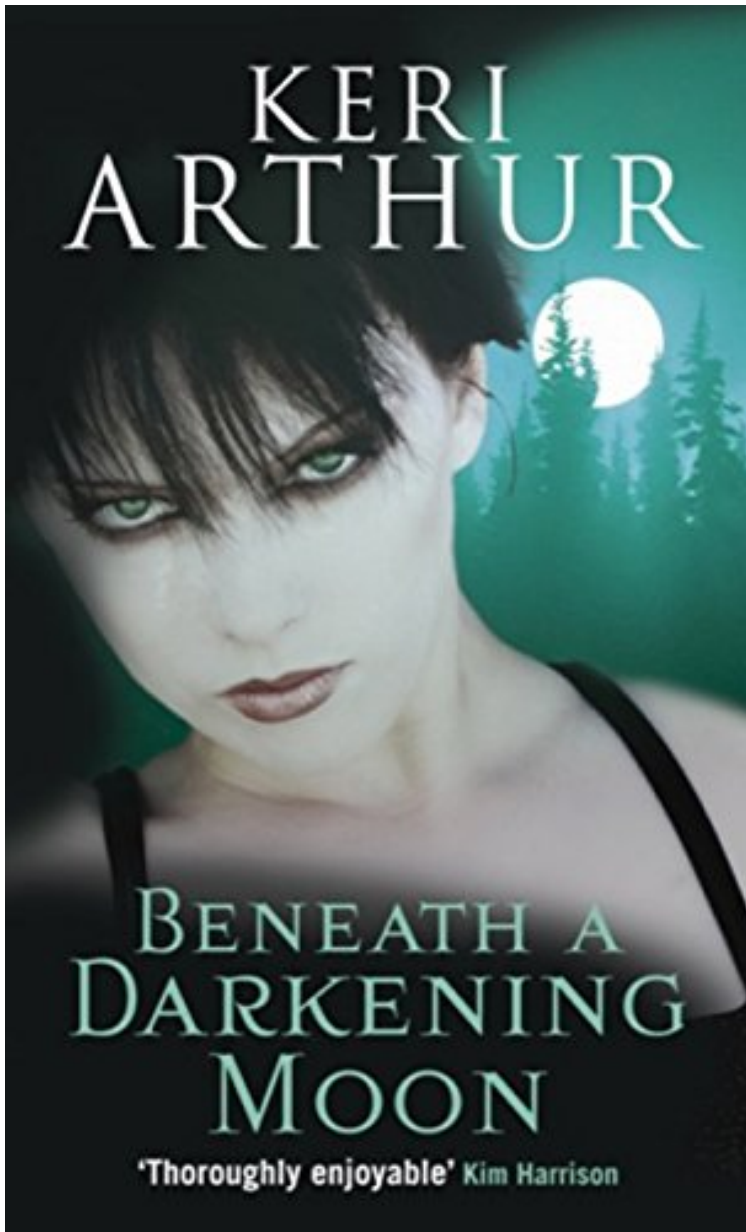


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Beneath A Darkening Moon: Number 2 in series



Par Keri Arthur
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurSomeone is murdering humans on the Ripple Creek Werewolf Reservation, and the murders are eerily similar to those Chief Ranger Savannah Grant witnessed nearly ten years ago. Having once had the reputation for being the wild sister, it seems her past has come back to haunt her. Worse still, the man sent in to help with the investigation is the one man Savannah had hoped never to see again - the

man who had taken her trust and her heart, and smashed them both. Cade Jones is in Ripple Creek to catch the killer who escaped a decade ago. He doesn't expect to find the woman who nearly caused his death - a woman who knows far more than she'll ever let on. This time, Cade has every intention of discovering exactly what she does know. Soon it becomes clear that the murders are not random and Savannah finds herself having to trust the one man she'd sworn never to trust again.

