

# CLOAKED by T.F. WALSH

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## EXCERPT



## CHAPTER ONE

### DACIANA

Damn bear. Leaving footprints on the outskirts of the forest, winding around the apartment blocks, and scaring locals for the past week. No wonder the cops had threatened to shoot him on sight today.

Sunrise wasn't far away; neither was my transformation from wolf into human, so I had to hurry. Romania's morning breeze wove through my fur, and the distinct dried-clover-and-grass scent screamed bear. He was definitely here—always just before dawn.

Not that I should care. Wolves and bears weren't the best of friends. But I'd seen the way humans made killing us a sport, and I couldn't stand to see any animal hurt.

Careening around the corner of the building, I halted and silenced my breaths.

Fifteen feet away was a frizzy, brown bottom sticking in the air. The bear that belonged to that butt balanced on the edge of an oversized trash can, head down inside, his scratching and grunting muffled.

A few steps closer, I snarled, the sound vibrating through my chest.

The bear jerked upward, a butter container sitting over his nose. He clacked his teeth and forced an expulsion of air, throwing the container off his face.

I backed up. Yep, this might be a funny moment on television, but not when you were the one facing the six-foot animal standing on hind legs.

He flopped back onto all fours and momentarily gazed back at his trash.

*I have no plans to take your garbage.* A growl slipped past my throat, and I lowered myself, feigning attack posture. *Come on, boy, get out of here before it's too late.* I stalked forward.

He swiped at me with a front paw, huffing.

I jumped back and circled him.

But he lunged suddenly, slapping the concrete ground several feet from me, and stood there, his mouth hanging open. He roared and made a pulsing sound deep in his throat.

Oh, he felt threatened now. *Good.*

I ran around him in a circle, faster. His claws swatted at me, inches away, but once I was at his back, I leapt closer and nipped his hindquarters.

His bawling echoed, but I hadn't drawn blood, and it sure as hell was better than a bullet.

The crunch of leaves sounded, followed by footfalls, from around the building behind me.

I flinched and sniffed the air. *Humans.*

The bear turned and ran away from the trash, from me, from the city, heading toward the forest. I chased after him to make sure he got as far away from here as possible.

He bolted faster, his paws hitting the ground with each pounce.

"The bear. And a fucking wolf?" a disembodied voice boomed from my left.

In the empty grassland between the apartment block and the woods, two police officers with rifles watched us. They were there to hunt the bear and broke into a run in our direction.

Fuck, this was bad. Really bad. I burst into the dense Transylvanian forest behind the bear, trampling foliage and dried twigs. He'd swung right and already put distance between us. He was safe, but what about me?

Heading straight ahead, I sprinted across forest floor, dodging low branches. I glanced behind me. Footfalls resonated, and the two figures raced my way.

Heavy breaths strangled my lungs as I bolted. The ground flew beneath me and fresh pine-scented air splashed over my face, promising escape. Except my heart was attempting to break free from my chest.

A shot was fired, and I scampered faster. Ten pulse-wrenching minutes later, the police were nowhere in sight or smell range. That didn't mean they couldn't still be trailing after me.

The first ripples of a transformation into my human form crawled through my back legs. I scrambled up the hill, claws digging into the soil for leverage with each rapid lunge.

*Not yet.*

My body shuddered, and I stumbled forward, shivering uncontrollably as thousands of tiny bite-like nips swarmed across my flesh. I whimpered, and a long exhale gushed past my lips. The change was happening.

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