

**The She-Wolf**  
**Mark Graham**  
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## CHAPTER 1

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Richard sat on a marble bench inside the courtyard. A warm breeze ruffled the small trees surrounding him. He sat, back straight with his hat sitting on his knee. A dark walking stick leaned against his leg - a gift from his father when he was younger. Here and there little birds flitted through the slightly overgrown topiary, singing as they did. The entrance to the asylum loomed before him. The wings of the building spread out east and west, turning north so he couldn't see the ends of them. The massive, three story building sat on over forty acres of land.

"And what am I going to do with you?" He said out loud. A little finch landed in front of him. Its head ticked up to the left and then right as it regarded him with both eyes. It took off again when Richard didn't throw any crumbs for it. He could almost hear faint voices being carried over the wind but no sounds coming from the asylum itself. The clock on the central tower stood still at nearly 3:50. Whether morning or not, he didn't know. The building itself looked the worse for wear. By all accounts his father had been an able superintendent but an abysmal caretaker. Now he was off in the tropics, leaving Richard with the asylum and a small sum of money.

Richard sighed and gripped his walking stick. The cool metal felt reassuring in his hand, as it always did when he was considering a problem. He twisted the stick in a half circle, back and forth against the ground.

"Really, father. Of all the times you would do me this dubious honor..." He had only recently found he was accepted into St. George's and was still celebrating a week later when the solicitor showed up at his apartments to deliver the letter from his father. As always, his father was brief and overly formal but the solicitor made everything more clear. The Miller-Chatham Asylum and all of its associated properties, taxes, debts, et cetera were assigned to Richard for his disposal. Included in the bequeath was money sufficient to pay for the asylum's costs for an entire year. *If he chose to keep the property in the family name.*

He stood, settling his top hat tightly on his head. He pulled his old pocket watch from his vest to check the time. "And now I shall be late for Miss Havers. Confound it." The loose gravel of the path crunched beneath his feet as he made his way to the gates and the waiting carriage. The driver, an old man with rough whiskers, lay back with his eyes closed. One of the two horses whickered and stamped its feet. Richard patted the brown mare on her thick neck.

"I am finished here, driver. It's back to Whittaker Park for me." Richard stepped up into the carriage, pulling himself into the interior.

"Sir." The driver said, his voice rough from his nap.

Richard watched the asylum dwindle away through the small window of the carriage. He leaned back into the seat and let his mind wander over the past week. *He wouldn't have*

*to keep the old building. He could sell it off, pay the creditors and use the money for his studies and eventually his own private practice if he was careful enough. And then Mary... Ah, Mary.* His thoughts went off on an entirely different path - one he wasn't comfortable with. He studied the countryside rather than follow those indecent thoughts any further.

Soon the laughter and squeals of small children told him they were close to the park. Richard arranged his clothing and checked his watch again. *Thirteen minutes late. Miss Havers will not be pleased with me.* He stepped out of the carriage and handed the driver his money, with a little extra. His father would frown if he were here but Richard didn't care. He had grown up into wealth, rarely needing to work for anything; why should he be tight with his own money that he didn't earn when others needed it more?

He found Mary sitting in her usual spot - a small iron wrought bench beneath a large oak tree. Her shoulder length, chestnut brown hair shifted around her elegant shoulders with the wind. Her ankle-length dress had clever flowers woven in a pleasing but simple pattern. He watched the slim curve of her neck before stepping around to her front. As usual, she had a small book in her lap. Mary was seldom without a book. She looked up when he approached and her easy smile warmed his heart.

"Richard. I was just beginning to wonder if you'd taken up residence in that wicked place." She closed her book with her gloved hands, not bothering to mark her place.

Richard smiled back. She was beautiful. His childhood friend had grown into a stunning young woman. "Hello, Mary. I'm sorry for being late again. Will you walk with me?"

"Of course, Mr. Miller." She smiled even wider at her small joke and stood. She reached her hand out for his arm but pulled back when Richard didn't freely offer his arm. "My steadfast friend." She said, her voice a little sad this time.

They walked slowly through the park, between running children and around tall trees. Their talk ranged from the news of the day to Richard's acceptance into St. George's.

"I must say, Richard. Everyone is awfully pleased for you. We always assumed you'd follow your father into medicine but to be accepted at such a young age is wonderful. I... I shall miss you when you go."

"And I, you, Mary. I..." He stopped and turned to her. "I intend to ask your uncle for your hand in marriage when I am finished with my studies."

"Richard! I... I..." Her eyes glistened wetly as she struggled with her voice. She reached for him again and, this time he let her rest her hand on his arm.

"If you'll have me, Mary. I will sell the asylum and use the money to set up a good life for the both of us."

"Oh, Richard! But why must we wait until your studies are finished? That's a frightfully long time from now."

"No. It must be then. When I am finished, I will be 'Dr. Miller' and worthy of you. Worthy of asking your uncle." He gently took her hand away from his arm.

"My uncle...!" Anger flashed briefly across Mary's face. She looked away. "My uncle is a cruel man and I worry about his intentions. You don't know him like I do, Richard. I've seen the desire he has for me in his eyes."

Richard ground his teeth. "I can do nothing, Mary. Whether your uncle desires you or not, he is your guardian."

Mary bowed her head in defeat. "As you say. Only, please hurry. Whether I am imagining his advances or not, he and his manservant are **not** my friend. They're brutish and, and..." She reached out, touching his chest briefly. "Hurry back." She finished, quietly.

"Cheer up, Mary. You'll see - the time will go by quickly. Let me walk you home and we'll speak no more of it. How goes your training?"

"Wonderfully. The new litter is nursing well and even the sire has shown interest in them. He has an affection heart, does our Edward. Although, the bitch is still overly protective of her pups and won't let him too close. I visit them when... Oh!"

A small, dirty child ran between them laughing while stomping through small puddles in his bare feet and mismatched clothing. "Here now!" Richard called after him.

"Check your pockets, Richard; that was a little gypsy boy. They're all thieves and beggars. I wish the town council would see fit to run them off. They're a dirty people, everyone says so."

"That child is no worse than any of the other small children in the park, Mary. A little more wild and a little dirtier but they have morals as much as any of us do. I've visited their camp a few times, in fact."

"Richard! You most certainly did not!"

Richard studied his company from the side. *Beautiful and meek but oddly argumentative at times.* "I most certainly did. As you say, they are a poor people - poor in wealth so how should they pay for medicinal treatment from our learned society? I brought my meager services and ended up drinking late into the night with them. They're a hale and hearty folk, Mary. Only... only don't try to compete with them in drink. I woke in one of their tents with the most horrible head-ache. Fully clothed! And with all of my personal items laid out beside me. Nothing was missing. An old crone gave me something for my

head that helped immensely. I went again to ask her for advice on the herbs they use but she wouldn't see me."

Mary breathed out heavily. "I suppose you are right. Still, drinking with those people... what a wicked idea, Richard. Oh! The party this evening! Are you coming? Please do! Everyone will be there and Thomas will bring his violin. My uncle and his servant are away another night so I've invited our friends over. Please go - everyone is anxious to hear about your plans."

"No, I can not. I'm attending Widow Belford tonight on her rounds and there's a small chance I will witness a birth." He chuckled. "She tells me it's quite different than a bitch whelping her puppies. Here we are, Mary. Safe to your home, unmolested by little gypsy children."

"Now you make light of me." She looked down. "I'll miss you and your company tonight, Richard. You are the voice of reason in our small group. I shall be too shy to speak to anyone without you there." She suddenly smiled up at him and her small, delicate face was mischievous. "Pray, don't faint tonight when the little one is born." She darted away, holding onto her skirts.

Richard chuckled as he watched Mary vanish into the doorway. From inside he heard the excited barking of one of her many mastiffs welcoming her home. The thought of being surrounded by friends, laughter and Mary herself was almost enough to make him change his mind about his plans. Almost. But, if he were to finish his studies quickly and return for her hand then he would forsake any pleasurable activity.

*I will be the man Mary needs. A man worthy of her gentle hand.* He told himself.