Chapter One Savannah Grant climbed out of the truck and took a deep breath of the crisp fall air. Though it had snowed last night, the sky this morning was rich and blue, and the sun was surprisingly warm. The aspen trees surrounding the small clearing glowed a rich, vibrant gold that contrasted sharply with the blue of the sky and the white of the snow-covered peaks looming high above. Leaves littered the ground beneath her feet, but the snow that had covered them earlier had melted. Now, the sunlight gleamed through the drops of water that remained, making them glow like tiny diamonds. But this tranquil setting hid a darker heart. She slammed the door shut and turned as a second truck came to a halt in the clearing. Three men climbed out - two deputy rangers and a brown-haired teen who looked positively green around the gills. The teenagers gaze skirted the clearing, resting momentarily on the barely visible trail that disappeared through the aspens. Then he gulped and looked at Savannah. His blue eyes were wide and frightened - a sure sign that, for once in his short life, Matt wasn't crying wolf. I don't have to go back up there, do I? No. She tried to give the kid a reassuring smile, but it probably looked as fake as it felt. But then, it wasn't every day that two human tourists were murdered within a week of each other inside the confines of the Ripple Creek Werewolf Reservation. And worse, those murders were an almost exact replica of a past event that still haunted her dreams. A shiver ran down her spine. Not from the cold, though here in the mountains it was chilly despite the sun's heat. While her clairvoyance skills were sometimes hit-and-miss, she'd certainly had more than her fair share of premonitions come true, and that's what she was feeling now. The past she'd tried so hard to forget was about to be resurrected. She rubbed her arms and stepped away from the truck. Ike, do you want to stay here with Matt? But I want to go up there with you. Ike, she warned, in no mood to take any of the young deputies' crap today. Either you do as I say, or you head back down the mountain. How the hell am I going to learn anything? You could always sit at a desk and do paperwork, she cut in. Your choice. Sullen didn't even begin to describe his expression as he nodded. Guilt slithered through her, but she shoved it away and glanced across at Ronan. Ready? The russet-haired deputy nodded and hitched the small backpack onto his shoulder. She spun and walked across the clearing. Sunlight filtering through the golden leaves dappled the faint path, but quickly gave way to deeper shadows as they moved into the pines. You were a bit hard on the kid, weren't you? Ronan said, his deep voice seeming to resonate through the silence. I know he can be annoying where you're concerned, but he truly is eager to learn. She blew out a breath. I know. It's just that you're dreaming again, aren't you? She looked over her shoulder. Ronan's gray eyes gleamed almost silver in the shadows, full of concern. But then, they'd known each other a very long time. Ronan was not only one of her few close friends, but her very first lover when she'd been a teenager just starting to explore her sexuality. And even though it went against her policy of not mixing business and pleasure, they still shared a moon dance when one of them was feeling lonely. What makes you think that? His smile lit up his eyes. The only time you're so short-tempered is when you're feeling the heat of the moon or have been dreaming. Considering we shared a few rather energetic nights last weekend, I figured it was the latter. She grinned. Have you made the bed yet? Yeah. Otherwise Conor would be curious. She nodded. The cabin they used for their retreats had been in Ronan's family for years, but these days it was only occupied in spring, when the fishing was good. It was the perfect sanctuary the rest of the year, except that Conor, Ronan's younger brother, was one of those wolves who had a nose for intrigue and always seemed to be three steps behind them. While he didn't appear to know about their sometime affair, neither of them wanted him to find out - only because the kid was a blabbermouth. Besides, their illicit meetings not only went against her own rules, but council rules as well. The council, she thought grimly, definitely needed to pull their heads out of their collective asses. Not so much because of the no-fraternizing-with-co-workers rule, but for all the other rules they were trying to institute - like a ten o'clock curfew for anyone under eighteen. This was the twenty-first century, for God's sake, not the Middle Ages. It was rules like that that had driven her out of both her home and Ripple Creek when she was barely seventeen. Of course, her views on the matter, though often aired, weren't taken into consideration, despite the fact her dad was the head of the council. He also happened to be the main force behind all the saving-yourself-for-marriage bullshit currently simmering, despite the hassle and heartache such beliefs had caused Neva, Savannah's twin, just over a year ago. What are the dreams about this time? Ronan asked. She brushed a tree branch aside, waiting until he'd passed before letting it go. Same old, same

