



Compilation

PSYCHO THRILL

A Collection of Chilling Tales

WRITTEN BY MULTIPLE AUTHORS

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

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PSYCHO THRILL — A Collection of Chilling Tales

PSYCHO THRILL is a series of horror novellas — from classic ghost story to psychological thriller and dark fantasy. This edition is a compilation of five haunting novellas.

Each novella was first published in German and has now been published for the first time in English. Among the writers are popular German authors, as well as newcomers to the scene. Each story is self-contained.

PSYCHO THRILL is produced by Uwe Voehl.

The Compilation

Christian Endres, *The Beast Within*

Jackson Ellis is a bouncer in Seattle. But deep within, he fosters a hideous beast. No one can know about the curse he carries, though some have discovered his dark secret. And they have the means to break him. Their goal is to destroy Jackson Ellis, as well as the beast within. The torture doesn't go as planned. So what does revenge look like, when all that is left is rage?

Vincent Voss, *Girl in the Well*

Sabine und Robert think they've won the jackpot, when they buy the old Kreuziger Farmhouse at a reduced rate. But then strange things start to happen: Who is this Marie, with whom only their young son can communicate? Why are there swarms of flies buzzing about? Whose footsteps does Sabine hear at night in the attic? In desperation, Sabine contacts the "Witch Archive," a special department at the Ethnological Institute in Hamburg, specializing in the supernatural. But it's too late. The evil has found its target, and it is closing in for the kill ...

Michael Marcus Thurner, *Suffer, my Sweet*

Throughout high school, Evelyn professed her love for Marco, but he wanting nothing to do with the girl everyone despised. Her hobbies were just too weird. She collected all sorts of strange things, like insects, carefully pinning them to cardboard, or capturing them in glass jars for display. As a result Evi was the laughing stock of her class. Twenty years, later, however, Evelyn seduces Marco at the high school reunion, and they begin a sultry affair. Marco isn't

sure if it's love, but he doesn't care: the sex is the best he's ever had. But Evi, she's sure it's something. Because if there is one thing she loves more than anything, it's her precious collection.

Robert C. Marley, *Tell-Tale Twins*

Bruised and battered, Edgar Allen Poe awakens in a basement dungeon. There, he meets a mysterious man who looks like an older version of himself. Within a week, Poe will attend his own funeral as a spectator, but that's not the most horrific encounter he'll have with a twisted fate. The clock is ticking, and his life is on the line ...again.

Timothy Stahl, *Unholy Night*

After a horrible accident, Adrian watches as his pregnant wife, Marie, clinically dies for several minutes. By some miracle Marie regains consciousness and finds that the unborn baby is also unharmed. But something in Marie has changed. She's cold and animalistic. Something evil has taken control. Then suddenly Marie disappears. Desperate to find his wife, Adrian tracks Marie down to her childhood home only to discover that her idyllic hometown carries an ancient, dark secret ...



PSYCHO THRILLER

A Collection of Chilling Tales

Written by Multiple Authors

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

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Digital original edition

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PSYCHO THRILLER

The Beast Within

CHRISTIAN ENDRES

BASTEI ENTERTAINMENT 

1

The first thing I feel is the cold.

In the metal.

In the air.

In my bones.

It literally emanates from all of the steel surrounding me.

The bars.

The ceiling.

The metal base under my bare skin.

I feel wretched.

The fact that there's a certain irony about this situation eludes me at this stage.

Shivering, I join my mind as it emerges from the darkness.

Lurking at the edge of the blackness, there is just more cold.

More cold and, of course, more pain.

But that also means that I am consciously aware of my body again.

Although right now, I'd prefer not to be.

I hear a whimper nearby and finally force myself to open my eyes.

Through the slightly blurred bars dancing in front of me, I see a medium-sized mutt with floppy ears, half setter, half mongrel.

Hesitantly wagging its tail, but not coming any closer.

I increase my efforts to free myself from the fetal position and the pain immediately bites again with ice-cold ruthlessness.

But it also helps me to remember.

Things have always come at such a price.

Knowledge.

Memory.

Identity.

