Circles have to be empowered, right? You have to know how to switch them on, like lights?"

"Something like that. Sure."

"How would a person turn this one on?"

I stared at her for a long time.

"Harry?" she asked.

"You don't need to know that, either. Not for an academic interest. I don't know what you've got in mind, Kim, but leave it alone. Forget it. Walk away, before you get hurt."

"Harry, I am not—"

"Save it," I told her. "You're sitting on a tiger cage, Kim." I thumped a finger on the paper for emphasis. "And you wouldn't need it if you weren't planning on trying to stick a tiger in there."

Her eyes glittered, and she lifted her chin. "You don't think I'm strong enough."

"Your strength's got nothing to do with it," I said. "You don't have the training. You don't have the knowledge. I wouldn't expect a kid in grade school to be able to sit down and figure out college calculus. And I don't expect it of you, either." I leaned forward. "You don't know enough yet to be toying with this sort of thing, Kim. And even if you did, even if you did manage to become a full-fledged wizard, I'd still tell you not to do it. You mess this up and you could get a lot of people hurt."

"*If* I was planning to do that, it's my business, Harry." Her eyes were bright with anger. "You don't have the right to choose for me."

“No,” I told her. “I’ve got the responsibility to help you make the right choice.” I curled the paper in my fingers and crushed it, then tossed it aside, to the floor. She stabbed her fork into a cut of steak, a sharp, vicious gesture. “Look, Kim,” I said. “Give it some time. When you’re older, when you’ve had more experience . . .”

“You aren’t so much older than me,” Kim said.

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. “I’ve had a lot of training. And I started young.” My own ability with magic, far in excess of my years and education, wasn’t a subject I wanted to explore. So I tried to shift the direction of the conversation. “How is this fall’s fund-raiser going?”

“It’s not,” she said. She leaned back wearily in her seat. “I’m tired of trying to pry money out of people to save the planet they’re poisoning or the animals they’re killing. I’m tired of writing letters and doing marches for causes no one believes in anymore.” She rubbed at her eyes. “I’m just tired.”

“Look, Kim. Try to get some rest. And please, please don’t play with that circle. Promise me.”

She tossed her napkin down, left a few bills on the table, and stood up. “Enjoy your meal, Harry,” she said. “And thanks for nothing.”

I stood up as well. “Kim,” I said. “Wait a minute.”

But she ignored me. She stalked off toward the door, her skirt swaying along with her long hair. She cut an impressive, statuesque figure. I could feel the anger bubbling off her. One of the ceiling fans shuddered and let out a puff of smoke as she walked under it, then whirled down to a halt. She raced up the short flight of stairs and exited the bar, banging the door shut behind her. People watched her leave, then glanced back to me, speculation on their faces.

I sat back down, frustrated. Dammit. Kim was one of several people I had coached through the difficult period surrounding the discovery of their innate magical talents. It made me feel like crap to withhold information from her, but she had been playing with fire. I couldn’t let her do that. It was my responsibility to help protect her from such things, until she knew enough to realize how dangerous they were.

To say nothing of what the White Council would think of a nonwizard toying with major summoning circles. The White Council didn’t take chances with things like that. They just acted, decisively, and they weren’t always particular about people’s lives and safety when they did it.

I had done the right thing. Keeping that kind of information out of Kim’s hands had been the right decision. I had been protecting her from danger she didn’t, couldn’t, fully appreciate.

I had done the right thing—even if she had trusted me to provide answers for her, as I had in the past, when teaching her to contain and control her modest magical talents. Even if she had trusted me to show her the answers she needed, to be her guide through the darkness.

I’d done the right thing.

Dammit.

My stomach was soured. I didn’t want any more of Mac’s delicious meal, steak or no steak. I didn’t feel like I’d earned it.

I was sipping ale and thinking dark thoughts when the door opened again. I didn’t look up, occupied as I was

with brooding, a famous pastime of wizards everywhere. And then a shadow fell over me.

“Sitting here pouting,” Murphy said. She bent over and absently picked up the wadded scrap of paper I had tossed aside earlier, tucking it tidily into her coat pocket rather than letting it lie about as clutter on the floor. “That’s not much like you, Harry.”

I glanced up at Murphy. I didn’t have far to look. Karrin Murphy wasn’t much more than five feet tall. She’d gotten her golden hair cut, from shoulder length to something far shorter, and a little longer in front than in back. It was a punky sort of look, and very appealing with her blue eyes and upturned nose. She was dressed for the weather in what must have been her at-home clothes: dark jeans, a flannel shirt, hiking boots, and a heavy woodsman’s jacket. She was wearing her badge on her belt.

Murphy was extremely cute, for a grown adult who also held a black belt in aikido, and had several marksmanship awards from Chicago PD. She was a real professional, one who had fought and clawed her way up the ranks to become full lieutenant. She’d made enemies along the way, and one of them had seen to it that she was put in charge of Special Investigations soon after.

“Hello there, Murphy,” I told her. I took a swig of ale and said, “Long time, no see.” I tried to keep my voice even, but I’m pretty sure she heard the anger in it.