## CHAPTER 2

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His dreams were random, chaotic images that made no sense but they all faded when he became aware of the banging sound. He woke disoriented and unsure of where he was. Pale early sunlight was trying to burn through the thick ground mist their area was well known for and a gentle rhythm of rain beat against his cottage.

"RICHARD! OPEN YOUR BLEEDIN' DOOR BEFORE I KICK IT IN!" The voice cut through Richard's confusion and he sat up immediately in bed, throwing the covers aside. He stumbled into his bed side table before making his way to the door, clad only in his long night shirt.

"RICHARD!" The voice yelled. More thumps shook the door before Richard unlatched it. A gust of cold wet wind swept through the room.

"Who...?" Richard swallowed the words in his throat and wondered if he might not still be dreaming. The figure before him was massive and inhuman. It was several moments before Richard could see that it was just a man with someone slung over their shoulders. The man stepped into the cottage and Richard took several steps back.

"Took your time, didn't you?" The figure told him. Something about him was familiar but all Richard could feel was terror, whether from being woken badly at such an unusual time from a short sleep or because of the man in front of him, he couldn't tell.

The figure pushed past Richard and crouched before his bed. He shrugged his shoulder ungently and the person on his shoulder slumped into the bed with a moan. The man stood again and pushed his hood back. Richard gasped. "William! What...?"

Mary's uncle frowned at Richard. He was an imposing man at well over six feet tall and his face was not made for smiles or kindness. He pushed a bit of his long hair out of his eyes. "Mind your questions and look to your patient, boy. If she dies then it's on your head."

"She?" Richard walked around William to study the figure on his bed. "Mary!"

"That's right, boy. Your precious Mary. I got back in time to catch one of her bloody dogs worrying at her throat like some crazed beast. I killed the damned thing and brought her here to you." William stepped close to Richard and looked down into the boy's face. The man's breath reeked. "You save her, boy. Like your life depends on it. I'll return to check on her health."

Richard barely heard him leave; he was already cutting through Mary's ruined clothing - clothing she was wearing when he'd met her at the park - to expose her shoulder. The dim light showed a terrible wound on the left of her neck but little else. He lit the small oil lamp on his bedside table and sucked in his breath at the amount of blood on her. He

could see bone through the skin of shoulder. Bone and raw muscle. Richard grabbed a jug of water, a basin and some cloth. Snatches of memory from earlier in the night came to him - the midwife in her commanding voice telling him what she needed to stop the bleeding from the baby being born. He cleaned what he could as gently as possible but at every touch, Mary groaned and twisted below him. He put his feelings aside and set to work, cleaning and sewing.

Much later, he sat back. He'd done what he could but Mary's breathing was still shallow, her face still too pale. He'd made a sling to keep her left arm as still as possible but she still moved against it, making inarticulate sounds as if in some bad dream.

Richard clasped his bloody hands tightly together. "Dear Lord in Heaven, please see to Mary's health for I am yet inexperienced in the gift you've given to me. She's one of your angels, Lord and I pray you are not yet ready to welcome her back into your loving embrace. In your name, I pray. Amen."

He leaned closer to her, hesitating slightly before kissing her brow. "I'll be back quickly, Mary. Hold on." With that, he ran out to find Widow Belford.

She was not much pleased to be awake after a long night of visiting pregnant women but Widow Belford came quickly enough when he was finally able to explain what was wrong. She took one look at Mary and turned to Richard. "You've not fed her, have you?"

He stammered. "I... no. I..."

"Aye, I imagine not. Check her wrapping - she's bleedin' through. Tsk. A shame to have such a beauty be stitched by a hand like yours. She'll have to marry you now; no other man'll want to look on those scars. I'll need some more water and save some for yerself as well, she'll be wantin' you to cool her. Likely she has a fever. Now, boy!"

Richard did as he was told while Widow Belford dug through his small kitchen. He was changing Mary's bandages when he smelled the broth cooking. His own stomach gurgled at him before he realized he hadn't had anything to eat yet. He ignored the small pains and peeled the last bandage away from Mary's shoulders. He tried to pull gently but the bandage was sticky with blood. He couldn't look at the stitched flesh. Not because he was squeamish but because he was terrified the old woman was right and that he'd handled her badly. He wiped the wound carefully before setting a new bandage.

"Aye, you be gentle like that with all yer patients and they'll be thanking you for it. Go on t' my sister and ask for some of my niece's clothes. Tell her I sent you and why. I won't have you changing her but she needs changing. Your sheets as well, it smells like. Well, no shame in it. Off with you. I'll feed her and when you've brought me the clothes, you go and feed yourself. I don't want you here hauntin' the room."

Nearly an hour later Richard sat staring at his plate of food at The Fighting Cock. Half of the food was gone but he couldn't remember eating any of it. Friends had stopped by to say hello but stayed away when he answered them. He couldn't remember what he'd told them. His thoughts kept turning to Mary and her ruined shoulder. Growing up with his father, he'd seen plenty of horrible diseases, amputations and madness but never one so personal to him. Never one that struck at his core like... He leaned over, vomiting the food he'd just eaten. Big Tom himself came over when he was done.

"Here, lad, I've known you since you were a child but I've never seen you like this before. Not even when your friend Daniel drinks you under the table. No, don't worry about the mess, I'll clean it up. Only, you should go home and sleep off whatever it is. I'll send one of my boys over with some food later. Do you need some help?" Bit Tom rested his large hands on Richard's shoulder.

Richard waved him away and stood, swaying with his hands on the table. "No, I'm fine. I'll go but I'm fine. I just, I'm sorry about the mess." He left some coins on the table and made his way out. Big Tom called after him but Richard didn't hear the words. He found himself walking home and remembering the bloody wound. Every thought kept going back to it.

Eventually he found himself standing in front of his own door. He stared, barely recognizing the plain wooden door with the brass door handle. His hand reached out, hesitated and then opened the door. Widow Belford glanced over at him. A young girl was tidying up the room.

"Back already? You smell like death. Wash up and eat; my sister sent over her youngest and some food. Your girl will live."

He stared at the old woman hearing the words repeat over and over. *Your girl will live.* Richard fell to his knees, tears streaming down his face. He sobbed quietly to himself while the old woman pretended to check over Mary. When he brought himself under control, he stood to walk over to Mary. Her color was improved and she was taking deep, regular breaths. He stroked the side of her face tenderly.

"Wash up and eat, boy. I won't tell you twice. I'll stay the night and then leave her to you tomorrow. Go on home now, Jenny. Tell your mother to send you along with more food later tonight."

The little girl curtsied. "Yes, nana."

"That one wants to birth babies, too. Better her than any of your doctors." She inclined her head towards Mary. "Her uncle was here briefly with his man." The old woman shivered in her thick coat. "Someone like that has no right walking around in human skin. Wanted to take her back home. Took everything I had to keep her here. Be back tomorrow, that one."



Richard carefully washed himself, making a note to shave in the morning. A whole small chicken and still warm bread was set out on the small table he used for eating at and sometimes for studying. He hadn't realized how hungry he was but now that Mary was going to live he found he could keep everything down. He took turns watching Mary with the old widow but couldn't sleep, even when the sun passed below the horizon.

Finally, when the moon hung fat in the starry sky, Widow Belford cleared her throat. "I'm tired. That means you're tired, too, boy. I'll not be wanting to come here again to deliver a babe from her so you make up your bed on the floor over there."

"I wouldn't dare!" Richard sputtered.

"No, I don't imagine you would. Not you. But I'll take no chances. Love can make people foolish. Aye and blind. Sleep, young Richard."

Much later Richard lay on his back listening to the old woman's snores. He found himself counting knotholes in the ceiling over and over while he lay on the hard floor.

*Years. I'll be gone years. Is it worth it? I could marry her now and take her away. Surely the money from the asylum would be enough for a life. Enough to start a life.* He thought to himself. *A life with Mary whether I was a proper doctor or not. I could... I could take her with me while I studied.* He imagined living with Mary - his perfect Mary without a blemish on her. They would have children and he would be a father to them. He'd watch them grow up and they would be whatever they wanted. They'd want for nothing. And his wife, oh, his wife.