By accepting the pain as a form of currency, I obtain a fraction of all these things.

Of my humanity.

Of my life.

The dog, for example: I clench my chattering teeth together, endure the pain, and stare at him until I can think of his name.

Marlowe. That's the dog's name.

And he is my best friend, as I can now recall again.

I want to say his name, but when I try, all that comes out is a rough croak that frightens us both to death.

No wonder the dog is backing away toward the closed door and watching me distrustfully.

It's obvious that he's torn.

That I am just as big of a dilemma for him as I am for myself.

Marlowe ...

I cling to the name and the sight of my confused four-legged friend. It helps me finally pull my mind out of the frozen blackness.

The darkness goes.

Cold and pain remain.

And the memories get stronger with each heartbeat.

More concrete.

I concentrate entirely on the question of why I'm lying naked in a steel cage in a windowless room.

Why the dog is here. Marlowe!

It takes a while, and not without the cold stinging in my limbs, but then it occurs to me.

On the worst nights of my life, Marlowe stands guard over my prison until I wake up in pain the next morning and put the puzzle back together again.

But all along, I thought that the pain, which is part of the puzzle, couldn't get any worse.

Should have really known better.

Suddenly it feels as if someone were grabbing me by the ribcage and ripping out all of my bones and guts.

I double over in the small, cold cage.

Let out an inhuman cry of pain.

Marlowe barks, frightened.

"Hey, come on, kid," Dead Crow's husky voice also resonates from somewhere.

Not that it's of any use to me now, of all times, to indulge in hallucinations of my friend and mentor.

Then it's over just as quickly as it began.

The pain is gone, as is the confusion.

Only exhaustion and coldness remain.

And knowledge.

Every haunting memory.

Every painful particular.

Every ugly detail.

My name is Jackson Ellis, this is the cellar of an apartment building in Seattle, and last night was a full moon.

Why am I sitting in this cage?

Let's put it this way:

During the full moon, I have a hairy problem.

*

It started on my twelfth birthday.

Great party, at least for a gang of excited twelve year olds who had still never played spin the bottle and still never had a smoke. Much less known what to do with tits or pussies.

Thanks for the party, Mom.

It's just too bad that you shot yourself before I could tell you how cool it was or that I love you.

Suppose the sleeping bags in the living room, where the full moon could shine in, were a stupid idea.

The moonlight didn't exactly bring out the best in me, if you know what I mean.

I still remember how I woke up the next morning and tasted that particular mix of cold and pain for the first time.

The taste of blood in my mouth.

I puked blood and hair and bits of skin on the tattered, blood-soaked sleeping bag of my best friend Jamie just as my mom opened the door. She must have been holed up behind it when the noise started.

She looked at me.

Not reproachfully.

Not horrified.

Not disgusted.

Not afraid.

Not sad.

So, according to her suicide note, as I understood it, I owe the slightly protruding lower jaw to her family's gene pool, while the severe form of lunacy goes back to my father, whom I never got to know.

My mother always called him a mistake.

Understatement of the millennium, if you ask me.

Sometimes I wonder how it must have been for her every year after my birth.

The uncertainty.

The waiting for hour X.

The hope and fear.

The praying.

Though, I've never seen her pray.

Not that you should get the wrong impression of her.

She was a great mom.

Made every effort and never let me realize how much effort it really was.

And it wasn't easy for her as a single mother in the northern province, you can believe that.

I could now, of course, say: damn, sometimes she'd give me a strange sideways glance if she thought I wouldn't notice.

But she didn't even do that.

Great woman, as I said.

A shame, that in my darkest hour, when I was scared and naked and covered in blood between the chewed up bodies of my friends, she left me alone and took the small-caliber way out.

She could have at least taken me with her.

*

I only vaguely remember the weeks and months after my first full moon as a wolf.

If someone comes up with the idea of making a movie out of my life, this phase would probably be referred to as my hobo years.

As I remember it, it's an endless collection of weeks during which a pale, emaciated teenager wandered, lost, over the widespread tracks across the upper half of the country, devoured by the memory of what he did to his mother and friends.

Probably just as well that I don't remember much about those years.

