

In for Pound

Lawrence Watt-Evans

The moment she was absolutely sure they were out of earshot of anyone else, she hissed at him, "Are you *nuts*?"

He smiled at her as he held open the car door. "I don't think so," he replied.

"But *running for mayor*?" She stood beside the car, not willing to interrupt the discussion even long enough to take her seat.

"Why not?" he asked, still smiling that toothy smile of his. "Seriously, Jen, do you see anyone better suited to the job? I'm an upstanding member of the community, I've had a good education, I have a career in public service . . ."

"Dave, you *know* why not!" She pointed at the sky. "You're going to have a *demonstration* of 'why not' in another hour or so!"

His politician's smile vanished, and he looked at her with an expression that just reeked of sincere concern—an expression she was quite sure he had practiced for hours in front of the mirror.

"And why should that disqualify me from serving as mayor? Surely you realize it's just an occasional inconvenience. So I'll be unavailable a couple of nights each month . . ."

"*Inconvenience*?" She stared at him, astonished. "Dave, you're a *werewolf*, remember? You inherited a genuine gypsy curse. That's a bit more than an inconvenience!"

"Why?" he asked mildly.

Her jaw dropped.

"Really, Jen—it's not as if I'm running for president. It's just mayor of Eltonburg. So I'll want to spend a

couple of nights a month in private; so what?" He patted her on the arm, urging her into the car.

Stunned, she sat. She watched through the windshield as he walked around and climbed in the driver's side.

"Dave," she said, "suppose there's a City Council meeting on a full moon? Suppose there's a disaster—a blizzard, say—on the night of a full moon?"

He shrugged. "I'll be ill, or unavoidably detained. These things happen; people will understand. It hasn't been a problem for me before."

"Before you were just a police lieutenant, not the mayor!"

"Detective lieutenant," he corrected her—he was touchy about the distinction between the two sides of Eltonburg's police department, enforcement and investigation. He started the car and looked over his shoulder to be sure the street was clear.

"Whatever. Don't you think that, even in Eltonburg, some reporter might stumble across the truth? Old Bill Beasley isn't going to give up his job without a fight, despite the indictments—he's going to have his people checking up on you all through the campaign, just looking for some little flaw. What if he notices you're never around at the full moon? How are you going to explain that? Suppose he says you spend a couple of nights a month at the strip clubs down on Route 8—how are you going to prove you *don't*?"

Dave frowned as he swung the car around the corner onto Main Street. "He couldn't prove I *do*."

"He wouldn't *have* to prove it—what are you going to say instead? That you grow fur and go running through the streets on those nights?"

"Well, why not?" Dave asked. "I've never hurt anyone. Sure, I'm not quite myself when I'm a wolf, but I'm no ravening monster. Even real wolves aren't, and I never *completely* forget who I am. I've chased a few cats, sure, but I never bit or clawed anyone—not even the cats. Not even that damned spitting Persian down on Third Street."

"So you'd just admit the truth? And you think people will vote for a werewolf? You know how old-fashioned some of the people in this town are—and they're Mayor Beasley's biggest supporters. You

don't see Beasley standing up in front of the congregation at Calvary Baptist and getting them worked up about the spawn of Satan?"

"I'm not the spawn of Satan . . ."

"Tell Reverend Henry that!"

He settled into an angry quiet for the remainder of the drive home.

When they were out of the car but still in the garage he burst out, "Damn it, Jenny, I *am* running for mayor, because *somebody* has to get that crook Beasley and his weasely flunkies out of office! Yes, I'm a werewolf, and it *is* a drawback, and an inconvenience, and we don't want anyone to find out, but I don't think it's going to come out—maybe Beasley will find out I'm never around at the full moon and will try to make something out of it, but who'll believe him? I'll just say it's private business, all in the family, and you'll back me up, and my mother will, and the voters'll believe us. Why shouldn't they?"

"Because they're human, and they want to believe the worst of any politician they hear about." She sighed. "But if you want to risk it, I won't stop you. You're right, you'd be the best mayor Eltonburg's ever had, and *someone* has to run against Beasley. But I don't *like* it, Dave!"

