

# 192 Days Missing

By Sue Denver

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## PROLOGUE

*192 Days Earlier*

*Lupiti, Oklahoma*

*Alaska Brown no longer noticed all the security cameras at Tulsa's Four Leaf Clover Casino. She knew they were in the parking lot where she parked, in the cashier's cage where she worked, and in the casino restaurant where she got dinner. That didn't even count the five cameras each at the many, many gaming tables.*

*As far as she knew, the only place on casino property without cameras was inside the bathrooms.*

*She believed they'd have cameras there, too, if it weren't illegal.*

*She awakened at 11:30 that morning, the 17th of September, as though it were a normal day instead of what was to become the worst day of her life.*

*She looked outside and saw the thermometer showing 81 degrees, which made her smile. Finally — a little relief from what had been a brutal summer.*

*She checked to make sure her daughter Macey had left for high school and winced at the clothes Macey had left strewn on her bed. She told herself to leave them — Macey needed to learn responsibility. But... "Maybe next time," she said as she picked them up and put them back on hangers.*

*She opened the door to Ricky's room and gave a short sigh. He wouldn't be home from college until Thanksgiving — which seemed years away. She made a mental note to look for a book he'd like when she had her dinner break. She could send it to him.*

*Alaska started two cups of coffee brewing, then stared at her wardrobe. She only had two suits, so she switched them each day. Yesterday was the yellow one, so today it would have to be*

*the blue one. But she paired it with a pink blouse instead of the white she had worn two days ago.*

*She tightened her mouth. She needed to look professional so she got that promotion her boss was dangling. But he always dressed so sharply and she'd seen him noticing how she dressed. Maybe she needed to find the money — somehow — for another suit?*

*Alaska downed one cup of coffee — half sugar — before putting on her makeup. She poured the second cup in her to-go mug for her trip into Tulsa. The drive time wasn't wasted — she always used it to talk to her mom. To make sure she and her dad were doing okay. It was the "special treat" part of her day.*

*As usual, her shift in the cashiers' cage ended at 10 PM that night. As she stepped into the exit elevator for the parking lot, Alaska assumed cameras were still following her.*

*As the doors were closing, a gorgeous young woman jumped in. She had long black hair and looked a little like Alaska's daughter Macey. Alaska nodded at her. She'd seen the girl a few times and knew she worked as a cocktail server.*

*Alaska followed her out onto the fourth parking level but stopped when she saw the girl looking around, confused. She was staring at the letters and numbers on the columns and looking down at her phone.*

*"Do you know where you're parked?" Alaska asked her.*

*The girl shook her head. "My boyfriend texted me he's parked at B-15. Do you know where that is?"*

*"That's right next to where I park. Come on, I'll show you." She walked the girl down a row and around a corner to where her used Honda Fit awaited.*

*"There," she said, pointing at a column. "B-15."*

*Alaska didn't notice two vans stopped nearby. She had no way of knowing they were positioned exactly to block the views of the only two cameras covering this section.*

*She did notice when a man opened the side door on one of the vans. She turned to look at him.*

*There was another noise — behind her. Before she could turn, a hand from behind slapped over her mouth, an arm grabbed her around the waist, and Alaska's feet came off the ground.*

*She saw the other man grab the girl, and both of them were rushed to the open van door.  
It happened so fast!*

*Alaska struggled and kicked and belatedly opened her mouth to scream. The man holding her grabbed the inside of her right arm and pinched. The pain was excruciating. Tears sprang to her eyes. She stopped moving — hoping that would stop the pain.*

*Alaska was tossed into the back of the van on a carpeted floor, then re-grabbed by the same man. He pulled her up against him, holding her with an arm tight on her waist and a hand back over her mouth.*

*“What the hell?” asked the driver, turning to look at them. Alaska saw only a ball cap pulled low, sunglasses, and a turtleneck sweater pulled up over his chin.*

*“They were together,” said the man holding Alaska. “Can’t leave one behind.”*

*“Shit.”*

*The van door closed, blocking out all light except what came from the front. The driver turned back around, and the van started moving.*

*Alaska heard gasping and turned to look at the girl. Her eyes were huge and her chest was moving in and out — fast. She was struggling to breathe. Alaska saw her panic as she wheezed and struggled desperately to get air in her lungs.*

*The man holding the girl — a sunburned white goon with buzz-cut hair so white it disappeared on his skull — let go of her and shook his head.*

*“What’s wrong with her?”*

*Alaska grabbed at the fingers covering her mouth. The guy holding her let her speak.*

*“She’s having an asthma attack. Let me help her.”*

*The van jolted to a stop.*

*“You can help her?” asked the man behind the wheel.*

*Alaska nodded.*

*“Help her and I might not have to kill you today.”*

*Alaska stared at him in horror.*

*“We didn’t come for you. Show us you’re useful, and you might survive. For a time.”*

## CHAPTER ONE

*Sara Flores*

*The Downtown Dojo in Tulsa, Oklahoma*

*Current day*

I knew this was a bad idea.

My name is Sara Flores, and I'm both a private investigator and a werewolf. The werewolf part of me wasn't normally a problem. I guarded that secret like it meant my life — because it probably did.

But today Connor Rockwood was making it a problem.

He had dragged me to this dojo on the eighth floor of a low-rent office building in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The owner is one of his former Special Forces buddies who lets him use the place for workouts when no classes are scheduled.