I remember one thing very well, though.

Every full moon was hell.

Which doesn't mean that the days and nights in between were better.

As a child, I transformed even more spontaneously — as soon as I was afraid or felt threatened.

Which had often been the case among the hobos.

A little boy is fair game for assholes who spend their ruined lives against the walls of freight cars and in the dark crossings of the old railway yards.

Fair game for all the depraved bastards who earn a bad reputation, preying on the nice guys with bad luck.

At the time, I transformed one or two times a week, no matter what the moon said.

Because someone held a switchblade to my throat.

Because some wiry heroin-fueled nutjob wanted to shout and slash me open with a broken bottle in order to save the Virgin Mary from the flies.

Because two guys held me down and stifled my cries with calloused hands and tattered woolen gloves, while the third guy dropped his pants.

Back then, it too often meant:

Moving on.

Fast.

Inconspicuously.

Like a ghost.

I probably would've been caught immediately if I hadn't been hunting among the hobos.

One less Chip or Jack or Joe from the old railway stations and tracks — who really cares?

Even the hobos took it pretty calmly in the beginning.

"A fucking bear."

"Those damned coyotes are getting bolder."

"That was definitely Marvin's fucking pit bull, the sneaky bastard. Someone should shoot that monster."

Someone really should have shot the monster.

And I don't mean the pit bull.

The monster in boy's clothing, who lugged a worn backpack around, along with a guilt that was so much bigger and weighed so much more than the boy himself.

Who tore through the ranks of hobos and threw up their blood in the woods on so many mornings.

I was more than a stray.

I was a serial killer.

At some point, I became such a bloody legend among the hobos that they were eventually just as afraid of the full

moon and strangers as I was.

But the blazing bonfires and suspicion couldn't save them when the wolf burst out of me and pounced at them from the darkness.

Why didn't I pack it in then and make a clean break?

Because human beings cling to life.

No matter how much animal gets out from time to time.

We cling to life, as fucked up as it may be.

Believe me, I know what I'm talking about.

I've stood on drafty railroad bridges and wide, dark highways several times.

I've never jumped.

But fell deeper and deeper.

Transformation after transformation.

When I was seventeen, I got to Seattle.

The cargo train stopped, as it always eventually did, and before I really even knew what was happening, why or how, this time I was one of the dark figures who jumped out and scurried away, stiff-limbed.

Just got tired of moving around, I guess.

Didn't want to spend another winter among the hobos.

Why Seattle?

No idea.

It was just as good as any other city to look for an inconspicuous place in the urban darkness.

Somewhere among the other sinners.

*

The memories of my first few months in Seattle are considerably more present than my days as a hobo-killer.

Took me a bit to find my bearings.

Got into some trouble.

Fell in with the wrong crowd at first.

Eventually, I started working as a bouncer.

It helped that I was already a tough kid at eighteen — usually my scowl was enough to keep any real trouble away from the door of a second-rate club.

Some people said that I looked wolfish.

Fuckers.

The ladies liked the quiet boy with the stubble and dark eyes.

The darkness within them.

If there was a problem when I didn't show up on the full moon (as already agreed upon), then I wouldn't hesitate to head to the next joint.

Even back then, there were enough shitty acts in old factories or warehouses that would pay a few bucks to have the idiots bounced.

Much better than a life on the tracks.

On top of that, I quickly found myself enjoying the businesslike camaraderie that existed among the bouncers.

I still like it today.

At the time, I was more desperate and somehow convinced myself to be a more normal part of the whole.

Part of the herd.

Even though I was still a wolf, as every full moon proved again.

It was back before Marlowe and the cage, when the nights went a little differently than they do now...

*

I always went to areas with a rough reputation.

I'd find myself a secluded corner by the early afternoon and wait restlessly for the full moon and its inevitable effect.

For example, I still remember lying on the top level of a massive, condemned parking garage and shivering in the autumn wind as I watched the moon rise in the sky and waited for it to begin.

For the affliction of the night to run its course.

For it to steal the control away from me and for the giant wolf to lunge on all fours in search of its prey.

For my desperate fear to chase down only the right ones.

