

The Amazing Wolf Boy

Roxanne Smolen

ONE

I'll never forget the night my life ended.

It was Christmas Eve, 2007, and I was in France with my parents at *Maison Kammerzell*, one of those fancy historic restaurants. The room glowed with plastic icicles. Ropes of apples and mistletoe hung from the ceiling. My tie felt like a noose and my suit coat a straitjacket.

We were dining on *le Reveillon*, a holiday feast of roast capon, which is a castrated chicken, and *boudin blanc*, which always tastes like vanilla pudding to me. My mother waved her hands as she described in detail the Christmas decorations at the Charity Ball she chaired. I love my mother, I really do, but give her a glass or two of wine and she can outtalk an auctioneer. My father listened with a rapt expression, letting her build up steam. I thought about my DS back in the hotel room. Out the window, beyond the reflection of red and gold holiday lights, I saw a full moon.

As if someone threw a switch inside my head, my senses came alive. The room rang with the sharp clink of china and crystal. The string quartet, whose classic Christmas Carols had gone all but unheard in the hectic atmosphere, now played sharp and clear.

Scents rose from my table and mixed with those from surrounding tables. I put down my fork, staring at my plate. My nose told me that the poor, mutilated rooster I'd been eating was stuffed with rosemary. The bird reeked. I couldn't believe I'd put that in my mouth. It made my skin crawl. For real. I could see the hair on the back of my hands stand up.

Hair on my hands? When did that happen?

Before I thought of a satisfactory explanation, agony gripped me. I clutched the sides of my head. It felt as if my skull cracked open. As if someone pulled off my face. My teeth ached so bad I couldn't close my lips. Drool dribbled down my chin. I covered my mouth with my hands and froze.

It didn't feel like me. The nose was flat. The jaw protruded. I ran my tongue over my teeth. They were long and sharp. Like fangs. I leaped to my feet, almost knocking over my chair. While my mother prattled on about the ball, I rushed from the table.

My only thought was to hide. It might have made sense to yell for help, both my parents are doctors, but I didn't want the other diners to see me. So I zigzagged through the tables with my napkin to my face, dodging curious stares. Panic churned the over-spiced food in my stomach.

I reached the lobby. A couple came in arm-in-arm through the door, and another couple greeted them. They laughed and shook hands, blocking the exit. Couldn't get out there. A man stepped out of the men's room, while two others went inside. Couldn't hide there. Too busy. The smell of leather and fur radiated from the coatroom. When the coat-check girl turned her back, I ducked inside.

Excruciating pain wracked my body. Every muscle clenched and twisted. I felt as if my bones shrank and elongated at the same time. Sweat poured from my skin. I tore off my suit coat and unbuttoned my shirt, gasping as the cool air hit my chest. Trapped in a sort of mental haze, I climbed behind the mink and sable wraps.

My father's voice snapped me to wakefulness. "I'm looking for my son, Cody."

It sounded like he was at the front desk. I could walk that far. Still sweating, I got to my feet.

All four feet.

I yelped, and the sound that burst from my throat was not human. I stared at sleek silver paws. As I stumbled forward, my pants slid from my hindquarters.

"Cody? Are you in here?" my father called.

Before I saw him, I smelled him—from his shampoo to his shoe polish to the residue of dinner that clung to his pores. He stood in the doorway of the coatroom, his face unreadable. Then he said, "For crying out loud."

Not knowing what else to do, I barreled past him into the restaurant lobby. My paws clattered on the smooth floor, and my hind legs skittered sideways. I saw wood paneling and spiral staircases. People stood everywhere. Someone screamed. The maître d' shouted something I couldn't understand.

Then I caught a puff of chilled, fresh air. I scraped and skidded toward the door, trying to spread my weight over four legs, and accidentally slammed my shoulder into a man's hip. He fell, and the impact bounced me into a twenty-foot Christmas tree. One of my hind feet snagged a strand of holiday lights; the tree swayed and tinkled.

I bounded out the open door, leaping for freedom, and hitting the pavement on all fours. Lights flashed and dazzled my eyes. The sound of traffic roared. The stench of motor oil and hot rubber rose in swells. Pedestrians came from all directions. They trampled me and cursed, or jumped back like I was something scary. I scrambled to get out of the way.