“Look, Harry—”

“Did you read the editorial in the *Tribune*? The one criticizing you for wasting the city’s money hiring a ‘charlatan psychic named Harry Dresden’? I guess you must have, since I haven’t heard from you since it came out.”

She rubbed at the bridge of her nose. “I don’t have time for this.”

I ignored her. “Not that I blame you. I mean, not many of the good taxpayers of Chicago believe in magic, or wizards. Of course, not many of them have seen what you and I have. You know. When we worked together. Or when I was saving your life.”

Her eyes tightened at the edges. “I need you. We’ve got a situation.”

“You need me? We haven’t talked for more than a month, and you need me all of a sudden? I’ve got an office and a telephone and everything, Lieutenant. You don’t need to track me down here while I’m having dinner.”

“I’ll tell the killer to be sure to operate during business hours next time,” Murphy said. “But I need you to help me find him.”

I straightened in my chair, frowning. “There’s been a murder? Something in my field?”

Murphy flashed a hard smile at me. “I hope you didn’t have anything more important to do.”

I felt my jaw grow tense. “No. I’m ready.” I stood up.

“Well then,” she said, turning and walking away. “Shall we go?”

Chapter Two

Murphy declined to ride in the Blue Beetle, my old Volkswagen bug.

The Beetle wasn't really blue, not anymore. One of the doors had been replaced with a green duplicate, the other one with white, when something with claws had shredded the originals. The hood had been slagged by fire, and my mechanic, Mike, had replaced it with the hood from a red vehicle. The important thing is that the Beetle runs, even if it doesn't do it very fast, and I'm comfortable with the car. Mike has declared that the VW bug is the easiest car in the world to repair, and so that's what I drive. He keeps it running eight or nine days in ten. That's phenomenal.

Technology tends to foul up around wizards—flip on a light switch, and it'll be the time the bulb burns out. Drive past a streetlight, and it'll pick just then to flicker and die. Whatever can go wrong will, automobiles included.

I didn't think it made much sense for Murphy to risk her vehicle when she could have taken mine, but she said she'd take her chances.

She didn't speak as she drove her Saturn down the JFK, out toward Rosemont. I watched her, uncomfortable, as we went. She was in a hurry, taking a few too many chances cutting in and out of traffic, and I put on my seat belt. At least we weren't on her motorcycle.

"Murph," I asked her, "where's the fire?"

She glanced aside at me. "I want you out there before some other people show up."

"Press?" I couldn't quite keep a nasty slur out of the word.

She shrugged. "Whoever."

I frowned at her, but she didn't say anything else—which seemed typical. Murphy didn't speak much to me anymore. We rode the rest of the way in silence, exited the JFK, and pulled into the parking lot of a half-completed little strip mall. We got out of the car.

A jet came in, low, heading for O'Hare International Airport, only a few miles to the west. I squinted at it for a moment, and then frowned at Murphy as a uniformed officer led us toward a building surrounded by police tape. There was an abundance of light, the moon overhead bright silver and almost a completely round circle. I cast an enormous, gangly shadow as I walked, my duster flapping around my legs. It towered beside Murphy's far smaller shadow ahead of me.

"Murphy?" I said. "Aren't we outside Chicago city limits?"

"Yeah," Murphy said shortly.

"Uh. Then aren't we out of your jurisdiction, technically?"

"People need help wherever they can get it, Dresden. And the last several killings happened in Chicago, so we want to look at this firsthand. I already worked things out with the local force. It's not really an issue."

"Several killings?" I said. "Several? As in more than one? Murphy, slow down."

But she didn't. Instead, she led me into a roomy building that proved to be under construction, though all the exterior work was finished. Some of the windows were still covered with board. I didn't see the sign on the building's front doors until I got close.

"The Varsity?" I said, reading it. "I thought Marcone burned it down last spring."

“Mmm-hmm,” Murphy said, glancing at me over her shoulder. “Relocated and rebuilding.”

Chicago’s resident crime lord, Gentleman Johnny Marcone, was the robber baron of the mean streets. He kept all the rough business inside the city proper, leaving his legitimate interests out in the suburbs, like here in Rosemont. Last spring, when I had confronted him in his club, a previous incarnation of the Varsity, about a deadly new drug on the streets, the place had wound up burning to the ground.

After the whole mess was over, word got out that the drug dealer I’d taken out had been Marcone’s enemy, and that I had nuked him at the crime lord’s request. I hadn’t refuted the rumor. It was easier to let people talk than to force Marcone to make an issue of things.

Inside the building, the floors were rough, unfinished. Someone had turned on a couple of halogen work lights, and they cast the interior into brilliant, clear white light. There was drywall dust everywhere. There were a few card tables set up, with workmen’s tools left out on them in places. Plastic buckets of paint, tarps, and a sack of new paintbrushes waited for use off to one side. I didn’t notice the blood until Murphy put her arm out in front of me to keep me from walking into it.

“Wake up, Dresden,” she said. Her voice was grim.

I stopped, and looked down. Blood. A lot of blood. It began near my feet, where a long splatter had reached out like an arm from a drowning man, staining the dusty floor with scarlet. My eyes followed the path of the long bloodstain back to a pool, maybe an eighth of an inch deep, surrounding a mound of ripped cloth and torn meat that must have been the corpse.