Actually feasible in an area like this.

Kind of funny.

The monster that justifies his monstrous deeds by only acting them out on other monsters.

A nice idea, and not just in Dexter, which always makes me grin smugly when I see it.

They almost caught me a year after my arrival in Seattle, anyway.

Not the cops.

The mafia — which up here still controls almost every strip club and similar place the same way it manages the hardcore brothels.

On one of my wild nights, the wolf grabbed a guy that was always knee-deep in snow, even in summer.

Unfortunately, he was more than a small-time coke dealer — the nephew of an influential boss, whose sister threatened to banish him from the Thanksgiving table forever if he didn't avenge the death of her little darling.

When I got wind that the big guys were looking for the murderer, I made a run for it.

I know it was embarrassingly irrational as they probably never would have figured out that I was the wolf.

Either way, I ran like the wind.

I was used to running anyway.

It was essentially all I could do.

I took what little cash I had hidden in the ventilation duct of my dump of a home and got myself on the next flight to Vegas.

Why Vegas of all places?

I can't even answer that now.

Maybe because the name of the city jumped out at me from the departures board as I rushed out of the taxi and into the airport.

Or because what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas.
And a lot happened in Vegas.

*

That's where I finally met Dead Crow.

My copper-skinned Obi-Wan.

My whoring Mr. Miyagi.

His real name?

He never told me.

It was a running joke between us that I would randomly ask for his real name.

Dead Crow's answer was always the same.

A Native American who works as head of security at a joint like the Silver Bullet Casino needs a cool name, he would often say before getting the next round of beer or whiskey or both.

We were really tight.

More than teacher and student.

Much more.

Real friends.

Though we didn't have a good start.

Dead Crow was having a smoke at the loading dock behind the Casino and caught me rummaging through a rusty dumpster on his turf.

Why?

Vegas is just not nice to people without any dough.

And I didn't want to work for Siegfried & Roy.

"What are you looking for in there, kid?" Dead Crow asked coolly from the ramp. "Don't really look like someone who should be digging in other people's garbage. Well, you're already doing it. You actually look like triple-fucked buffalo shit. But your spirit. That guy looks like he could

get things done, if you know what I mean.” He casually flicked his cigarette away in a high arch. “Interested?”

I stood in the dumpster and had no idea what had actually just happened, let alone if I was interested.

Regardless, he had my attention, as I looked for my future in the wet, stinking mass of kitchen waste and tourist scraps.

But he was a real head-turner, this old Native American man who was not nearly as old as the wrinkles on his tanned face suggested.

A nose like an eagle’s beak.

Arms covered with tattoos on tattoos.

Long, gray-streaked hair down to the bone comb in the back pocket of his leather pants.

Always wearing a dark shirt and a black leather jacket.

He wouldn’t even take a piss without his cowboy boots.

He put out a hand and I took it.

Accepted the job and anything else he had to offer.

Guidance.

Camaraderie.

Friendship.

You just had to love this madman.

Who treated the Dutch and English tourists like punching bags when they blatantly crossed the line and wouldn’t take their hands out of the waitresses’ panties.

Who laughed loudly and a lot.

Who drank me under the table at the end of our shift every morning and always had the hottest dancers when they first showed up and were still new in town.

Who continued laughing and flirting and drinking when I was already unconscious in bed.

On top of that, he always had the best stuff.

A phenomenon, that man.

But don’t worry.

This isn’t going to be a story about Indian sweat lodges, totem poles, and hallucinogenic drugs.

Well, maybe the latter if you want to push it. If you count passing a joint back and forth during sunrise on the casino roof with a bottle of whiskey between us that didn't make it to the morning.

But it's not about that.

It's about what Dead Crow taught me.

About me and the beast in me.

*

"You can control the wolf inside you, kid," Dead Crow said to me one morning, while we were having our liquid breakfast. The cleaning crew behind us washed away the puke and the dreams from the previous night.

It had been a rough night with more weirdoes than usual. At one point, I almost lost control and let the monster steer.

I didn't ask Dead Crow how he knew about the wolf, and certainly not whether he would tell anyone about it.

