

# **Blood Sacrifice**

*A Werewolf for Hire Novel*

Nic Brown

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the authors who inspired me, the teachers who instructed me and my family who supported me. Especially my wife, Fiona, who did all of the above and most challenging of all... she put up with me. Thanks Baby.

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## Chapter 1

The weight of the sawed off shotgun in my hand was a great comfort as I made my way cautiously forward through the brush and foliage around the small clearing. It was early spring and the vegetation was still sparse from the hard winter they'd had in this part of Quebec. Even so, there was more than enough of it to provide cover for me, as long as the wind didn't change and give my scent away to the creature. I could see it striding back and forth in front of the abandoned mine entrance less than thirty yards in front of me.

It looked vaguely like a man, if that man was twelve feet tall and covered from head to toe in snowy white fur. The creature's arms seemed too long for its size and where the fur on most of its body was short like a gorilla's, the arms were covered in much longer hair that swished back and forth as it moved. It turned in my direction and for the first time I saw its face. Two black eyes, almost like those of a shark, were set into its face just above a squashed, wide nose that puffed in and out as it smelled the cool early evening air.

I noticed that its fur was not entirely white as I'd thought before. All around the creature's mouth and on its broad chest, the hair was stained a nasty, clotted, reddish-brown. The color of dried blood. This was the creature I'd been tracking for three days, the Wendigo, a monster straight out of Native American legend. Only this one was all too real.

Of course that might have been hard to believe, even seeing the thing prowling about the mine's entrance, except that I'm a creature out of legend as well: a werewolf. Not the Claude Raines "Wolfman" who's cursed to kill when the moon is full. My second, hairier nature is something I can control, mostly. My other nature also gives me an edge over most people. Even without changing into a wolf, I have enhanced senses that allowed me to follow the scent of blood the beast had trailed across the forest.

I'd found the remains of a campsite several hours ago and picked up its trail there. Actually, I hadn't picked up its trail exactly. I could smell the blood and lingering human scents of its victims. The creature had taken at least two people with it when it left the camp. It made a snack out of a third. A man, I believe. The remains I had found were only identifiable as human by the bits of clothes still clinging to them in a few places. From what I could tell, the two others had been alive when it took them, but that had been at least six hours before I'd arrived. I hoped their condition hadn't changed in that time. It was their scent, more than that of the elusive creature, which had led me here. It had brought them back to save for later would be my guess; its nature made it prefer the taste of fresh human flesh above all else, and there just weren't that many people on the menu in the wilds of Quebec's Algonquin Provincial Park at this time of year.

As I watched from my cover, I saw the thing hunch down almost onto all fours and disappear into the blackness of the mine's opening. I heard a shrill, sharp scream come echoing out of the cave. The screaming continued for a minute, but began to weaken until it turned into wracking sobs that were almost inaudible even to my enhanced hearing.

I started to move forward, then dropped back out of sight when the Wendigo suddenly emerged from the darkness of the mine. It stretched itself out for a moment and then sniffed the air. The wind was still and I hoped it wouldn't be able to pick up my scent. It intently scanned the tree line around the mine, its brow furrowed in concentration, its face looking far too intelligent for my liking.

I held my breath as its gaze passed over my hiding place twice without pausing. Then, as though hearing some signal, the creature lumbered off into the wilderness on the far side of the clearing from me.

I could still hear the sobbing coming faintly from within the mine, but I waited until I'd silently counted to one hundred. I'd seen no further sign of the Wendigo in that time, so I crept forward out of my hiding place and towards the mine entrance.

As I got closer, the scent of blood and decay came to me, filling my sensitive nose. It wasn't overwhelming, but the smell of death, coupled with the woman's crying made my stomach turn in

nauseated fashion. The entrance of the mine was almost six feet tall, so I didn't have to duck my 5'10 frame as I went in, but it was close.

The interior of the mine sloped gently down and to the left, and I quickly saw the source of the decaying smell. Bones, clothes and other remains were strewn about the inside of the mine. My hopes rose of finding the other two victims alive as the crying continued from further ahead.

I concentrated a moment and changed slightly into my wolf form. Not much, but I had enough control to allow only my eyes to change. They turned golden and the world's colors became washed out to me. What I lost in color, I made up for in sensitivity and I could see almost as clearly as day even in the dimly lit interior of the mine. The woman I'd heard sobbing was lying on her back another forty or so feet into the shaft. I shifted the shotgun from my right to left hand and went forward.

Her long blonde hair was a matted and tangled mess that concealed her face from me. I could see that she had been battered around pretty badly, but she was alive. I bent over her and pushed the hair off her face. At the touch she jolted awake and would have screamed but for my hand which snapped across her mouth.