He couldn't tell when he fell asleep but something suddenly woke him up. *The moon is higher so I must've fallen asleep.* He sat up to check on Mary but froze. She wasn't there. The old woman was mumbling to herself in her sleep. Richard searched the house quietly but it was small and there weren't many places for an adult to hide. Turning again, he saw the latch on the door was undone.

"Mary." He whispered. Richard opened the door and stepped out. Clouds hid the stars and he could feel the air getting colder. Mud squelched beneath his boots.

"William. Maybe William came to get her and brought her home. That has to be it." He told himself out loud. There was a shortcut through the large park to the Havers estate. Richard set off through the path. He could hear merry voices from the tavern near his home but the bright light from their lamps faded as he made his way through the park. No children greeted him, nor anyone else. Frogs quieted as he passed the small pond while the occasional night bird called out to its friends. He was nearly through the park when he stopped.

Mary was there. By herself, sitting on the bench she always used. She was staring up at the sky and only wearing her night clothes and the simple sling holding her left arm. Richard stood near a young oak tree trying to make sense of this image in front of him.

Without turning her head, Mary called out. "I know you're there, whoever you are." She paused. "Oh, I know who you are. I know that smell." Now she did look around, directly at Richard. "Who are you?"

Richard stood out from the tree and walked toward Mary. His voice was uncertain. "Mary?"

She smiled for him. The Mary he loved. "Oh, hello Richard. I knew it was you." She turned to face the sky again. "It's beautiful, Richard. Sit with me."

"Mary... you shouldn't be up, Mary. You could... your bandages... What's beautiful?"

"The moon, Richard. Everything. The birds, the trees, the little green monsters in the pond, everything. Life, Richard."

Richard stood next to Mary, looking at her closely. Her eyes were wide and he could see drops of sweat along her forehead. "Mary, I understand. You nearly died. Yes, life is beautiful. I'm glad you're alive - more than you know. But your shoulder..."

A sudden laugh bubbled out of Mary. She threw her head back and laughed harder, shaking from the effort. "I can hear them, Richard. The people at the tavern, people in their homes. I can hear them. Everyone is so alive." She stood, suddenly close to Richard. Her voice dropped to a whisper and she stared up into Richard's eyes. "So alive, Richard." She leaned forward, pressing herself against Richard and kissed him. When his mouth opened in surprise, Mary's tongue found his. Her tongue twisted in his mouth and Richard suddenly couldn't breathe. He could feel her right hand against his back, working up and down. His sudden, shameful erection pressed against them. He tried to push her away but couldn't; she was so strong. Manic. He desired her.

Richard pulled his head back, gasping for breath. "Mary! We shouldn't!"

Mary spun away, laughing. "Oh, Richard! Shouldn't we? If I die tomorrow or if you die tomorrow then what have we had? A few kind words, a walk together but so far apart? The world is alive, Richard, and I can hear it all! The dogs have it right - when a bitch is in heat, she gets mounted. And, Richard." She grabbed his arm, pulling his hand onto her breast. He involuntarily squeezed it, feeling the hard nipple against his palm. She moaned quietly. "I'm in heat."

He jerked his hand back. "You're mad. You're shaking and the fever has overcome you. You're... We need to get you back. Back into bed."

She smiled at him again. "Yes, bed. Take me to bed, Richard. Mount me." She leaned in close to him. Her voice pitched lower, deeper. "I'm your bitch, Richard. Take... ARGH!" She screamed, falling to her knees while clutching her right hand to her chest. "R... Richard... h...h...help me. It hurts so much."

"Mary!" Richard kneeled down, picking her up. He staggered under her weight. "My god, Mary, you're burning up." Richard ran as well as he could with her in his arms. He kicked his door to open it and the widow shrieked in surprise.

"I need help! Mary was out at the park by herself! I woke and found her there and she's been... babbling, incoherent! The fever's worse!"

"Lord help us. Set her down, boy!" Widow Belford closed the door and hurried over to the bed. Richard set Mary down. Blood was seeping through the bandage on her shoulder again.

Mary moaned, twisting on the bed. Sweat soaked through her night clothes, outlining her lithe body. Her large, dark nipples pressed hard against the simple fabric. He could see the full, dark hair between her legs. Despite himself, Richard found himself harder than he'd ever been. Some smell was driving him nearly crazy. *God help me and save Mary.* He thought.

Mary's body shook and suddenly the sling snapped, freeing her left arm. "Hold her down, Richard!" The old woman yelled.

Richard leaned against Mary, trying to position himself around her nearly naked body. Mary closed her arms around him, crushing his body against hers. He found he could barely breathe and was astounded at her strength. *Truly, the manic individual gains incredible strength! Father always said it was true but now I find out!* He felt her cheek against his as Mary rubbed her face against him over and over. Slowly, she relaxed, settling down against the bed. Richard pried himself away, keeping his face averted. At the last, Mary held onto his hand, moaning quietly.

Widow Belford quickly covered Mary's body with a blanket. "Let her hand go, Richard. It's not right. Something here is wrong."

"I... I can't. I'm trying and I can't get my hand free." The old woman and Richard pulled and pried at Mary's little hand but neither of them could make her loose her grip. Finally, Mary murmured in her sleep, "Richard..." and tightened her grip.

Richard screamed in pain as his little finger snapped in Mary's grip. Mary sighed in her sleep and her hand fell away as her breathing steadied.

### CHAPTER 3

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Richard's finger throbbed painfully beneath his bandaged finger. "Will you take turns with me tonight, Widow Belford? She needs someone to watch over her while she sleeps. In the morning I will talk with her to gauge her temperament. I have never seen her in such a state."

The old woman looked slowly from Richard to Mary. "Aye, I will. That finger of yours won't let you sleep, will it? I thought not. I'll sleep first but take care to give me a turn or you'll be worse for it in the morn." She marked a line across a nearby lit candle. "Wake me here."

"I'll give you your turn, miss." He sat back against the hard wooden chair near his small bed to watch Mary sleep. She was freshly bandaged but they left off making a new sling for her arm. She looked far better than she had this morning. He watched her lips move and imagined she was talking in her sleep. *Lips that kissed me so passionately early.* He remembered the feel of her lips against his, the way her tongue moved in her mouth and the feel of her body against his. Images of Mary in her night shirt came unbidden to him. His hand still remembered the soft feel of her breast. His manhood stirred at the recollection. *I'm no better than one of the dogs she raises. Lusting after poor Mary when she's in this state.* He'd seen women in various stages of undress before but always as cadavers or women committed to his father's asylum. Never... never Mary.

He pulled his latest copy of the Medico-Chirurgical Transactions journal to distract himself from his own thoughts. He was reading a study on the mortality in prisons when he caught himself absently stroking his erection through his pants. There was a slight smell in the air - a spicy scent making him flair his nostrils to take in deep breaths of the cloying smell. He slammed the journal closed and stood, pacing the small room. Mary muttered quietly under her breath, her hands moving slightly beneath the blanket. He took care not to watch her too closely.

He was thankful when the marked candle reached its limit. Widow Belford was slow to wake but took her turn readily. Contrary to the pain radiating from his finger, Richard fell into a deep, dreamless sleep quickly.

Richard woke to laughter and bright sunlight streaming through his murky windows. He sat up slowly, wincing at the aches his body had accumulated from sleeping on the hard floor.

Mary jumped up from her chair when she spied Richard sitting up. "Richard! You're awake! Miss Belford was only just telling me about your finger. Is it true? I'm so terribly sorry. Will you forgive me?" She was dressed in a cream color gown a little too tight for her frame. *Borrowed from the widow's niece.* He told himself. He did his best not to stare at her constrained bosom. *The niece is certainly not as well endowed.*

"Pah. Nothing to forgive. Invalids are never responsible for their actions when they're under duress. That is one lesson I'll gladly take from my dear father. My finger will heal. I'm more concerned over your shoulder." He stood.

"Miss Belford changed my bandage earlier. My poor Richard. Here, we've had our morning meal but left plenty for you. Please, sit." Mary reached out, placing her hand on Richard's back to guide him to the nearby table. Richard jerked at the unexpected contact but Mary seemed to take no notice.

"She's a strong one, your Mary." The old woman offered.

Richard "She's not mine, Miss Belford."