"No one's asking you to like it," he muttered. He twitched and stumbled as he reached for the door to the house.

Jenny knew the signs. "Get those clothes off," she ordered. "We don't want them torn. That suit cost six hundred dollars."

He sighed. "Right," he said, pulling off his tie. "I guess I cut it closer than I meant to." He slipped off his jacket and handed it to her.

His fingers were already shrinking by the time he started on his shirt buttons, the nails thickening into claws. Jenny hurried to help.

Undressing him was a lot more fun the other twentyodd nights of the month, she thought—he'd be returning the favor, and when the clothes were off he wouldn't drop down on all fours and run off howling.

He might howl a little, or drop to all fours, but he wouldn't run off. And he wouldn't be furry and wagging a tail.

By the time his pants were entirely off he was more wolf than man, and a moment later he was *all* wolf. He trotted to the overhead door and glanced back at Jenny expectantly.

"Oh, all right," she said. She pushed the button, and the door lifted. She stopped it once it was high enough for him to slip out.

"Don't be all night, okay?" she called. "I'd like to get to sleep at a reasonable hour."

He didn't answer; instead he ran off, tongue lolling, down the street.

She sighed, pushed the button to close the door, then stooped and scooped up his clothes. It would serve him right if she *didn't* wait up, and he turned back on the front porch.

Of course, then the neighbors might see him out there naked, which would be hard to live down--and his mayoral hopes would be completely dashed. She trudged into the house and up the stairs, the bundle of clothes in her hand.

An hour later she was in the kitchen, treating herself to a glass of wine, when she heard the growl of a truck's engine and glanced out the front window.

She froze, and set the wineglass down carefully. Then she rounded the corner to the foyer and stepped out the front door onto the porch.

The Animal Control van was cruising slowly down the street; as she watched it stopped under a streetlight, and a man in a gray uniform jumped out, holding a pole with a loop on the end.

A second man came around the front of the van. "There he is!" he called, pointing at the Rosentals' bushes.

Her heart sank. Dave had been careless, and had been spotted.

She tried to think what she could do. If she claimed he was her dog . . . well, they had discussed this. He had no collar, no registration, no vaccination tag, and the Animal Control people would insist, quite reasonably, that she take her dog in and get him a license and get his shots taken care of.

Except he couldn't come in for a rabies shot unless the full moon was in the sky, and the vets weren't generally open then.

The two men were rushing for the bushes, one to either side, trapping their prey between them. She saw a flash of gray fur, and the two men dove, pole sweeping around, and then the three were all in a heap on the Rosenthals' lawn, and a moment later the two men were dragging a snarling, struggling wolf toward the van.

"Hey!" she called, stepping down from the porch—she'd find a way around the problem with the shots; maybe she could claim religious grounds for not having it done. "Hey, that's my dog!"

The two men ignored her as they heaved Dave into the cage in the back of the van and slammed it shut. She hurried toward them.

Once the cage was locked, one of them turned to face her.

"That's my dog," she said, pointing.

"He hasn't got a tag," the uniformed man said.

"We hadn't got around to it yet."

"Well, you can't let him run loose with no tag, lady. Eltonburg's got a twenty-four-hour leash law."

"I know, I know, I'm sorry—we've just been so busy . . ."

"The law's the law, lady. You want him back, you can come down to the pound and claim him, first thing in the morning. And bring your checkbook."

"In the *morning*?" A vision of Dave waking up naked in a cage at the pound appeared before her. "Can't I have him back now? I . . . I don't feel *safe* without him watching the house!"

The man shook his head. "Sorry, lady. We got rules—we find a dog running loose with no ID, we take it to the pound. No exceptions. Look, it's just one night."

"But . . ." She stared at Dave, who stared back at her with frightened yellow wolf-eyes.

The other man slammed the van door. "No exceptions," he said.