I scented water and remembered passing a fountain on the way to the restaurant. I headed toward the smell at a trot, thinking it would be quieter there, and caught my reflection in a storefront window.

I was a dog. A large, silver dog with a short yellow tail. How could it be true? It had to be a dream. *Keep to the sidewalk. Try to look inconspicuous. Just a big fluffy pet wearing a necktie.* My tongue lolled to the side. I closed my mouth but it dropped open again as if my teeth were too large to contain.

The fountain was not as deserted as I hoped. It was a meeting place for lovers. Some of the girls squealed and pointed. Several couples hurried away. Maybe they thought I had rabies. I stood there, not knowing where to go or what to do. I felt scared and confused.

But also intrigued. I smelled fear on the people who stared at me, tasted their mingled scents on the breeze. I wanted to chase them just to see how fast and how far they'd run.

What was wrong with me?

The wail of sirens rose over the street noise. Weird sirens, not normal ones like in Massachusetts. I never missed home more than at that moment. If I could just wake up, I knew I would find myself in my own bed. That thought held me, and I must have

spaced. A moment later, two cars screeched to the curb. Several uniformed men hopped out. One held a lasso on a stick. They walked in my direction.

“I need help,” I shouted. “Something’s wrong.”

Only, that’s not what came out. I frowned, replaying the rough sounds that burst from my throat. The men surrounded me, holding their arms from their sides like they were fences. I decided to try talking again. Maybe if I said something in Dog it would come out as English.

“Woof,” I barked. “Woof, woof, woof.”

The nearest guy tried to loop his lasso over my head. I dodged. He swung again, and I backed into one of the men. He wasn’t a very good fencepost—he went down beneath my weight.

I spun about, intending to speed away, but my hind legs ran faster than my front. I skittered around the fountain like I was running on ice. The bystanders scattered. The men spread out, cornering me. A growl rose in my chest; my teeth bared themselves. Without thinking, I jumped. No, I soared. Right over their heads. Came down running and didn’t stop.

I heard shouts and the thud of heavy footsteps, but after a while, the sounds faded. I didn’t slow down. My nose led me to a brick-paved alley, and I tore through it, trying to catch up with myself. It was like if I could run fast enough, far enough, I might leave the nightmare behind.

After a time, pain overcame my horror, and I limped to a halt. My overexerted muscles screamed, and my paws felt raw and stone bruised. I was still in the labyrinth of byways, enmeshed in the rich odors of garbage. I saw recessed doors and bicycles leaning against walls.

Townhomes. Everyone asleep. Visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads.

My holiday dinner curdled in my stomach. I was thirsty. Someone left out a dog bowl, and the water was almost irresistible. I refused it. I would not drink like an animal. With an almost drunken stagger, I continued walking.

The alley was bright. I looked up at the brilliant, full moon.

Tears burned my eyes. I wanted to cry. But I was sixteen years old. I hadn’t cried since I was a kid. Besides, if I started, it might sound like I was howling, and I couldn’t handle that.

In a doorway, I curled into a ball and put my paws over my muzzle.

* * *

I awoke to a frigid dawn. I was human. I was also naked. All I wore was my necktie from the previous night.

My body convulsed with shivers as I stumbled down the alleyway. I had to get to my parents before I died of exposure. There was no traffic so early in the morning. The street lamps were still lit. I stood in the shadows, searching for a signpost, a landmark, anything familiar. I didn't know Strasbourg well, although I'd visited before.

While I considered how to get from point A to point B, a squad car pulled up the alley behind me. An early riser must have seen me streak past their window.

As the police officer stepped toward me, I raised my arms over my head and shouted, "I'm an American."

His eyes were amused. At least, he didn't draw his gun. "You look cold," he said in a thick French accent. His gaze settled on my shriveled shrinky dink.

I dropped my hands, covering myself. "I was...I am..." I wanted to tell him I was mugged and my clothes were stolen, but I was shivering so hard, I couldn't get the words out.