Mary patted Richard's hand gently. "Not yet." She said.

Both Widow Belford and Richard turned to stare at Mary but she'd turned away already to busy herself in the small kitchen. She hummed to herself while checking various shelves. An occasional 'tsk' made Richard wince at the imagined dust or food left out too long.

"H... how much do you remember, Mary?" Richard asked.

"Hmm? Oh, I remember the party. You really should have come, Richard. Elizabeth was there. And the other Richard. The stories those two tell! Well, certainly not fit to repeat in pleasant company but they had all of us laughing. I remember seeing everyone off and then walking out to check the kennel but nothing else until I woke this morning. Miss Belford tells me I was attacked but I feel fine. Stiff but fine." She turned to Richard and smiled her bright smile. Richard's heart skipped a few beats and he felt himself grow hard at the memory of her kiss. "You saved me, Richard."

"I... yes. Well. The very fact that you're up and moving is a testament to your own strength, Mary. I cleaned your wound and sewed you up but from a wound like that you should be abed for weeks, at least."

Mary laughed. "We're a hearty breed, we Havers." She reached out to tussle Richard's hair, resting her hand briefly on his neck with a squeeze before pulling it away.

"Mary, what...?" Richard started.

Widow Belford cleared her throat. "I've my own rooms to look to now your girl is on her feet, young Richard. If you'll see me to the door?" Richard stood when she did and led her to the front door. She pulled him through the open door to stand outside with her in the morning sun. Dew sparkled from nearby grass and leaves.

The old woman pulled Richard close to whisper to him. "You watch yourself with her, boy. I was at that girl's birth and I knew her and her parents. That's not the Mary I knew.

She weren't glad to see me in your rooms with you asleep. There was a gleam in her eye that she'd never had before. And her such a gentle child growing up. I don't worry about you being alone with her anymore; I worry about her being alone with you. Good day."

Richard closed turned to find Mary sitting at the small table, smiling in a way he'd never seen before. It wasn't her mischievous smile but rather a smile that said she knew a delightfully wicked secret but wasn't planning on sharing with anyone.

"Will you sit with me, Richard?" She asked. Her smile didn't waver.

"I... Let's go for a constitutional, Mary. If you're able to stand and be about then the fresh air and walk will be good for you."

If anything, her smile widened. "All right, Richard. Let me get my hat."

Properly clothed, Mary walked past Richard to stand outside. The side of her chest brushed Richard's arm and the cloying smell was suddenly stronger. Richard involuntarily took a deep breath and almost leaned closer before catching himself. *Is she doing this on purpose? Surely not. Not Mary.* He wondered.

The air smelled fresh after an early morning rain and the bright sun helped to wipe away the memories from the previous night. They were soon walking together as they had for years, enjoying each other's company and talking of various things. Young children were playing in the park while some adults walked through on errands. Women sat in small groups gossiping and laughing behind their fans.

Mary let out a sudden laugh. Richard looked over at her. "What is it, Mary?"

"It's... oh, nothing, Richard." She glanced at a small knot of women on the other side of the park. Richard noticed her cheeks had turned slightly red. "My mind wandered for a moment and I'm just happy to be alive and well in this beautiful weather." She rubbed his arm gently.

Richard moved away slightly. "Mary, I've been meaning to ask..."

"Oh, Richard! Look! Isn't that the most delightfully colored bird?" She held onto Richard's upper arm with her right hand while pointing with her left.

"I... Where, Mary?"

"Over there, in the bushes. The prettiest little red bird."

Richard shaded his eyes against the sun but could make out little more than shadows and moving things. "No, I can't see anything." *Could it be an effect of her wound?* He wondered. *Bad blood making its way to her brain? Perhaps I should try leeches on the wound.*

"Pity. Oh, there it goes." A small red bird burst from the bushes, flying low to the ground before disappearing into the trees.

"Why, you were right, Mary. Phenomenal." Only then did Richard remember Mary's hand on his arm. He gently pried it loose. "Mary, I've been meaning to ask you about your sudden intimacy. I'm not comfortable with it and certainly not in public. We are not husband and wife."

Mary took her hand back, rubbing it slightly. "I didn't even notice. I'm terribly sorry, Richard. Perhaps... perhaps after what happened I'm instinctually needing to be reassured by human touch? I will try to watch myself, Richard. Please don't be cross with me."

Richard softened. *Of course that was probably it.* "No, Mary, don't worry. I shouldn't be so insensitive."

The walked together a moment more before Mary spied another couple walking their dog along the path. Richard tipped his hat to them. "Good morning."

"Good morning to you both." The other man told him.

"What a handsome male." Mary told them. "An Irish Wolfhound, is it?" She stepped closer but the large male backed away with a growl, head low to the ground and teeth bared.

"Ceasar!" The man exclaimed. He yanked on the chain but the dog continued to growl, its eyes locked onto Mary. "I'm sorry. He's usually a calm dog. I don't even take him hunting."

Mary knelt in front of the dog with her hand out. "It's quite all right. I have some experience with animals, especially dogs." She leaned forward and the dog growled louder.

"I must insist..." The man began.

Mary's lips pulled back slightly and her eyes narrowed. The flesh along Richard's arms broke out into goose pimples and he felt the hairs stir on the back of his neck. The dog's reaction was immediate; its tail drooped and it lay on its stomach before rolling over to show its belly. Richard could hear it whimpering slightly.

Mary smiled. "There's a good boy!" She rubbed the dog's belly vigorously. "I'm afraid I've excited him too much; I believe his bladder has got the best of him." The pungent odor of animal urine hit Richard just as he noticed the animal pissing on itself.

The other woman turned her head. "Oh, John, really. You must do something with that animal."

Mary stood but the animal continued to lay on its back. When the other man yanked on the leash, the dog was pulled onto its side but it refused to stand.

"I wouldn't worry about it." She told them. "Perhaps it smells my own dogs on me. I raise several mastiffs of my own." She offered her hand. "Mary Havers. If you ever need any help in discipline or raising your dog, please visit me and my family's estate. This is... my good friend Richard Miller."

Richard gave his own hand. "A pleasure. Pray excuse us."

They continued along the path together. Richard glanced back at the other couple to see the man yelling at the dog to stand.

"He ought not to treat him so roughly. Sometimes a gentle hand works just as well as a rough hand." Mary hugged Richard's arm to her side. He felt her bosom press against his arm. His erection was immediate and nearly painful. "Let's sit together and enjoy the weather, Richard."

Richard pulled himself away. "Mary, I'm thankful you're feeling better and I sympathize greatly with what has happened but you really must control yourself. People will have the wrong idea."

Anger flashed across her face. "The wrong idea about what? About what, Richard? That you're my betrothed? That I have feelings for you? That I want to feel your touch and be close to you? About what, Richard?" She was shouting near the end.

People nearby suddenly found other things to be interested in. "Mary! I... What is wrong with you today? In all the years I've known you, I've never heard you raise your voice." He could feel his heart racing at the sudden fury in her voice. A small bead of sweat rolled down his temple.

She leaned close to Richard and he could see she was gritting her teeth. "What is wrong with **me**? You've said you will marry me. When? I don't give a ... a damn about your studies or waiting for you to finish, for that matter. Why can't I show affection for you when I have feelings?"

Richard collapsed to his knees. Sweat poured down his face and he couldn't breathe properly. His heart pounded in his ears. Mary was immediately beside him. "Richard! What's wrong, Richard! I'm sorry! I don't know what came over me!"

Richard dug a finger into the neck of his shirt, pulling it away from him. "Can't... can't..." He gasped. He felt strong arms lifting him as if he were child in his parent's arms.

Mary's voice came from a great distances. "Hold on, Richard." He remembered nothing else.



## CHAPTER 4

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Richard woke in his own bed to the chirping of birds and the sun low on the horizon. His whole body felt heavy but comfortable - as if he could sleep forever. He listened to the birds for a while before turning to his side. He froze. Mary was abed with him, under covers. Now that he was more aware of his surroundings he could feel her arm across his chest and the warmth of her body pressed next to him. Her eyes were closed.