The first man said, a bit more kindly, "Look, lady, we used to cut folks some slack on this, but we just got tired of people who let their dogs run around wild, and promised every time oh yeah, we'll be down first thing tomorrow and get a license, we'll put a collar on him right away . . . and then nothing, and two or three days later we'd pick up the same dog chasing someone's cat up a tree, or digging in someone's lawn, still with no tag. So now we have to be tough about it—some people ruined it for the rest of us, y'know?"

"I know, but . . ."

"I'm sorry, lady." He turned away.

She watched helplessly as the two men climbed into their vehicle and drove away.

This was a nightmare. They were taking her husband away! And tomorrow morning, when the moon set, he'd turn back to himself there in the dog pound, stark naked, and they'd find him there, and it would be in all the papers, and they'd assume it was a prank, or that he'd been drunk, and any chance he might actually be elected mayor would be gone . . .

And besides that, it would just be so *embarrassing*!

She couldn't let that happen. She had to get him out of the pound *tonight*.

But how? She supposed there must be someone there at night, but it would just be a guard, and she wouldn't be able to claim Dave—the night watchman, or whoever was there, would just tell her to come back in the morning.

She'd have to *force* them to free Dave.

And how was she going to do *that*? Walk in there with Dave's service weapon and order them to free her dog?

She blinked as she stood on the lawn, watching the Animal Control van round the corner onto Armistead Avenue.

Why *not* just walk in with the gun and demand her dog?

Well, for one thing, they would recognize her, and the night watchman probably had a gun of his own.

But she could get around that . . .

She stood, thinking hard, for a moment, then turned and went inside.

A few hours later, somewhere between 2:00 and 3:00 in the morning, she cruised down the deserted streets and parked the car in an empty lot two blocks from the pound; she didn't want anyone getting her license number. Then she got out and opened the trunk. She was trembling; it took three tries before she could get the key in the lock.

It opened at last, though, and she reached in and pulled out Dave's bulletproof vest.

She'd never worn it before, and it was too big for her, but she got it on and tied it in place, the kevlar panels pressing uncomfortably on her breasts—it was meant for a man, not a woman, and she was bigchested.

Then she pulled on the old black raincoat, to further hide her figure—she was already wearing black

jeans and a black T-shirt, to make it as difficult as possible to see any distinctive details about her. Her feet were in old deck shoes with black stockings pulled up over them, to blur any markings or footprints.

Then came the motorcycle helmet with the dark visor, hiding her face and hair completely—and making it hard to see; it was like wearing sunglasses at night.

It *was* wearing sunglasses at night, really—the tinted visor was meant to serve the same purpose, as well as keeping bugs out of a motorcyclist's teeth.

And then came the scary part, as she lifted Dave's pump-action twelve-gauge out of the trunk.

She had fired the gun exactly three times. The first time she had started at the bang when it went off, but the other two she had been ready for it. She had still completely missed the target Dave had set up for her, and the next day her shoulder had been sore from the recoil, but she had fired it.

Her hands trembling again, she loaded five rounds of birdshot into the magazine. That wouldn't kill anyone, she was pretty sure, but it should be enough to hurt and to scare away anyone who got in her way.

Thus equipped, she marched toward the pound.

There were lights on—not very many, but at least two. That was a good sign; she needed there to be someone in there she could frighten into opening Dave's cage. She reached the main entrance without serious incident, despite being almost blind with the helmet's visor down; she had to lift it to peek now and again. Once she reached the entry she held the shotgun in one hand, and pounded on the door with the other.

Nothing happened; she pounded again.

She was starting to think about what she would do if the night watchman refused to answer when a surly voice called, "Who the hell is it at this hour?"

"It's an emergency," Jenny called. "I need to use your phone."

"Oh, Christ . . ." The door started to swing open.

Jenny thrust the barrel of the shotgun into the crack, then pushed herself after it, stepping into the building.

She found herself in a narrow hallway, on a scuffed linoleum floor between green concrete walls, lit by bare bulbs in wire cages overhead. Backing away from her was a young man in a dirty T-shirt and torn jeans.