He opened his trunk and removed a long, heavy coat. Perhaps he didn't feel it was cold enough to wear such a garment. He tossed it to me, and I put it on. The coat was as icy as the air. If anything, I felt colder. He ushered me to the car. I balked. I didn't want to go to jail.

"My parents are at the *Sofitel*," I managed to say.

"*Oui*. Your family contacted us regarding your disappearance and your mental aberration." He pushed me inside with a practiced hand atop my head and slammed the door.

The car was so small I had to slouch to fit. The backseat smelled like vomit. There was no heat. The officer got in front and spoke French into his radio. I hugged my arms and puzzled over what he'd said.

Mental aberration? Is that what had happened? Had I only thought I was a dog? That would explain my father's annoyed reaction when he saw me in the coatroom. The idea comforted me as if being crazy was better.

By the time we reached the police station, I felt warm within the coat. The officer helped me out of the vehicle and up the stairs. Noise burst to greet us as he opened the door. The station was crowded despite it being dawn on Christmas morning. I walked at his side past the front desk, garnering more than a few stares. He led me down a corridor decorated with a line of threadbare tinsel taped to the wall. The floor was gritty and cold. We stopped at an office with Captain Jean-Luc Boudreaux stenciled on the window. Inside, I saw my parents get to their feet. My mother's eyes were puffy as if she'd been crying.

"Mom." I wanted to go to her and hug her, but the look she shot me was not inviting.

My father handed me a fleece jogging suit. I slipped on the pants and passed the coat to the officer.

He accepted with a nod.

A bald man I assumed was Captain Boudreaux stood from the desk. "So we find zee little boy and all is well, no?"

Wincing at the words *little boy*, I sat to tie my shoes. I felt invisible. No one spoke to me. My father signed a pack of paperwork. I imagined it like a receipt. Like he was pulling a wayward puppy out of the pound.

And just like that, we were free to go. Before I knew it, we were back at the hotel.

I wanted to talk about the night before, wanted to figure out what had happened, but I was still getting the silent treatment. My mother paced the room, avoiding my eyes. I stood at the door, wondering how to broach the subject.

At last, I said, "Am I crazy?"

"Don't ever think that," said my father.

"I must be." I took a step into the room and held out my hands. My palms were raw from a night of running on all fours. "I thought I turned into a dog."

"A wolf," my mother snapped. "You turned into a wolf."

Her tone was both disgusted and accusing as if it were my fault. As if I'd been playing around. I was so taken aback it took a moment for her words to sink in.

“Wolf?” I remembered the full moon. “As in werewolf?” *But aren’t werewolves vicious monsters?*

She stopped to face me, straightening her shoulders. “Your father and I have talked it over, and we feel it would be better for everybody if you went to live with your uncle in Florida.”

“What?” I stood there, dumbfounded. “I can’t live with him. I only met him once.”

“It’s for your own good.”

“But what about my life? What about school?”

“They have schools in Loxahatchee,” she shouted.

Loxahatchee. As if there *were* such a place.

Tears filled my eyes for the second time in as many days. “I can’t believe it. I can’t believe you’d send me away.” I expected them to take me to a doctor, or even a psychiatrist. But this?

“We already have your ticket,” my father said. “We’ll arrange for a car to pick you up at the airport and take you to Bob’s house.”

Uncle Bob. The black sheep. The only thing I knew about him was that he sometimes hit my mother up for money.

“You aren’t coming?” I said, sounding like the little boy the captain had branded me. My parents turned away.

So there you have it. My life was over. Not literally, of course. But as I stared out the window of the jumbo jet at the spreading void of Everglades below, I knew nothing was going like I planned.

The Amazing Wolf Boy

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***** I loved it so much I read it again this time in one day. I've already let someone borrow this book and she said and I quote "words cannot express how great this book is and you wolf lovers will enjoy it".

About Author Roxanne Smolen

Roxanne Smolen became enamored by werewolves after watching the movie Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein when she was a girl. The pathos of the wolfman character touched her even then. As she grew into her author shoes, the idea of a conflicted werewolf character grew as well until she knew his story had to be told. Her wolf boy series takes place in Loxahatchee, Florida, not far from her home. You can connect with her on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), and [Google+](#).

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