Slowly, very slowly, he moved away from her to stand beside the bed. He was still clothed but his shoes were by the door. He remembered the park and everything that happened before he passed out but he did not remember how he came to be here. His heart felt fine now.

"Richard?" Mary's voice was confused behind him. "You're up."

He turned to look at her but immediately turned around again. She was wearing her pale night shirt and sitting up with the blanket around her waist. He could clearly make out her well formed breasts. Neither large, nor small but they fit her body well. Her dark nipples were hard against the cloth.

"For God's sake, Mary. What were you thinking? If someone had found us, I would be shamed for life."

"Ashamed of me, Richard?" Her new anger was back; he could hear it clearly in her voice.

"No. No, ashamed of my actions. It's not honorable for a man to be abed with a woman not his own wife. We are not children anymore, Mary. When we're married..."

"When!" Mary shouted. He heard her take a deep breath. When she continued, her voice was more calm. "I was worried about you. You've said before that the closeness of another person can help so I lay next to you. Let's not fight, Richard. I'm starving and you have no food here. You may turn around now. Your honor will be safe."

Richard realized he hadn't eaten since the morning. "I don't want to fight, either. We've never had a serious argument and I don't want to start. Let me take you to dinner, Mary. As an apology." He turned to face her.

"My dearest Richard, I will forgive anything if you feed me. Oh, yes, my uncle was here earlier."

"Here? How do you know?"

Mary rolled her shoulders. "I could sm... I could see there was a note on the door. It was addressed to you but I read it before joining you in bed." Richard noted she had the decency to blush at the admission. "He was very angry that I wasn't here. The note said

he would return tomorrow and if I was missing again, there would be 'consequences'. His manservant was here with him. I... I suppose he was, anyway. He follows my uncle like a shadow."

"I can walk you home after dinner. I'll change your bandage and then bring you home."

Mary's voice was quiet. She looked down at her feet. "I don't want to go back home."

Richard sighed. "You **have** to, Mary. We'll talk about it after dinner. I don't want you withering away. May I have the honor of escorting you, Miss Havers?" He offered his arm to her.

"I should be delighted, sir." She flashed a shy smile before taking his arm.

After a few steps outside, Richard unhooked his arm. Although he attempted a few conversations, Mary was quiet the entire walk to the tavern.

"It seems Big Tom is busy tonight." Richard remarked. "I've seldom heard so many people at once."

Mary had her eyes closed. She was slowly shaking her head back and forth. "Too loud." She whispered. "Too loud."

Richard patted her arm. "It'll be all right, Mary. I'll be here."

The roar of laughter and drunken threats increased significantly when he opened the door. Large groups of rough men stood and sat at various tables. The serving girl met them as they entered. She had to lean close and yell to be heard over the noise.

"Bad night for dinner; the *Vindictive* is in port. Big Tom already had to throw out ten of her men." A shout for more drink brought her away from them.

"Perhaps a different place for the night, Mary?" Richard asked. "Mary? Are you all right?"

Mary was grinning but it was not a pleasant smile. The small hairs on Richard's neck stirred. She was looking around the room slowly, watching the men argue and fight.

"Mary?" He asked again.

"What? Oh, I'm fine. There's an empty space in the corner. We can sit there. I'll warn you that tonight your purse will be quite empty when I'm done eating."

They made their way to the small empty table, dodging fists, bodies and insults. Several men called out to Mary with varying degrees of offers. Richard was bristling with every

comment but finally took action when a large man grabbed Mary around the waist. She danced out of his grasp but a piece of her gown was torn.

"Have you no decency, sir?!" Richard yelled.

The man stood, laughing. Richard had to look up at him - he was certainly taller than Richard and at least twenty stone. His arms were as big as Richard's leg. Mary stood behind Richard.

"Aye! I ha' more than decency for her!" He grabbed his crotch and pulled. His companions roared around him.

Richard started to take a step but Mary pulled him back. She eyed the bull male in front of her. "Why, sir, I'm surprised you know where to find your manhood. I would have thought one of your mates would have it by now. Perhaps as a trophy." The man's face turned an ugly purple color at the insult. His friends laughed even harder. Several of them cheered Mary on.

After they were seated, Richard studied Mary's face. She was flushed and still grinning at everyone around her. *Her teeth are showing. That's what's different.* "Where did you learn to talk like that, Mary?"

She laughed at him. "Here and there, Richard. Don't you ever listen to people talk around you?"

"Yes, but... But generally it's better company than this."

Mary grabbed his hand and squeezed. He winced at her strength. "You can't be coddled your whole life, Richard. If your back is too straight, it will snap at the smallest thing. Enjoy yourself more."

A seaman stopped by their table to drop a huge cup of beer in front of Mary. His accent was too thick to understand but he seemed to be encouraging Mary. He walked away laughing with his belly shaking.

Richard reached for the drink but Mary's hand slammed down against his own. He gasped at the pain. *Where does she find the strength for this? Was she always this strong?* He wondered.

"I believe that's my beer, Richard. I'm certain Big Tom would be happy to get one for you."

"Mary, I really don't think..."

"No, you often **don't** think. That's your problem, Richard."

Richard watched his gentle Mary pick up the beer, take a gulp and then slam the tankard back down. "Why are you doing this, Mary? Who are you now?"

She glared at him. "Doing what, Richard?"

He was about to answer her when a large fist crashed down through their table. Richard scrambled away from the ruin. The man Mary insulted was standing by their table, swaying slightly. He looked more drunk than he had earlier. Mary stood near the wall, drenched in beer.

"YOU WHORE!" The man yelled. "I'll show you my manhood! I'll shove it up your loose CUNT and watch you squeal from it!"

Richard stared in silent amazement as Mary leaped at the man. She slammed into his chest, sending both of them tumbling along the ground. A ragged cheer went up but Richard couldn't tell who for. When they were finished rolling, Mary was on top of the man. Richard winced when the man swung his fist at Mary's face but Mary ducked and then grabbed the arm. She jerked and Richard heard a bone snap. The man screamed shrilly.

"Mary!" Richard shouted. He tried to make his way to her but other crewmates were blocking his path. "Mary!"

He could barely see through the mass of bodies in front of him. The large man was on his stomach now. Mary was still on top but she had her arms around the man's neck. Her face was next to the man's ear and he could see her mouth moving. When she was done talking to him, she stood. The man rolled onto his back and seemed about to stand again but Mary's foot struck out, smashing the man's crotch. The man wailed, clutching his one good arm to his broken manhood. Richard could make out a dark stain spreading through the man's trousers. He hoped it was piss and not blood.

The crowd parted as Mary walked back to Richard. Several clapped her on the back as she passed and still others shook her hand. She laughed with them. *She's enjoying this. God, what has happened to my Mary?*

"Richard! Did you see that? I don't think he'll be bothering us again tonight. I'll need another beer!" She laughed again. Her face was flushed from the exertion and she was rubbing her left arm over and over.

"You'll have no such thing! I've never seen such barbaric behavior before! I'm taking you home right now, Mary."

"I haven't eaten anything and I'm still sober, Richard. Why on earth would I go home now? Let's find a new table and eat. By an open window or I'll be stripping next!" She was scratching her left arm now, dragging her fingernails against the sleeve of her soaked gown over and over. She turned to find a new table.

"Mary." When she didn't turn to him, Richard grabbed her shoulder and pulled. "Mary!"

"What, Richard?!" She yelled.

"God's sake, Mary. You're bleeding." Richard pointed at her left arm. The sleeve was ripped and tinged with blood.

"I... What..." Sweat stood out against her forehead. "What's happened, Richard?"

"We need to get you outside in the cool air. Come with me." He grabbed her wrist and pulled her to the exit.

She was still scratching her arm when they were outside. "Mary, stop. Stop scratching."

"I... I can't... The itching. It's insane. Richard, I... Ohhhh..." She moaned. "R... Richard... something's wrong. I fear I may do harm to myself. I can't... I can't..."

Richard pulled her to a nearby carriage. A middle aged gentleman was seated in the driver's seat, smoking a pipe.

"Sir! I'd like to hire your carriage."

The man looked at Richard over his pipe. "Can't. Waitin' for someone else."

"I'll pay double. Please, my... my friend is sickly. I need to get her to the asylum. I'll pay triple. Please!"