Outside I saw lightning. Strong winds drove the rain horizontally — right at the windows. It was one of those angry March storms that like to blow through Tulsa and scurry the residents into hiding.

The dojo was a simple place, with a huge blue mat in the center of the room surrounded by banged-up green lockers for changing, a wall rack of bo fighting sticks, and three orange benches, one of which I was sitting on.

It was my fault I was here. Working with Connor had seemed like a good idea two months ago. That's when I became a private investigator licensed by the state of Oklahoma. Fifty-five hours of classes, pass a test — and voila! — I'm a private eye.

I wanted the license to back off suspicious cops who might find me near dead bodies in parts of town no sane woman would go near. The license gave me an excuse to be there.

And, yes, I've been in the vicinity of a bunch of dead bodies in the two years since I was turned by my neighbor, a dying Lupiti shaman. Don't get me wrong — I'm happy he did it. But the man told me nothing. As far as I know, I'm the only werewolf — the only supernatural anything — on the planet.

As for the dead bodies — finding missing or threatened innocents has become my calling, and the assholes who take them aren't interested in giving them up. Not without a fight.

“C'mon, Flores.” Connor grabbed my arm and dragged me out on the mat. We were both in street clothes but barefoot.

“You can't learn Krav Maga up here, darlin'.” He pointed to my head. “Your body has to learn it too.” He had a slight Tennessee accent that normally made me smile since it came from a body built like the Hulk.

Today I wasn't smiling.

“I'm not paying you to teach me martial arts,” I said, surprised at how defensive I sounded. “I have a brown belt. What I want is all the street-fighting strategy you learned in Special Forces.”

“That's what I'm tryin' to teach you.”

He eyed me, pursing his lips. “Big, bad, brown belt, huh? Show me some moves.”

My eyes narrowed. If he smiled, I was going to have to kill him.

This was a very bad idea.

I'd met Connor two months ago, when I hired him to bodyguard my very first client. She'd been run off the road and had her house bombed by a man determined to kill her. I'd stashed the two of us in a hotel suite and hired Connor to protect her while I was asleep.

He'd done a good job — apparently in more ways than one since my client was now dating him.

Connor reached across the three feet between us and pushed my shoulder. Provoking me.

I took the push without moving my feet and imagined him with a big wolf-sized bite out of his shoulder. I was careful not to smile.

He threw up his hands. “This is a bad idea.”

Well... at least we agreed on that.

“Just teach me the moves,” I said, also throwing up my hands. “What's with you? You want us to spar? You're eight inches taller than me, outweigh me by more than 100 pounds, and you're a man. And former Special Forces. What are you trying to prove?”

“And who d'you think you'll be fighting — teenage girls?”

I wanted to scream.

I'd *love* to test myself against Connor — because I didn't know who would win. And I need to know because the next man trying to kill me might have his skills. My life might depend on it. Thanks to my wolf, I've been stronger than any man I've gone up against in the two years since my transformation. But none of them were at Connor's skill level.

The problem is, Connor would know immediately there was something wrong about me. Beaten — or almost beaten — by a woman? He'd never let that go without answers. Thus far, only three people know what I am. They're all my friends, but it makes my skin crawl that they know.

No way I'm adding Connor to that list.

He snapped his fingers in front of my eyes. "This won't work. You can't teach heart or guts. And you, little girl, don't have either."

I smiled. He was still trying to provoke me, but I was immune to macho posturing.

He raised his eyebrows. "You reckon that's funny? Your next client won't think so when you get her killed because you can't protect her."

I lunged forward and punched my right fist — twisting it in perfect karate form — aiming directly at his throat.

I wasn't aware I was moving until my fist was almost there, and, horrified, I tried to stop.

Connor got his forearm up to block me — he'd been expecting something, after all. My fist hit his forearm and I heard a very faint crack.

We broke apart.

He grabbed his left forearm, his eyes wide in surprise.

I grabbed my right hand. Instead of a soft neck, my knuckles had hit bone and I'd broken at least two of them. The pain was so bad it made my eyes water, but I had to hide it. Tomorrow my knuckles would be healed. No way to explain that except that they were never damaged.

I bent over until the urge to scream in pain stopped.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I moved before I thought. I didn't think you could get to me. What did you say...."

Connor moved the fingers on his damaged arm and winced. He looked back at me, evaluating.

“My fault,” he said. “Nothing worked. Sayin’ you’d get a client killed — I went too far. But — hell, Flores. That was so fast I barely saw it. And strong.”

“You have pain moving some of those fingers, don’t you?”

He stared at me.

“I have really good hearing and I heard a crack. I think your ulna is fractured.”

He kept staring at me.

I closed my eyes. Fractures take a long time to heal. Time he wouldn’t be able to do his normal bodyguard work.

All my fault.

I walked over to the bench and picked up Connor’s cell phone.

“Stick your thumb on here so I can call Judy. She’ll get you checked out.” I turned away from him to dial, hiding the broken knuckles on my hand.

“Judy? It’s Sara. Could you do a job for me? Connor needs the best orthopedic guy in Tulsa. His ulna bone is fractured — hopefully just a hairline.”

I handed the phone back to Connor and left.

I could feel his eyes on my back...

***[The full book is available here on this site, plus from every online book retailer.]***