I didn't let the beast off the leash in Vegas even a single time by mistake, not even when we had to get through all the trouble with the Triads.

Spent the full moon nights alone in the desert.

Apart from that, immersed in my job.

And always had Dead Crow by my side when things got rough.

Felt at ease for the first time.

Balanced.

Life in Vegas was still more show and facade than the club scene in Seattle, but it felt more real.

More meaningful.

The way it just is in these situations.

You think you're the center of the universe.

The center of reality.

Even when it's all made up of glass and fake shine.

"You just have to show the bastard who's boss," Dead Crow continued lecturing, as if it were the most normal topic in the world for two men to discuss at the bar in an almost empty, tired casino in Las Vegas. "You and the wolf, you're a pack. Never forget that, kid. Show him who's boss in the pack and that you're in charge. And not only when it's a full moon out — you have to show him every day. Otherwise, he'll eat you entirely one day."

Now I think that this conversation was the first time that I saw myself and the wolf as two beings whose existence were tied together, and not as two sides of my personality.

Instead, two people who shared a body.

After the second beer, I asked Dead Crow why I couldn't control the wolf during a full moon.

"The full moon gives the wolf's totem power, kid," Dead Crow answered seriously. "That's his thing."

Still don't know if he really meant it or if he was just taking me for a ride with his Indian mysticism.

After the next beer, I found the courage to ask whether Dead Crow knew others like me.

He gave as little of an answer as he did to the question of his real name.

But I suspect that there was someone else who had a similar problem to my own.

Eventually saw the scars on Dead Crow's back when his shirt was torn by the bodyguard of a nouveau riche Russian in a scuffle at a black jack table.

And they didn't originate from the bigwig's female companion, although there had been enough opportunities for it, if I interpreted Dead Crow's grin correctly.

And, to be honest, there are enough Native American legends with some shaman or warrior who changes his skin, where they usually make it sound all flowery, right?

Anyway.

On our next day off, we drove into the desert.

Parked in the middle of nothing.

No trace of civilization anywhere you looked.

Sat silently on Dead Crow's old Mustang, looked into the emptiness, watched a couple hawks hover in the warm wind, and emptied a bottle of Johnny Walker.

"Come on, kid," Dead Crow finally said. "Want to try something."

We stood in the sun.

Like two boxers before the sound of the bell.

Seemed pretty ridiculous to me.

And then Dead Crow gave me a couple of hearty slaps and suddenly started to throw all kinds of insults at me.

Really got me livid.

Spouted really nasty shit about my mom, and so on.

Quickly lost control.

I yelled at him, he yelled back.

I shoved him, he shoved back.

I tried to punch him in the face.

He gracefully dodged it and kicked me in the balls.

Even when I lay on the sand in front of him, he kept kicking.

Over and over again with the tips of his awful cowboy boots, in the stomach and in the ribs, against my hips and my collarbone and shoulder.

The wolf came to the surface faster than a rottweiler on the fence when the mailman comes.

I growled at Dead Crow.

Wasn't much human in this growl.

Already felt the fur growing on my arms and chest and face.

The bones and muscles and tendons grinding in preparation for what would soon happen.

Dead Crow still didn't even run to the car when the seams of my clothing burst and the fabric ripped.

As dark fur broke out all over my skin.

"Fight it, kid!" Dead Crow yelled.

Screamed at me like a mangy mutt.

"Show him who's boss! Show him ... oh shit."

Dead Crow just barely made it into the car.

Hit the gas and fishtailed off in a cloud of red dust.

The wolf chased after the Mustang through the desert for over two hours before he slowed down and Dead Crow could finally outrun the shaggy fleabag.

He waited a few miles away until I had caught up to him, naked and with sore feet.

Neither of us said a word.

It was only when we had the wasteland behind us and drove through the city, which looked strangely changed and pale, that Dead Crow said:

"You've got a real crazy wolf, kid. A real lunatic of a wolf."

With this knowledge, our first field experiment ended.

Before the next time we ventured out into the desert, Dead Crow taught me some breathing techniques.

Practiced an hour every day with me, sometimes even two.