The driver pondered for a moment before nodding his head. "Mind the inside. They'll take damages out of my skin."

"Thank you. You're a good Christian man. The asylum please, and hurry."

The carriage sped off when they were both inside. Richard held Mary against him, his arms around her upper body. She shook in his embrace. Her skin burned with fever and her eyelids flickered open and closed. She twisted against him, moaning over and over.

"Shhh, Mary. I'll help you soon. Shhhhh..."

Mary hugged Richard's body tightly and he cried out in pain. Breathing was difficult but he forced each breath while he stroked her back. He could do nothing to make her stop moving. He could feel her muscles tightening and relaxing, over and over beneath his hands. He'd sat through many of her fever spells but this was the first time he'd seen her do this.

"Pray with me, Mary." He told her. When she didn't respond, he began the Lord's Prayer and repeated it over and over until the carriage stopped. He paid the driver more than three times the fee and then released him. The walk to the asylum's entrance was difficult and at one point Richard had to drag Mary along. Inside, he found a derelict wheelchair to sit her in. He finally had to use straps to contain her when she wouldn't sit still.

Richard wheeled Mary to the women's section of the asylum. Pale moonlight from the slightly waning moon gave him enough light to see the path. He stopped at the first room he found and wheeled Mary inside. The room was empty except for a molding mattress in the corner. The single window was barred and the door was heavy iron.

"I'm sorry, Mary. This is not the best place but I have more equipment here to help you. I'll get you lying down and then prepare some medicines that sh..."

Mary jerked her arms, snapping the leather straps on the wheelchair. She fell forward out of the chair onto the dirty stone floor.

"Mary...?"

The room spun. Richard found himself on the ground with Mary on top of him. His mind couldn't piece together what happened to cause him to be on the ground. He tried to move but Mary was holding him down. Her shoulders jumped over and over beneath her torn gown. She was rubbing her face against his jaw over and over.

"Mary, get off. I need to help you." He pushed again but stopped when she growled at him. The musky odor from the night before filled his nose and he could feel his erection grow, pressing against his pants. Mary licked his neck slowly, savoring the taste. She rubbed her whole body against his own, up and down. He could feel her breasts rubbing against his chest.

"Rrrrrrichard..." She moaned in his ear.

Richard found himself having a hard time concentrating. The smell coming from Mary filled his brain and all he could think was how much he wanted Mary. *No*. He told himself. *NO!*

He pushed with his entire body, taking Mary by surprise. She landed against the other wall, rolled and came up on her hands and knees. Richard was shocked to see her face. She had drool running down the sides of her mouth and her lips were pulled tight against her teeth. Moonlight shined off of her eyes. Mary watched Richard for a moment and then slowly turned around. Still on her hands and knees, she lowered her upper body and raised her hips. She moaned again. "Rrrrrriichard... please..." Richard stood. He wanted nothing more than to run to her, to join in her animal passions.

He ran out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him. A key was still in the keyhole and Richard turned it just in time for something to slam against the door.

"RRRRRRRRRRRRRRICHAAAAAARD!"

Richard pressed himself against the wall opposite the door. Another slam against the door caused light dust to shower to the ground.

He heard Mary's voice again. She was quiet the but words didn't sound right coming from her mouth. "Rrrrrriichaaaard... preeessshe... preeeeeeeeesshe... don'..."

He called to her through the door. "Mary! I'll... I'll find something to help. Just... just wait until this passes. I'll find something."

"Rrrrichaard... love... you..."

"Oh, God. Mary. I'm so sorry, Mary."

The door shook again. "NOOOOOOOOOOOOUUUUHHHWWWWWLLLLL!"

Richard covered his ears at the noise. When he took his hands away he could hear a cracking noise followed by grunts. He got up and cautiously made his way to the door. A small window set into the door let him see inside. He gasped at the scene.

Mary was completely naked and on her knees with her upper body tucked into a ball. Her eyes were clenched shut and sweat covered her whole body. She was growing. He watched in amazement as her skin moved her body. Flaccid skin grew out from her lower back, only to be filled out with a popping sound. As he watched, a tail grew from her spine. Dark brown hair grew down from her neck to the new appendage.

She screamed again. Her mouth broke and elongated, cracking over and over. Thick hair was sprouting over her entire back now.

Richard pushed himself away to throw up on the floor next to the door.

*Oh, Mary. Christ in Heaven, what's wrong with you?!*

Mary howled, long and loud. Richard sat against the wall, curled up in a ball. His mind raced but nothing made sense. He listened to the noises coming from the cell and couldn't bring himself to look. When she howled again, he ran blindly away from her.

Briefly, he considered going home but at this time of night the journey would be treacherous. *The door will hold her. It will.* He assured himself. *I just need time to think. Time to understand this. To understand what's happened to her.*

He was in the men's common room when he realized how quiet the asylum was at the moment. After Mary's screaming and the horrendous crashing noise the silence was almost unnatural. Richard collapsed into an old chair by a large bay window. The pale

moonlight and his own night-adjusted eyes let him see just how much his hands were shaking from his ordeal. He hugged his hands to his chest and rocked slightly while trying to grasp the situation. He could deal with the madness and the change in personality but the physical changes? Nothing in his studies or observations even came close.

"Mary..." He whispered to himself. "What have you become?"

After several hours of his mind racing, sleep crashed into Richard and he fell into a sleep filled with dark shapes chasing him endlessly.



## CHAPTER 5

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Richard moaned in pain when he awoke. *It seems I shall be making a habit of sleeping on hard floors.* He thought. He pushed the blanket away from his body and stood, knuckling his back. The morning was gray and misty with not a single bird welcoming him to the new day. He was mid-stretch when he realized he had not fallen asleep with a blanket at night. Next to the blanket were shreds of fabric. He bent to look closer but realized almost immediately what they were.

"Mary. Oh, Mary." Tears welled up in the corners of his eyes. He sat holding the fabric to his chest and sobbed until his throat ached. Memories of their childhood flooded him. She was always looking after him, making sure he ate well and dressed well. Her as a child with her elbow bleeding from a cut yet telling Richard he should be careful how he played and never mind her elbow. Memory upon memory of her laughing, teasing, sharing painful secrets and excitement for every one of his accomplishments assaulted him.

When the tears ended so too did his hesitation. He lurched to his feet, nearly running to the woman's section of the asylum.

The metal door to Mary's cell was crumpled in half and partially embedded in the wall opposite her room. The wheelchair existed as small pieces strewn about the room. More pieces of Mary's gown littered the floor, mixed in with shreds of the old mattress. Mary was gone.

Richard surveyed the room slowly as he decided what to do next. *All of this power and she harmed not a hair on my head. I ran from her and she still showed me kindness. Never again will I abandon her. Never again.*

He set off on foot for town. His stomach rumbled ominously as he walked but he shoved thoughts of food aside and, instead, concentrated on determining where Mary might have gone. *Not to her uncle. My home or Widow Belford or with one of her friends. But, perhaps not. What could she tell them?*

It was mid-day by the time Richard arrived in town. He first walked around the park but Mary was nowhere to be found. When he stopped in at The Fighting Cock, Big Tom asked if Mary was all right. The sailor she fought had to be brought to the ship for medical treatment but might very well die; his manhood and pelvis were both crushed. Oddly, the other sailors held no ill will towards either of them. They were all witnesses to the threat and he was not well liked by his crewmates. Richard promised to give Mary Big Tom's regards.

Richard paused in front of the door to his cottage. It was the last place he could think Mary might be. With a nervous hand, he opened the door. Mary's uncle sat on the edge of his bed. His manservant stood behind him with his arms crossed in front of his chest. He cut an imposing figure in his native land's dress and thick, brown beard but he looked

small beside his master. William had his hands clasped in front of him while he stared at Richard.

"Richard. Where is she?" His tone was cold.

Stress gnawed at Richard's stomach. He could almost feel his heart thumping in his chest. "I thought she might be here."

William's nostrils flared as he took in a deep breath with his eyes closed. He smiled slightly. "Ah. I see. You'll come with me. I want to talk to you and I haven't had my mid-day meal yet. Ranjit's pet will have something ready by now."

