

# Werewolf for Hire

## By Sue Denver

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### CHAPTER ONE

Lillian Knudsen shook yet another hand and gave yet another distracted smile. The Tulsa Chamber of Commerce rubber chicken lunch sat uneasily in her stomach — a burp just made her re-taste it. She patted her red hair to make sure it wasn't falling out of the biz-exec bun she always wore to events like this — so much fussier than normal.

She'd chatted up the Caskcuts, who were at her table for the lunch. They'd bought the downtown hardware store and were hoping to learn more about how business operates in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

She'd made the rounds of hellos to everyone else.

All she really wanted to do was get to her Jeep, go home and pass out. Except... she was afraid to sleep. Afraid the dreams would come again. Like they had for the past two weeks.

Fourteen years ago, a bomb blew up the truck she was driving in Iraq and took her left foot. She'd had nightmares about it for five years — waking up in soaking wet sheets with her heart racing.

Bo Knudsen had been there for Lillian — in the hospital, then in marriage, and finally as her partner in their shooting range business. When cancer took him two years ago, she didn't know how she managed — only that the demands of the business kept her out of the hole she wanted to crawl into.

Love for Bo — and the life they built — had made the nightmares go away so long ago she'd stopped thinking about them.

Two weeks ago, they came back. Which is why she was craving sleep at 1:30 in the afternoon.

A hand grabbed her shoulder. Lillian flinched.

“My goodness,” said Betty Sue Franken, her helmet hair gorgeously styled as always and probably hard as a rock. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Lillian winced.

“I just wanted to say it’s always good to see you. We women business owners have to stick together, you know.” Betty Sue actually winked at her, then patted her on the shoulder. She turned to greet someone else before Lillian could even respond. Just as well.

Lillian spotted Warren Caddel, owner of Sharp Shooters gun shop, across the room. She turned away. The annoying man was trying to buy up half of Tulsa.

She shouldn’t have come today. She usually liked these events. It was fun playing business leader in town — not a role she’d ever imagined for herself. She’d always thought she’d be a nurse — until Desert Storm hospitals changed her mind.

Lillian had adjusted her left leg prosthesis today to allow her to wear low heels with her best business suit. But she’d been in a rush and, apparently, she hadn’t adjusted it perfectly — her left leg was tilted for a slightly higher heel than the one her shoe had.

It was frustrating how the tiniest difference could make walking feel unnatural.

She waved goodbye to the others, then took the garage elevator up a floor. She walked towards her bright red Jeep Wrangler hardtop, parked about 20 cars away.

She winced as she saw the two-week-old mashed-in front hood she had yet to get repaired. It looked like someone had swung a baseball bat down on it, but why? It made no sense.

A car engine revved behind her, so she moved over closer to the cars on her left to give the driver more room to get by.

Something hit her good right leg, crumpling it. Her body flew forward, slamming into a blue Chevy, bashing her head on the trunk.

She slid, dazed, to the dirty concrete floor.

*What the heck?*

*Who?*

Lillian looked around. She was on the floor, her head leaning against the back of the Chevy.

Tires squealed so she stuck her head out and looked. A red taillight turned the far corner, speeding towards the exit.

Gone.

Lillian saw blood on her knees, her nylons scraped to shreds. She stared blankly at them.

Suddenly, her stomach dropped. She was flying through the air from bombs, hearing the staccato of rifles shooting, the M14s returning fire. There were screams. Terrible screams. The stench of smoke was everywhere. Her silk blouse was wringing wet, and her heart was having hysterics.

She covered her head and ears with her hands and arms and pulled her head down to her knees.

“Not there. Not there. I’m not there.” She said it over and over like the V.A. therapist had suggested to her.

She didn’t know how long she stayed, sitting on the dirty concrete floor, arms over her head.

The next thing she noticed was the chime of the garage elevator. Someone was getting out. She shook her head and tried to stand. Her right leg hurt, but it could hold her. Her prosthesis wasn’t damaged.

Lillian brushed off her legs and skirt and walked the rest of the way to her Jeep. She flashed the Jeep remote, entered and buckled up. She sat there, taking deep breaths, trying to slow her heart rate.

A gun! She needed a gun to protect herself!

Only then did she feel the Springfield Armory 911 she had holstered at her back. Sitting there. Still holstered.

Angry at herself, she leaned forward and pulled it out. She stared at it and shook her head. What was the point of going armed if you forgot it was there when you needed it? Bo would have been disappointed in her. *She* was disappointed in her.

She laid it on the seat beside her. After more deep breaths, she checked the rearview mirror and backup camera carefully.