old. Death, destruction, and mayhem. Only this time, it wasn't in the past, but the present. And that scared her, because the man behind those murders was supposedly dead. So how could they be happening again, here in Ripple Creek, in almost the exact same manner? The press had never been allowed to release all the details, so it couldn't be a copycat. Yet the murderer at least, the first murder was the same. Right down to the mutilation of the victims' genitals. Only two things were different this time, the victims were human, and instead of letting the blood drain into the soil, someone or something was lapping it up. A shiver ran down her spine. Fear, she acknowledged. Fear of what was coming. Who was coming. She swallowed heavily but didn't allow that particular fear any more space, because at that moment, death touched the air. She stopped, sniffing the faint breeze and tasting the scents entwined within it. A new death, Ronan said, stopping close enough that she could feel his body heat. The blood is still fresh. She nodded. The hint of sage and musk suggests the victim is male. Same as the first one. She glanced over her shoulder and met his gaze. The grim certainty reflected in his eyes echoed through her. They had themselves a serial killer and with autumn giving way to winter and drawing in the cross-country skiing crowd, soon there would be far too many potential victims in Ripple Creek. Let's get up there before the scavengers do. She followed the ever-thickening scent of death through the trees. The path became steeper, rockier, as the tree line began to recede. The clumps of snow became drifts, and the chill in the air was more noticeable. Yet, despite that, sweat trickled down her spine. The past she'd fled was merging with the present, and all she could see in the future was disaster. She swiped at the moisture dribbling down her forehead and tried to get a grip on her imagination. It was just a murderer just a crazy person. The past wasn't coming back to haunt her. It was a weird coincidence, nothing more. Maybe, that deep-down voice said. And maybe not. Regardless of whether it was just a coincidence, when she'd reported the murders to the IIS who were an offshoot of the FBI, and who by law had to be notified whenever a human was killed on werewolf land she'd noted them as being similar to those past murders. And that meant that they just might send the same man to investigate. And he was the last man she ever wanted to see in Ripple Creek. There're the egg-shaped boulders Matt mentioned, Ronan said, pointing to the rocks off to the left-hand side of the trail. She nodded and made her way toward them. Beyond the stones, death waited. Like the first victim, this man had his arms and legs stretched wide, his penis and scrotum sliced away, and his heart removed. For a moment she closed her eyes, fighting not only the sickness that churned in the pit of her stomach, but also the memories that came crowding back. Of course, they weren't actually her memories, but rather those of the man she'd been sleeping with. A man who'd been the very opposite of the gentle soul she'd thought him to be. Yet even without those memories, it was doubtful that scenes like this would ever become easy, she thought, as her gaze swept around the stone circle that surrounded the mutilated body. She might have spent the last nine years as a ranger, but death was not something she'd encountered often. Which was why finding someone so brutally and methodically slaughtered still had the power to shock her. We have ourselves a nut-job, Ronan said, as he came to a halt beside her. That we have. The question was did this nut-job re-create past events by chance or by design? You want to secure the area and take some preliminary photos? I'll call headquarters, and get them to send the coroner. Presentation de l'diteur Someone is murdering humans on the Ripple Creek Werewolf Reservation, and the murders are eerily similar to those Chief Ranger Savannah Grant witnessed nearly ten years ago. Having once had the reputation for being the wild sister, it seems her past has come back to haunt her. Worse still, the man sent in to help with the investigation is the one man Savannah had hoped never to see again - the man who had taken her trust and her heart, and smashed them both. Cade Jones is in Ripple Creek to catch the killer who escaped a decade ago. He doesn't expect to find the woman who nearly caused his death - a woman who knows far more than she'll ever let on. This time, Cade has every intention of discovering exactly what she does know. Soon it becomes clear that the murders are not random and Savannah finds herself having to trust the one man she'd sworn never to trust again.