"I'm here to help. Can you be calm and quiet if I take my hand away? I don't want to let that thing know I'm here," I said in a whisper.

Her eyes still wide with fear, she nodded her head and I slowly took my hand away.

"Where is it?" she asked in a raspy whisper, her voice cracked and strained from screaming.

"I don't know, but I need to get you out of here before it comes back."

She looked around frantically and then grabbed my arm with surprising strength.

"Where's Linda? It took me and my daughter, where is she? WHERE'S LINDA?" Her voice rose as she blurted the words out.

I clamped my hand over her mouth again and whispered. "I don't know where she is, but if you keep raising your voice we're both going to end up dead!"

She nodded again and I took my hand away. I placed my finger to my lips as she started to speak. "Wait here, I'll look a little further in, but then we have to go. Don't move or talk. Do you understand?"

She nodded again, but she was looking around nervously as she did so. I tried to pick up a scent of another living person, but the air was too filled with the foul smells of death for me to detect anything useful.

I leaned in and whispered. "I'll find her. Remember, wait here and don't make any noise. It's going to be OK." I stood slowly, disentangling my arm from her grip.

It didn't take long to find Linda. The girl had been tossed, almost casually, upon a heap of bones just around a bend maybe another sixty or so feet in. She looked to be about fifteen and she shared her mother's long blond hair, but it was damp with blood from a nasty gash that ran across the side of her head where she'd hit a rock. She wasn't moving and I couldn't see any signs of life at all. My heart sank, but I leaned in and checked her pulse. She was alive! I examined her briefly to see if I could safely move her and decided I didn't have much choice. I slipped the shotgun into a holster on my side and gently picked her up. She didn't seem to weigh anything in my arms as I moved back towards the entrance.

When I got to her mother, she burst into fresh tears and started stroking the girl's hair, murmuring to her. But her daughter didn't move and she was becoming more agitated by the second.

"What's your name?" I asked in a hard whisper.

"Maggie...Maggie Stein," she muttered, stroking her daughter's head.

"Well Maggie, your daughter's alive but unconscious, and if we want to get out of here, I'm going to need you to stay calm and quiet. Can you do that for me?"

Her eyes never left her daughter but she slowly nodded her head again.

"Good. Now let's go. Stay close to me and try not to make any noise."

With Linda in my arms and her mother behind me holding onto the back of my jacket, we cautiously made our way towards the mine entrance. Just before we reached the exit of the shadows of the mine, I stopped and motioned for her to stay put as I gently set her daughter down against the wall. Maggie knelt by the unconscious girl, wiping her face and silently crying as I moved further forward.

The creature lived in this mine and its smell was too strong here for me to tell anything by scent, so I slipped forward to see if it was nearby. As far as I could tell, the clearing outside the mine was empty, but something didn't feel right. It was eerily quiet, almost like the forest was holding its breath waiting for something to happen.

I didn't like it, but I needed to get these people out of here before it came back. Wherever it went, it had been a while since it had last eaten and I'd say it was ready for its next meal.

I crept back and found Maggie slumped against the wall next to her daughter, hugging the girl close.

Her eyes, bloodshot and tired, looked up at me. "She's so still..." was all she said when I saw them suddenly widen in horror.

"FUCK!"

I spun around as the form of the Wendigo filled the mine entrance.

Maggie was screaming incoherently, but I didn't have time to even look her way. I stared into the creature's soulless eyes and time seemed to slow down. It moved forward, reaching out for me. I grabbed for the shotgun on my hip and managed to draw the weapon, but it was there before I could raise the barrel. As if it knew what the weapon was, it grabbed my arm, and yanked me off the ground, slamming me into the opposite wall. I went limp and tried to roll with the force of the blow, but I felt at least one of my ribs snap as I hit the rock wall. Without letting go, it threw me the other way, slinging me head over heels out of the mine shaft.

I felt a searing stab of pain, and I thought dimly that it had dislocated my right shoulder. I landed hard on the ground outside the mine and rolled to a stop on my side facing the entrance. The Wendigo was there and it was smiling, or as close to it as its face could manage. In its hand it held the sawed off shotgun which I must have lost in the struggle.

Icy daggers of fear stabbed my heart as the reality of it hit me: the Wendigo was smiling. The eyes may have been soulless, but the creature was definitely intelligent. This had been a trap and I'd fallen for it. The beast dropped the weapon and took a slow step forward, my ears filling with a rumbling sound like a diesel engine coming to life, as it growled at me.

I rolled backwards and came up in a crouch facing the creature. My dislocated arm hanging uselessly at my side, we faced off fewer than twenty feet apart. For some reason, it wasn't rushing in to finish me off. I didn't know why, except that perhaps it was enjoying the sport, feeding on the fear it knew I felt as it drew nearer.