"Ancient Native American techniques?" I asked the first time, as we sat on his bed in the lotus position, eyes closed, but the spirit wide open, as my wise mentor put it.

"Yoga," Dead Crow answered after the next exhalation. "Do what I say. In. Out. In. Out. In ... slower, kid, you're panting."

Eventually, he decided I was ready for another try.

So we went to the desert again.

"But don't come back, okay?" I requested, as we faced each other on the red-brown sand once more.

Dead Crow smiled kindly.

"Okay, kid," he said reasonably. "And you make sure that crazy wolf stays where he is, okay?"

I nodded grimly and my Native American friend hammered his bony fist into my chin.

And he was proven right.

Sure, it wasn't easy, and in the end my will was probably more crucial than the shit with the in- and exhaling.

Anyway, I showed the wolf who was boss.

I remained a man despite Dead Crow's harassment.

An angry, tormented, inwardly torn man with bruises and sore ribs.

But a man.

And that's how Dead Crow taught me how to control the wolf in me when there wasn't a full moon.

We repeated the desert trips.

In the end, I even managed to consciously bring about the transformation, and then to mostly keep the upper hand, and finally to determine the time I'd revert back.

Dead Crow didn't say it, but he was terribly proud.

Me too, for that matter.

Four weeks later, the best and only real friend I've ever had OD'd.

I carried him out of the shitter stall where the Native American cleaning lady had found him.

One of his sisters.

Another tribe, but the same blood or something.

She howled like a wolf herself.

Luckily, I was the first to react to her cries.

Wrapped the old bastard in a stained table cloth from one of the cleaning carts and carried him down to the garage. That way, the paparazzi couldn't get a photo the way they always did with the drunken starlets.

Set him on the back seat of his Mustang, got in the car, which was still covered in dust from our last trip to the desert, and drove off.

Laid the crazy Indian out in the middle of the desert like a chief, doused him with whiskey, and set him aflame.

He and the rising sun raced ablaze.

I waited until the wind started blowing his ashes away.

Afterwards, I headed north toward Seattle to pay my respects once again.

*

I came up with the idea for the cage after my return from Vegas.

Dead Crow had shown me how to put the wolf in his place and stay in control.

If I let the beast rage unrestrained during the full moon, it would hurt our relationship.

I also had the feeling that I was betraying Dead Crow's memory if the wolf gained any control.

Nothing worse than guys who are sentimental, eh?

In any case, the cage is a very practical thing.

And if anyone asks, it's for Marlowe.

Better an animal abuser than an animal-man.

I justify the sound insulation on the walls with the old drums that I got cheap from a friendly club owner and left in a corner to collect dust.

As for the bars and locks on the inside of the door, I still have no adequate excuse.

Either way, my landlord doesn't give a shit about what his ideal, paying tenant, in the small room next to the boiler, does.

Would really be different if he knew what went on in here on a full moon.

Or that I writhe around naked in a cage and talk to my dog.

"Marlowe."

Slowly, I recognize my own voice again.

Still scratchy.

Still powerless.

But already sounds more like me.

Marlowe feels the same and wags his tail more enthusiastically than ever.

"Come here, boy," I encourage him. "Come."

He hesitates, anxiously shifts his weight from one side to the other.

He wants to come to me, but still isn't quite sure.

I can understand that.

I pull all of my strength together.

"Marlowe," I say firmly, although I'm shaking from the cold and the aftermath of last night.

At the same time, I shove my hand out between two bars.

It only works for the human version of me, don't worry.

What do you take me for?

"Come here, Marlowe."

Marlowe darts over to the hand like a torpedo and licks it frantically, while I try to pet him.

"Yes, that's right. Good boy, Marlowe."

He nestles up against the bars.

But I lean powerlessly from the other side.

I comb through Marlowe's soft, shaggy fur.

I have to admit — all this is more than just therapy.

My fingers grope around his head and neck.

Looking for the leather collar.

It takes a while until I get the key loose from the carabiner on the leather strap.

When I get it, I ball my fist around it and curl up in the cage again.

My eyes close almost on their own.

The cold creeps into me all over again.