Richard had no choice but to follow the two men to the Havers estate. The various dogs in their kennels bayed as they entered the grounds. The sound rattled Richard's nerves - too close to Mary's howl from the night before.

The dining hall was large enough to comfortably sit a party of twenty people. William sat at one end of the oval table while motioning for Richard to take the other end. William's Indian manservant clapped loudly twice and a young woman came through a side door carrying a huge silver plate of food. She was tall - as tall as Richard and perhaps a little taller. Her body was well defined with muscles flexing in her thighs and calves at every step. Her bare stomach held not an inch of excess skin. Richard had never seen a woman in such shape. She was also nearly naked - a thin, translucent silk outfit covered her breasts and hip. Richard could plainly see her heavy breasts through the material. He averted his eyes before taking in more detail.

"Come now, Richard! Why look away? Is she not magnificent?" When the woman placed the tray in front of William, he reached a hand around to fondle the woman's ass while another hand reached through her flimsy material to massage a breast. The woman leaned over and kissed William full on the mouth. Richard looked away but couldn't ignore the moaning sounds the woman was making.

"Th... this is indecent, William. What you do in your own house is your own business but I'll not stay to watch you flaunt your excesses."

William laughed. "Away, wench. You heard the **gentleman**." The woman left momentarily before returning with another tray for Richard. He studied the table while she laid out the various dishes. When she was finished, she retired to a large cushion in the corner of the room, behind William. She lay on her side to study Richard. His stomach rumbled at the smell of the food and he barely hesitated before eating.

"Now. On to the subject of our Mary. Again, where is she, Richard?"

"I honestly don't know, William. We were... I brought her to the asylum to treat her wound more carefully. I fell asleep and when I awoke, she had left. Perhaps she had an engagement somewhere?"

William scoffed. "An engagement. Don't play the fool with me, Richard. I can smell her on you. I know what happened last night. The beast took her."

"The...! I... I don't know what you're talking about, William!"

"The beast. The wolf. I can see it in your eyes even if I couldn't smell the bitch's scent on you. Don't look so shocked. After all, I made her what she is. No, don't interrupt me. I've waited too damn long for her to be mine. Her parents were an inconvenience so I killed them. Don't follow them to their deaths, Richard. I know the girl had feelings for you. I know you planned to marry her. But no longer. She's an animal, Richard. She has the passions of an animal, the needs and wants of an animal. Your gentle Mary is gone and you're too pathetic for her to even consider. I alone am what she desires. I alone can handle her strength. She will abase herself before me now that she knows what I am. You... Well, you are nothing more than food to her."

The food in Richard's mouth turned to ashes on his tongue. He swallowed his bite. "You don't know Mary. She wouldn't. She wouldn't take you. You're her uncle!"

William suddenly stood, fury in his eyes. His voice raged. "I am her KING! I am no longer a man and no longer content with human desires. I need a mate that can withstand my attentions and she was the ONE! And, oh, the pleasure I took in making her." His tone changed, his voice mocking Richard. "My poor gentle Mary." Again his voice roared. "GONE! I know what the beast desires. I know how strong it pulls at the soul. She is no longer human, no longer able to resist her base desires. She will kill. Again and again, she will kill. I will direct that fury and we will reign. The monarchy is nothing - a mockery. With Ranjit and Mary beside me, nothing is impossible. I will bring down this government and install myself at its head. We will rule."

Richard was aghast. "You will...?! Are you mad?! This is treasonous talk!"

A growl came from the woman in the corner. Slowly, she slinked to her hands and feet. Richard could hear subtle cracking sounds from her. Small orange and black hairs dotted her pale, naked flesh. William waved his hand at her and the growling subsided. The woman returned to her cushions, licking her arm with a tongue too long for her mouth.

"And what will you do? A mere man? What will any of you do? I am not alone in this endeavor. I have people in positions of power waiting for me to make my move. I waited only for my consort. Now. Where. IS. SHE?!"

Richard shrunk in his chair. The fury from William beat at him physically. Sweat ran freely down his face and body. His breathing was ragged. "I... I really don't... don't know. We were at the asylum and she changed. I... I couldn't see her like that. I ran. She was gone in the morning. Escaped from her cell."

"You ran. Of course you ran. And now I will set the mouse after the wolf. You find her, Richard Miller. You bring her to me tomorrow or I will find you and kill you. If you run, if you hide from me, I will find you. Wherever you are. If you make me wait too long, I will go to your father and devour him. Slowly. Bring her to me, Richard. Fah! Woman, come here and pleasure me. You'll serve until I have Mary back. On your knees."

The woman made her way to William. She crawled under the table and soon Richard could see her head bobbing up and down in front of William's lap. William placed a massive hand on the woman's head.

"Leave, Richard. When next I see you, you'll have Mary with you or you'll be dead. Run away, little mouse."

Richard stood away from the table. The woman made small mewling sounds and he swore her ears were moving on her head. Richard turned and ran.

## CHAPTER 6

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Small children played around him. He barely noticed their exuberant laughter while he sat on the bench. A few pigeons pecked around his feet, looking for crumbs. At the edge of the park, a small gypsy girl watched the other children playing. She clutched an old careworn doll in her hand. One of the buttons used for the eye was hanging by a thread. When the children noticed her, a larger boy picked up a rock and threw it. The rock struck the girl on her shoulder and she cried out before vanishing into the trees.

"Here! What do you think you were doing?!" Richard ran to the children. They looked at him dully, the playfulness he heard earlier completely gone. Distrust and sullenness were reflected in their faces. "Well? What do you have to say for yourselves?"

The larger boy thrust out his chin. "She was jus' one o' them. She shouldn't be here. The town's only for decent folk."

"Decent folk?! Where's the decency in what you did? She's just a little girl!"

Another boy, smaller than the other spoke up. "Not like us. My ma says they steal kids. Mebbe she was one o' them what got stolen and she was lookin' for her ma."

The other children laughed around him. Richard raised his hand to slap the boy but stopped. *What am I doing? I'm not angry at them. God help me, I'm angry at myself. I'm one of them. One of these little children. Afraid of something I don't understand.* He lowered his hand and spoke to the larger boy. "When you're older, I pray you'll understand the folly of your ways. Until then, understand that that little girl was a kinder soul than all of you."

The children stared at him, not understanding what he meant. Richard grabbed his hat from the bench and walked to his solicitor's office a short distance from the park. The sun continued its slow journey while he worked with the men in their office. When he was finished, he collected a few things from his cottage and hired a carriage back to the asylum. The assorted bumps and creaking of the carriage lulled him into a light sleep and he was thankful for it. When he awoke, he was near the asylum and the sun was an orange sliver on the horizon.

Richard paid the driver and bade him wait while he gathered a few things from the asylum. When he opened the doors, he stopped, astonishment plain on his face.

"Hullo, Richard." Mary said. She was sitting on the floor facing the large entrance doors. Her face was ashen, a light gray color with large bags under her eyes. She spoke slowly, as if considering each word. She was wearing a simple gown that fit her badly and no shoes.

"Mary! My God, Mary! I've... I've..." Richard rushed to her, not trusting himself to speak. He embraced Mary tightly, not believing she was truly there. She was solid, more

so than he remembered. His hands could feel individual muscles beneath her clothing. She seemed larger than he remembered.

"Be gentle, Richard. I'm afraid I'm not feeling as strong as before." She laughed but it nearly turned into a cough.

Richard sat back. "Where have you been? I've been terrified since... Mary, what a fool I was! I didn't know. I didn't know what to do. Your uncle found me. He... we talked. He told me what happened. Mary, I'm so sorry. I couldn't believe it was true but I saw it with my own eyes."

"And, Richard? I suspected since yesterday that it was my uncle. After this morning, I was sure. He's looking for me, isn't he? I knew he desired me but I had no idea how black his soul was. I'm cursed, Richard. Cursed like him."

"No! No, you're not! Mary, you had the chance last night. You could have killed me but you didn't. You're not like your uncle. You restrained yourself. He wouldn't have."

Mary sighed. "I fed last night, Richard. I was so hungry. There were animals in the forest and I fed - a deer and countless rabbits."