There was a large fir tree to my left and in one quick motion I lifted my wounded arm up and slammed my shoulder into the tree. Fireworks exploded in my head and I screamed out as the force of the blow jammed my shoulder back into its socket. My arm hurt like hell, but I could move it again and that was all that mattered. Unfortunately, the motion had presented my back to the creature and I felt, more than saw, it lunge at me.

I rolled off the tree, diving to the right as the Wendigo's massive claws tore a gash the size of a basketball in the hard bark in the spot where I'd been. I staggered off balance as I turned again to face the beast. I had to take the offensive or I was dead.

I willed myself into my half wolf form. This was where I had the best of both worlds: the power and strength of the wolf, but the flexibility of a human. It was also as far as I could change while fully dressed, but that didn't matter, what did matter was payback, and this abomination was due for some.

The change didn't increase my height significantly, but my weight increased as my muscle mass went up by at least fifty pounds. I was strong, fast, and agile, with the ability to heal from most wounds with remarkable speed. And for all that, I knew that unless I got to the shotgun, I didn't stand much of a chance against the Wendigo.

A normal weapon would do little good against this supernatural beast, but the shotgun was loaded with special shells. They had been made for me by the Algonquin shamans before I'd set out. I didn't know what was in them, but one of the shamans, Three Bears, had said that I must shoot the creature with at least one shell to break the Wendigo's power. That power was as simple as it was frightening; no man or animal could kill the beast, as long as it continued to feed on human flesh.

I tried very hard not to think of that as I leapt forward, my own claws extended, and swiped at the thing. For a creature of its size, it was fast, but I was faster. Darting in and out, I struck at the Wendigo as we circled each other in a strangely choreographed ballet of blood.

It swung one of its clawed hands at me with too much force and was left off balance. I seized the chance and leapt onto it, catching it right at the ribs with my own claws. Blood spurted, a brilliant scarlet against snowy fur. The Wendigo howled in pain as I danced back out of its reach.

I'd managed to rip four deep furrows into its side, and to my horror, I watched gashes knit themselves shut right before my eyes. Damnation! I could heal fast, but this was unreal.

The Wendigo remained still while its side healed. Our eyes met and I knew it had wanted me to see, to understand. It moved with lightening speed, slashing in at me as it came. I dodged the initial attack, but it pressed in using its incredibly long arms to full advantage, never letting me get close enough to hit back at it.

I don't know how long we continued dancing around the clearing. Dodge, strike, move; round and round we went. There was very little style to the attacks, but they came at such a mind-numbingly fast pace that form didn't matter. I had years of martial arts experience and the natural skill and ferocity of a werewolf, yet it was all I could do to stay ahead of the creature.

I was tiring from the continuous fighting and it began to score more hits on me. A cut here, a gash there, the occasional bruising blow. Individually, they weren't much, but combined, they were taking their toll. I felt myself slowing as my body spent its strength not just fighting the creature, but healing my own wounds.

We had moved back around the clearing and my opponent stood between me and the mine. The Wendigo made another grab for me and I caught its wrist with my left hand. I twisted and pulled it past me using leverage and all my strength to keep it off balance. I was able to grab its forearm with my other hand and drive it head first into the fir tree it had struck before. The Wendigo's face smashed into the tree with a loud crack. The force of the impact shook the tree all the way to the top, as if a wind was blowing it.

I leapt on to its back and began tearing into it with both my clawed hands. I tried desperately to do enough damage to the thing to overcome its ability to heal. I latched onto the side of its neck with my wolf's jaws and bit down as hard as I could. I twisted my face away, ripping a huge mouthful of flesh and fur out of its neck between the jaw and shoulder.

The creature had been trying to rise, but the neck wound seemed to take the fight out of it. It slumped and quivered underneath me as blood poured from the gaping tear in its flesh.

Finally it was still and the only sound I heard was my own rasping pants for air. My chest ached fiercely with each breath I drew and I wondered absently how many of my ribs the thing had broken. This was not turning out to be a great day.

Standing, I turned and headed back for the mine entrance. I changed back into my human form as I slowly crossed to the dark opening. Just at the edge of the light from the doorway I could see Maggie's body lying limply against the hard stone wall, her eyes open and staring sightlessly up at me. There was a nasty circle of gore on the wall above her head and it was immediately apparent that the thing had smashed her into the wall. I told myself that she probably died instantly, but the fear I'd seen in her eyes when she saw the Wendigo would not be something I'd soon forget.

"I'm sorry Maggie..." I said in a soft voice as I started in to see if her daughter had fared any better.

I hadn't even taken a step when I heard it. The Wendigo had been dead not five minutes before and now I heard it howl an unearthly cry as it stood and started lumbering across the clearing towards me.