My stomach quailed, threatening to eject the bites of steak I’d taken earlier that evening, but I forced it down. I walked in a circle around the body, keeping my distance. The corpse was, I guessed, that of a male in his thirties. He had been a large man, with a short, spiky haircut. He had fallen onto his side, facing away from me, his arms curled up toward his head, his legs up toward his vitals. A weapon, a little automatic pistol, lay seven or eight feet away, uselessly out of the victim’s reach.

I walked around the corpse until I could see the face.

Whatever had killed him, it hadn’t been human. His face was gone, simply torn away. Something had ripped his lips off. I could see his bloodstained teeth. His nose had been torn all the way up one side, and part of it dangled toward the floor. His head was misshapen, as though some enormous pressure had been put upon his temples, warping his skull in.

His eyes were gone. Torn out of his head. Bitten out. There were the ragged slash marks of fangs all around the edges of the sockets.

I closed my eyes, tightly. I took a deep breath. Another. A third. That didn’t help. The body stank, a sickly sewer-smell that rose up from the torn innards. My stomach wanted to roll up my throat, out my mouth, and onto the floor.

I could remember the other details, even with my eyes closed, and catalogued them neatly for later reference. The victim’s jacket and shirt had been torn to bloody ribbons along his forearms, in defensive wounds. His hands and arms were a mass of pulped, ripped meat, the palms and fingers slashed to ragged lumps. The curl of his body hid his abdomen from me, but that was where the blood was pooling from, spreading out like ink from a spilled bottle. The stench only confirmed that he had been eviscerated.

I turned away from the corpse and opened my eyes, staring down at the floor.

“Harry?” Murphy said, from the far side of the body. The note of hardness that had been in her voice all evening was absent. She hadn’t moved while I had done my cursory examination.

“I recognize him,” I said. “At least, I think I do. You’ll need to check dental records or something, to be sure.”

I could hear her frown in her words. “Yeah? Who was he?”

“I don’t know his name. I always called him Spike. For the haircut. He was one of Johnny Marcone’s bodyguards.”

Murphy was quiet for a moment, then said, succinctly, “Shit.”

“What, Murph?” I looked back at her, without looking down at Spike’s mangled remains.

Murphy’s face was set in concern, for me, her blue eyes gentle. I saw her wipe the expression away, as quickly as a shadow crosses the floor, a smoothing of lines that left her features neutral. I guess she hadn’t expected me to turn to her. “Take a look around a little more,” she said. “Then we’ll talk.”

“What am I looking for?” I asked her.

“You’ll know it,” she said. Then added, in a whisper that I think she didn’t intend me to hear, “I hope.”

I turned back to my work, and looked around the room. Off to one side, one of the windows was broken. Near it was a table, lying askew on the floor, its legs warped and bent. I walked over to it.

Broken glass littered the ground around the collapsed table. Since the glass was on the inside of the building, something must have come in through the window. There was blood on several of the broken pieces of glass. I picked up one of the larger ones and frowned at it. The blood was dark red, and not yet wholly dried. I took a white handkerchief from my pocket, folded the shard of glass into it, and then slipped it into the pocket of my duster.

I rose and paced over the floor, my eyes downcast, studying the dust. In one spot, it was rubbed almost clean off the floor, as though a struggle had taken place there without blood being spilled. In another spot, where the halogen lamps didn’t quite reach, there was a pool of silver moonlight below a window. I knelt down beside it.

In the center of the pool was a paw print, in the dust, a paw print almost as big as my spread hand. Canine. Dots at the tips of the paw spoke of heavy nails, almost claws.

I looked up through the window at the rounded silver shape of the almost-full moon.

“Oh, hell,” I breathed. “Oh, hell.”

Murphy came toward me and watched me silently for a moment, waiting. I licked my lips, stood up, and turned to her. “You’ve got problems.”

“No kidding. Talk to me, Dresden.”

I nodded, then pointed at the window. “The attacker probably came in there. He went after the victim, attacked him, got the gun away from him, and killed him. It’s the attacker’s blood on the window. They struggled a while, over there by that clean spot, maybe, and Spike made a break for the door. He didn’t make

it there. He got torn to pieces first.”

I turned toward Murphy, looking down at her solemnly. “You’ve had other murders happen in the same way. Probably about four weeks ago, when the moon was last full. Those were the other killings you were talking about.”

Murphy glanced at my face for a moment, keeping her eyes off mine, and nodded her head. “Yeah. Four weeks ago, almost exactly. But no one else picked up the full moon angle. Just me.”

“Uh-huh. Then you should see this, too,” I said. I led her over to the window and showed her the paw print in the dust beneath it. She regarded it in silence.

“Harry,” she said after a minute. “Are there such things as werewolves?” She brushed a strand of hair back from her cheek, a small and oddly vulnerable gesture. She folded her arms over her stomach, as though she were cold.

I nodded. “Yeah. Not like you see in the movies, but yeah. I figure that’s what you got going here.”

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