Lillian looked everywhere when she exited the garage, but no cars sat idling — waiting for her. She was on edge the entire drive home. Cars moving towards her caused her hands to clench — she expected them to swerve into her. She was afraid of cars coming up from behind her. She flinched when cars passed her, expecting them to jerk the wheel into her.

She almost cried in relief when she finally spotted her comforting red brick house with its wide swath of green lawn and green foundation plantings. The green always soothed her, reminded her that although the temperatures could boil past 100 here in Tulsa, she was not — absolutely not — still in that hellhole Iraqi desert.

The remote opened the garage door and welcomed her back into the womb. Sanctuary. The place Bo bought for them. One story, so she never had to deal with stairs. A pool in the back, which he was so proud of. But which she hadn't used in the two years since he died.

Lillian got out of the car and found herself staring — again — at the dent on her front hood. Her peace evaporated. Nausea started to rise in her throat.

Turning purposefully away from it, she used her gun to enter her own house as though it were enemy territory. She went through it carefully, checking all doors and windows. Checking under beds and in closets. Resetting the house alarm for the night.

Satisfied she was safe — for now — she sat down on Bo's big recliner. Paws, the black alleycat with white feet Bo had adopted, jumped up in her lap and started to purr. She petted the cat, and finally, finally, her heart rate slowed back down.

She slept like a rock that night. She wasn't sure if it was physical or mental exhaustion, but a full night of sleep did wonders. She went to work feeling positive for a change.

Maybe she'd turned the corner?

But... Lillian jumped at noises. She patted her gun behind her back obsessively. She felt like her 22-year-old self again — afraid of everything. Vulnerable.

She hadn't turned any corner.

By 4:30 that afternoon, Lillian gave up. Her problem wasn't going away. Somebody had — probably — hit her car with a baseball bat. Yesterday, someone had slammed their car into her. She needed a professional to find out what the heck was going on here. And to fix it.

## CHAPTER TWO

Sara Flores liked BK's Shooting Range. If you needed to carry a firearm, and Sara did, then you needed to practice. She had tried other local indoor ranges but came away covered in black lead soot — which meant she was also inhaling it. She really didn't want or need anything that could make her stupider than she sometimes already was.

At BK's range, you only shoot BK's ammunition which had lead-free primer plus copper bullets. Clean air.

Sara liked their pistol booth four — which was mostly hidden from the other booths. Hidden was important because Sara's reflexes were better than human. Noticeably better.

It wasn't any fun coming in twice a week just to hit the bullseye with all 60 rounds. Her vision was normal, but her muscles held her hand unnaturally steady.

Others might be satisfied shooting this well, but Sara wasn't. She worried she needed to be better.

It was a year and a half since she was turned werewolf by a Lupiti shaman who then died on her. In that time Sara mounted seven rescue missions — each to help some innocent targeted by someone evil who thought he could use them or kill them without consequences.

She'd succeeded in each of those missions — but luck played a bigger factor than she was comfortable with. Sara still worried she wasn't good enough. She had no special forces training. No martial arts.

She'd recently earned her Private Investigator license for Oklahoma, but what did that really mean? It required only 55 hours of training and passing a test. Voila! — she was now a P.I. She felt like she'd "earned" one of those mail-order diplomas sold on the Internet.

So Sara came to BK's twice a week — trying to get better. She liked to practice drawing a pistol from her different concealed carry holsters. From the front and then the back, right hand then left. That was 40 shots. Then she used her corset holster, which fit right up under her breasts. Ten shots with the right hand, then 10 with the left. As fast as she could.

Sara hit the button to bring the target back to her.

She wasn't perfect today. For a change, she'd tried shooting from a different start. She had turned past 90 degrees from the target — as far as she could while still clearly seeing it from her

peripheral vision. Most of her shots were no longer dead center, and two had just missed the bulls eye. Something to work on the next time she was here.

Sara packed up and left the booth.

She was walking past the front desk when Lillian Knudsen, the owner, called her name. Lillian was a conservative woman with long red hair tied back at her nape in the kind of ponytail women wore when they were no longer in their 20s. Not high up like a real pony's.

Word was Lillian and her husband started this range when they returned together from serving in Iraq. For the past two years, Lillian ran it herself. Sara liked her quiet confidence in dealing with the occasional gun nut who demanded to use his own ammo.

Lillian held out a folded paper towards Sara. "You left this on the desk when you paid," she said, looking intently — strangely — at Sara.

"Oh," Sara said. She walked to the counter and took the paper. It looked like one of the payment receipts given out at BK's Range. "Thanks."

Lillian immediately looked down as though she were working. Sara took the hint and walked out the door, putting the paper in her purse.

She didn't want to drive all the way home before reading it, so she...

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