"Get a move on, kid," Dead Crow says, annoyed. "Or do you want to lie on your ass all day?"

Marlowe barks at me.

"It's okay, buddy. I'm here. Everything is okay."

I am still shaky like a dried up alcoholic. It takes multiple tries before I can push forward on my knees, get the key into the lock, and unlock the cage door, which is reinforced with cross bars.

Marlowe huddles up against me as soon as I drag myself out of my prison on all fours.

"Just a minute, buddy," I mutter and lie on the rough, concrete floor.

Better than the freezing metal.

Marlowe licks my face with his warm tongue.

Good old Marlowe.

What he has to endure just because I need someone that I can count on.

Who, on the next morning, comes to me, forgives me for everything, and gives me the key, no matter what happened in the night.

Oh yeah, I know all about it.

I know it all too well.

Once, I recorded the spectacle on video.

Actually, I always wanted to avoid it.

Also don't understand how some people film themselves in bed.

But humans are just curious.

Even if they are a wolf in sheep's clothing.

So, just once I mounted a camcorder on the tripod and placed it in front of the cage.

Wanted to see why even the toughest guys were wetting themselves when they saw how I turned into a six and a half foot monster made out of muscles, fangs, claws, and fur.

Well.

What can I say?

I immediately destroyed the tape which showed the transformation just as clearly as Marlowe's panic.

The world isn't ready for such special effects.

Poor Marlowe.

He still has to bear it.

When it happens, he hides behind the drums, on some of his blankets.

He has to deal with a lot when the transformation begins and moments later a ferocious beast starts to rage, pushing against the steel, and growling.

Luckily, Marlowe is clever.

He only comes out again when it's all over.

When I become myself again on the cold, firmly secured, metal floor and have the taste of blood and bile in my mouth, which — to top it all off — feels as if someone pulled out all of my teeth and cut off my tongue.

I feel so sorry for Marlowe.

But I need him.

Even now, it's mainly Marlowe's rough tongue and doggy drool that bring me back to reality.

Dead Crow's presence can't really be called reality.

It takes a lot to stand up.

"Ah, fuck."

Every vertebra cracks.

Marlowe never leaves my side, which leads to me constantly tripping over him.

I don't say a word.

Don't have the right.

Just slip into my underwear and the old worn out flip-flops.

"Come on, buddy. Time to go home."

I lock up the cellar room and drag myself through the dark, unfinished hallway to the elevator, Marlowe still by my side as a loyal wingman.

I push the button, prop myself up against the brick wall and wait until the elevator rumbles down and the doors slide open.

Today, the elevator is empty.

No surprise.

It's only a little after four.

The metal doors close and I try not to think about the cage, as I aim for the button to my floor and actually hit it on the second try.

We are set in motion.

But only briefly.

The elevator stops with a jerk and the doors slide open sooner than they should.

Mr. and Mrs. Fosco look me up and down.

"Morning," I mumble and step aside to make room for them.

Marlowe wags his tail as the retired couple enters, and we continue moving upward.

The silence is particularly awkward.

"You're up and about early," Mrs. Fosco eventually remarks, which doesn't really make it better.

"I was about to say the same to you," I respond and attempt to produce something like a smile.

"We're coming from the hospital," Mrs. Fosco reveals in a confidential tone. She ignores the panting of her overweight husband and adds: "Charles thought he was having a heart attack again."

"And?"

"Just gas," Mrs. Fosco says, "as usual."

Her husband mutters sullenly to himself.

Mrs. Fosco keeps ignoring him with the experience of over thirty-five years of marriage.

"And you?" she asks in return.

"Laundry," I say without hesitating.

The Foscos know how I earn my money and what kind of hours my bouncer job requires.

"And why do you do your laundry naked?" Mr. Fosco now asks grumpily.

He just wants to take the attention off of his gas.

And because his wife is staring at my crotch.

"He can get away with it, Charles," his wife says.

Mr. Fosco glares piercingly at my six-pack.

I shrug with my toned shoulders.

"This nut puked on my clothes when I threw him out of the club. I didn't want to go into my apartment like that, so