The lights at least let her see through the confounded visor. "Put up your . . ." she began; then she stopped as she realized he already had both hands raised high.

"Oh god oh god oh god," he said, stumbling backward down the hall. "Listen, there's no money here, I swear there isn't, if there were I'd have stolen it myself."

"I don't want money," Jenny growled, trying to lower her alto voice to a tenor—she had hopes that her disguise hid her sex as well as her face.

"What, did Uncle Bill do something again? Listen, I swear, I didn't have anything to do . . ."

"Shut up," Jenny growled, aiming the shotgun at the man's nose.

The man—a kid, really—shut up and froze where he was.

Uncle Bill?

"Who are you?" Jenny demanded. "Who's Uncle Bill?"

"I'm Rafe Hayes," the kid said. "Uncle Bill's the mayor. My mom's brother."

"Mayor Beasley is your uncle?" She stared for a moment; yes, there was a resemblance. "He got you this job?"

Rafe nodded eagerly. "You don't want to hurt me," he said. "My uncle would get really pissed."

"I don't care what your uncle wants!" Jenny roared—aware as she did that her bellow was not up to Dave's standards; she didn't have a man's lung capacity or a cop's experience in yelling. "I'm here for my . . . for the animals." It had occurred to her at the last instant that revealing she was after a particular "dog" might not be wise. She didn't want to attract everyone's attention to that one specific canine, especially not when she'd told the animal control crew that Dave was her dog.

"Oh!" The kid looked suddenly relieved. "You're an animal rights activist? Which group?"

"Uh . . . Free Our Furry Friends," Jenny improvised hastily.

"I haven't heard of that one . . ."

"We're new."

"So, like, do you have a specific agenda? Have you got a truck here, or something, to take 'em away?"

"That's not your problem. You just open the doors I tell you to open and keep your mouth shut and your hands where I can see 'em." She jabbed with the gun; Rafe's hands, which had started to descend, rushed back up toward the ceiling.

"Okay," he said, staring at the gun.

"Good. Now, where are the cages?"

Rafe led the way down the corridor and through a door into the depths of the pound. Jenny found herself surrounded by dogs of all sizes and varieties, most of them asleep, a few stirring at this unexpected intrusion. A Great Dane whined at her, and a Pomeranian yapped.

She didn't see Dave.

"Where are the newest ones?" she asked. "The ones they brought in tonight?"

"Oh, they're in the other room," Rafe said. "We don't put 'em in here until the vet's okayed them."

"Show me," she growled. An Alsatian growled in response. "Shut up," Jenny told the dog. Then she gestured with the gun.

Rafe led the way to the holding area; here half the cages were empty, several held cats—and crammed into one of them was a big gray wolf, wide awake and watching them silently.

"Let that one out first," Jenny said, pointing. "That cage is too small for him; it's inhumane."

"Yessir," Rafe said. He fetched a ring of keys from a peg by the door and unlocked Dave's cage. Dave bounded out the instant the door opened, then hesitated, looking at Jenny and Rafe and Jenny's gun.

"Good dog," Jenny said. "You're free now." She waved at the room's open door, and Dave trotted out into the passageway, out of sight.

Now Jenny found herself facing a dilemma; to maintain her cover story of being an animal rights activist she needed to let more animals go—but she didn't particularly *want* a bunch of strays roaming the area.

She hoped they wouldn't do any real harm.

"Let out the others," she said.

Rafe hurried to unlock the cages, releasing the half-dozen cats—and while he was doing that, Jenny stepped back out into the hallway and closed the door.

Dave was waiting there; he looked up at her expectantly. Obviously, he thought she had a plan.

She didn't; she was making this up as she went along. She needed some way to get out of here without making a mess of it all. She wasn't a detective like Dave, with lots of police training . . .

Police. She looked at him, and then smiled.

"Is that a siren?" she shouted. "Damn it, did you call the cops?"

"No, I swear . . . !" Rafe called back. A cat yowled and hissed, and Rafe muttered something Jenny couldn't make out.