Three Bears was right, I couldn't kill the thing. Hell, I'd torn the side of its neck out and all that there was to show for it was blood-matted fur where the wound had been. This was too much.

I backed further into the cave, looking for the shotgun, but didn't see it. I changed again to my half wolf form and readied to face off as it reached the opening, blocking out the waning light of day with its huge form.

"Get down."

The words came from behind me and I didn't hesitate for a second. I dropped flat and as I did, I felt the blast of the sawed off shotgun firing from almost directly behind me.

The sound was nearly deafening in the confines of the mine, and my ears rang as I watched the results of the blast. The sawed off barrel of the gun allowed the shot to spread quickly. In fact, if I'd been much further ahead, I'd have taken some of the fragments from the blast myself.

A normal shell would have been filled with small metal balls. These shells contained a mixture of quartz and mineral fragments that had all been soaked in a ceremonial potion by the Algonquin shamans before being loaded into the casings. Three Bears had said that this magic was the only thing that could truly stop the Wendigo curse.

I guess he was right. The Wendigo had taken the load across the whole front of its body. Small streams of smoke rose from dozens of tiny wounds on the creature, but otherwise it seemed unharmed.

Its chest heaved as it breathed, and then its black eyes rolled up into its head as it fell to its knees. The tiny smoking spots that covered it were growing larger. They glowed with an eerie reddish orange light, like embers in a fire. The spots grew larger and brighter, spreading like ripples in a pond as the Wendigo's entire body was slowly covered with the unearthly light. The creature made a feeble moaning sound. Smoke streamed in thick tendrils up into the air and out of the mine entrance. When the glow finally encompassed its entire body, the light pulsed almost like a heart beating. It grew brighter with each pulse until I was finally forced to look away from the glare.

The light shone like a burning sun, but I felt no heat. Finally, the light faded and I could look again. The Wendigo was gone. In its place at the front of the cave lay the body of an old man.

He was nude and covered in wrinkles and the dark blotches of bruises. From underneath him a thin trickle of smoke still rose. I don't know how long I stared at the form on the ground in front of me before I was startled by a quiet voice behind me.

"Is it dead?"

I turned. I'd forgotten the shotgun blast that had brought the thing down so quickly, stunned by the turn of events, but now I saw who'd fired the weapon. The shotgun looked impossibly large and unwieldy in Linda's small hands. The girl held it before her with the still-smoking barrels pointed at the figure on the floor. Her eyes were wide, and like the gun, they never wavered from the old man.

"I'm pretty sure it's dead. I'll check it." I was moving towards the man, but then paused. "Your name is Linda right?" She didn't respond to my question, so I went on. "I'm Michael Warren. Thank you. That shot probably saved both our lives."

She continued to stare past me at the old man's body. Then she quietly said again, "Is it dead?"

"Linda, let me have the gun, then I'll check it." I spoke in a calm voice and extended my hand to her for the shotgun. Instead of giving me the gun, she stepped to the side, keeping the old man's body in line with the barrel of the weapon, but moving out of easy reach.

Her voice was still quiet but it had iciness to it that I'd heard before, usually right before someone died. "You touch this gun and I'll kill you too, Michael Warren. I don't know what the hell you are but you're a monster too. I saw you, you aren't human. So you stay the fuck away from me!" She pointed the barrel of the gun at me. I could see from the wisps of smoke that she'd fired both chambers into the Wendigo. She probably didn't even realize the gun was empty, but the intent was there in her shocked eyes. If I pushed her at all, she'd try to kill me as sure as she'd shot the creature.

She was a frightened young girl and I was the big bad wolf. I could have snatched the gun away from her pretty easily, even if it had still been loaded, but she'd been through enough. I took a cautious step back from her with my hands partially raised.

“Linda, please put the gun down. I’m not going to hurt you. I don’t know what you think you saw but I’m as human as you are.”

“Don’t you lie to me. I saw you turn into some kind of monster and you killed Mom.” Tears ran down her face and the gun shook in her hands.

“Linda, I didn’t kill your mother. I came to stop that creature and to help you if I could.”

“Fat lot of good you did. Where were you when...” She seemed to choke for a second, trying to talk and sob at the same time. “When it killed my Dad? Where were you then if you came to help?” She’d lowered the gun but still stood out of reach. I held out a hand to her and slowly stepped forward.

“I’m sorry Linda. I’m so sorry. I tried to get here as fast as I could. I...”

“Fuck sorry!” she screamed as she brought the gun up and pulled the trigger. Nothing happened, it hadn’t even been cocked. She dropped the gun and ran at me, striking with clenched fists against my chest. I just stood there and let her hit me until she finally broke down sobbing. I put my arms around her and held her quietly as she sobbed in my arms. A little girl in a world filled with monsters.

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