"You stay in there until I tell you to come out, you . . . you untrustworthy person, you!"

Lame, Jenny, she told herself. Really lame. "You untrustworthy person"? She giggled. "Come on, Dave," she said. "The car's that way."

Together, woman and wolf ran for the door.

They were almost there when Rafe burst out of the room with a pistol in his hand and fired at her.

The first shot went wild, chipping concrete from the wall, but the sharp bang startled Jenny; she stumbled, but caught herself without falling.

The second shot hit her square in the back and felt like she'd been kicked.

"Ow," she said, as she turned around and raised the shotgun.

Dave had already spun around and was charging down the hallway; Rafe fired again, this time at the animal plunging toward him.

"No!" Jenny shouted, raising the shotgun—but she couldn't shoot; she might hit Dave.

Dave didn't seem to be hurt. Rafe fired again, at point-blank range, and then Dave's teeth closed on his wrist. Jenny heard something crunch horribly, and the pistol fell to the floor. Then Rafe went over backward, the wolf on top of him . . .

"No!" Jenny shouted. "Da— Don't! Get off him!" She raised the shotgun again and pointed it directly at her own husband.

The wolf turned and glared at her, those big yellow eyes almost glowing. For a moment they stared at each other—and Jenny realized she was staring along the barrel of the shotgun, the sights aimed directly at Dave.

She lowered the gun, and Dave leapt off Rafe and ran for the door.

Jenny hesitated until she heard Rafe groan—he was alive and conscious, so she didn't think he could be *that* badly hurt. She turned and yanked open the door; Dave bounded out, with Jenny close behind.

A moment later they were in the car, Dave in the back and Jenny driving. She pulled out of the lot with tires squealing.

They made it home safely, and Jenny staggered inside. She dropped the shotgun, peeled off her black raincoat and her Kevlar armor, tossed aside the motorcycle helmet, and then leaned against a wall, panting. Utterly exhausted, she let herself slide down until she was sitting on the floor.

Dave came to her, tongue lolling from his mouth, and put his head in her lap. She petted him once before falling asleep, sprawled there in the foyer.

She was awakened by the transformation; dawn's light was streaming into the house, and the head in her lap had changed from a wolf's to a man's. Dave's eyes, human once again, looked up at her.

"That little bastard shot you!" he said.

"I had your bulletproof vest on," she said. "He shot *you*, and you weren't wearing anything!"

He still wasn't, she noticed admiringly. Her husband was unquestionably a fine-looking man—when he

was a man at all.

"Just fur," he said. "I guess the stories are true, though—you need silver bullets to kill a werewolf."

"I would rather never have tested that," she said, stroking his hair.

"Would you really have shot me if I'd done what I wanted to and ripped his throat out?" Dave asked.

"I don't know," Jenny admitted. "And I *really* don't want to test *that* one!"

"Same here," he said. "But I'm glad you aimed—helped me get my temper back under control. I mean, the little bastard *shot* you!"

"I'm fine," Jenny insisted.

Dave sat up. "Let me see your back," he said.

She was too tired to argue; she turned and let Dave pull up her shirt.

"Nasty bruise," he said. "Skin's not broken."

"Told you," she muttered.

"Yeah, you did," he agreed. "And you told me I was crazy to run for mayor, and you were right about that, too." He shook his head. "I probably broke that kid's wrist tonight, and I might've killed him. And . . . and if the silver bullet part is true, then maybe the contagious bite is true, too, and he'll be out there running around on all fours next month, same as me. That's *bad*, and we'll have to do something about it. This whole werewolf thing—I was kidding myself, Jen. It's not just an inconvenience. It'd never work, me being mayor."

She twisted around to face him. "You're not going to run?" she asked.

"No, I'm not," he said.

She remembered Rafe Hayes talking about his uncle, Bill Beasley. She remembered Rafe making threats and promises and firing that gun wildly. She remembered a dozen other things about Bill Beasley and his family, and she considered what might have to be done to ensure that Rafe Hayes didn't become a public menace at the next full moon.

"Then *I* will," she said.