"You were hungry. You couldn't help yourself, Mary. You..."

"I enjoyed it, Richard! The taste - the hot blood going down my throat as I ate their entrails and meat. The doe was still alive while I feasted on her. It tried to run but I was so fast; it was child's play to catch it. I had my choice of whatever I wanted. I fed and fed until I was sated. My... my fur was sticky with all of the blood. My fingers... I had claws, Richard! For rending flesh. What use are claws so sharp as that for anything other than destruction. For killing?!"

Richard held Mary's hand in his own. Her hand was as large as his now. The skin of her palm felt rough against him. "But not me, Mary. I was there, asleep and you passed me over."

Mary looked away from him. "You. I wanted you, Richard. Not for eating, no." She laughed bitterly. "For rutting. I almost had you while you slept, whether you wanted it or not. I looked down at you sleeping so peacefully and wanted you."

"But that wasn't y..."

"**IT WAS ME, RICHARD!**" Mary pulled her hand back. The yell seemed to exhaust her even more. "It was me. The whole night, it was me. The night you found me in the park - that was me! These urges I have - to kill, to mate, to run - they are me. Even now, I desire you. Even now I want to run through the forest. I was laughing when I chased the doe. I exalted in the feeling of it. Me, Richard. I did."

"Mary..."

"I found the gypsies, Richard. Close to morning, I changed back. They took me in and I've spent the day with them. I met your old crone. She gave me this." Mary reached into the neck of her gown to pull out a simple brass necklace. "She said it would help. It has. But, oh, it pains me. With it she said I would stay myself; the beast couldn't take me. I would be weak but I would be myself. It hurts all the time, Richard. It wants out. It's throwing itself against the wall of my body and it hurts so badly. But, if it allows me to live a normal life, I will suffer for it."

Richard pulled himself closer to Mary to sit directly in front of her. He looked into her eyes while he spoke. "I've told my solicitor to sell the asylum and all of the land. Even my cottage. He's to send me the money when they are sold. Come with me, Mary. I've had plenty of time to myself to think and I've decided; I don't care about my studies. There is enough money from the sale of this old building to keep us well for many years. We'll go and we'll keep going so your uncle can't find us. The things I saw while I was there... it's unnatural. He plans to bring down the monarchy for himself. He demanded I return you to his care. I can't. I can't let you go. I love you, Mary."

Tears streamed down Mary's face. "Oh, Richard. I love you more than you know but, I can't. I can't run. I can barely walk while I'm like this. My love. Oh, how I've loved you. But, I would slow you down. If my uncle desires me then... then I shall have to kill myself. I would die if you were harmed because of me. I cannot help you like this."

Richard leaned forward. Slowly, he brought his lips to hers and held her. He could taste the salt from her tears. His hands found the cold chain of the necklace around the back of her neck. He fumbled at the clasp.

Mary pulled back. "Richard, what...!"

He unhooked the chain and slowly pulled it off. "I trust you, Mary. Whatever you are now, you're still Mary. There's another way." He pulled the amulet away and stood.

Mary's hand flew to her throat. Her face flushed red. "Richard! You don't know what you're doing! What other w... ARGH!"

Richard backed away until he felt the stone wall behind him. He dropped the amulet to the ground. Mary writhed in front of him, her hands going to her head. Richard watched as the knuckles of her fingers popped and grew. Pale slivers of fingernails fell away as thick, black claws slid from the tips of her fingers.

"RICHARD!" Mary yelled. A line of drool flung from her mouth. Her brow furrowed in concentration or pain. "Rrrrrrrrr...!" Tendons stood out on her arms. "Nooooooooo-uhhhhhhhh!" She brought her hands down to the front of her dress and sat back on her knees. She pulled her hands apart, ripping the front of the gown to expose the white

corset underneath. Muscles stood out on her shoulders as they shook. Her shoulder blades bunched out from her back.

Mary held out her hand to Richard. He marveled at the claws, a dull black in the light of the lamps around him. "Rrrrrr... chrrrrd..." He heard more small popping noises and watched as the knuckles shortened slightly while the fingers themselves grew in thickness. Small brown hairs dotted the tops of her knuckles.

"I'm here, Mary. I'm not running. Not again." He reached a trembling hand out to briefly touch her hand. Mary pulled it away from him.

Richard heard the whine of fabric stretching. Mary's corset strained against her torso. Her abdominal muscles clenched, pulling Mary forward into a ball on her knees. She roared and sat back again. Brown hairs grew around the bottom of the corset, disappearing into the ruin of Mary's gown. A spicy scent suddenly flooded the room. Richard involuntarily grabbed his manhood and rubbed, moaning through clenched teeth. Mary tore the rest of her gown from her body. Hairs traced from under her corset, into her under clothes and down her thighs.

"It... hurrrrrts... Rrrrr... chrd... want... want... rrrrr!" The fabric on the bottom of her corset ripped, showing her belly button. Her stomach muscles clenched again. Mary dug her hands into the waistband of her underclothes. Her claws tore through the fabric, exposing the rough tangle of her brown pubic hair. She ripped them off with a shrug. Mary leaned back, spreading her thighs in front of her. Richard saw the thick lips of her vagina before a new growth of brown hair covered them. The brown hair around the pussy lips quickly turned a darker color as her juices mixed in with them. Richard rubbed himself more vigorously, unable to stop or look away. Mary's right hand reached up to her straining corset. Her breasts were flattened in the restricting fabric. They grew and Richard watched the sides and tops of her breasts bulge out. The top of the corset ripped, exposing a line of fur racing up the middle of her body to her throat. Her right breast grew out of the ripped corset slightly before her left. Mary's right hand squeezed her own breast and she leaned her head back. Her left hand reached between her furry thighs. He could see dark black skin on the palms of her skin and under the fingers themselves.

"Rrrrrrrrrrr... ohhhhhhhhhhhhh..." She moaned. Her finger dipped into her vagina. Richard watched her rub her left hand in small circles while her right hand fondled her engorged breast. She tweaked her nipple, pulling the breast up to her mouth. Her tongue lolled out, nearly reaching the nipple. Mary roared again when her face cracked. Her mouth was slightly longer, her teeth spaced farther apart on her gums.

The rip from the bottom of the corset ran up to the middle and the corset fell away from her body. Fur fanned out from the middle of her stomach to wrap around the side of her body. Mary's left hand plunged in and out of her vagina. Richard could see fur grow along her fingers, darkening in the wetness between her legs. Muscles bulged on her



thighs before disappearing beneath a coat of fur. Her feet were elongating, the bones cracking under the strain. Her big toes pulled back with the lengthening feet. Like her fingers, the toenails fell off as the feet thickened. Smaller black claws quickly replaced them, digging into the rough stone floor with a teeth-grinding screech. Her calf muscles strained and she fell forward, catching herself with her hands. The bottoms of her feet turned a dark black color before puffing out slightly.

Mary's heavy breasts swung in front of her. Fur sprouted along their sides, racing up to her neck. Her nipples were covered but soon, even they grew larger, showing through the thick brown hair. Their color turned from a dark brown to nearly pitch black. Mary stretched back on her new feet. Her hands were completely covered beneath the fur. The claws of her hands scratched dust from the stones of the floor. Richard watched the fur continue from her breasts to her shoulders and then down her arms. Her biceps shook, causing her to temporarily dip to the floor. Her bare back was covered in sweat. Small trails ran of sweat down her sides and into the fur of her stomach before dripping slowly to the floor. Fur raced down her thighs to her calves, enveloping them in dark brown hair.

Her mouth continued to grow, pulling her nose flat against the tip. The skin of the nose blackened while taking on a pebbled texture. The line of black from her nose traced down to her lips and they blackened as well. Sharp teeth grew through the empty parts of her gums at the front of her mouth. Her tongue hung inches out of her mouth, shifting as the new teeth grew in place. Bones shifted in her muzzle, pulling the bridge of her nose up before fine brown hairs grew to cover it. Her ears shifted slightly up and back on her head as they grew larger. Fur from her nose grew down her face to the side of her face and up to cover her ears. The tops of her ears grew to a slight point and then twitched slightly. She looked up at Richard with her lips pulled back in a grimace. She tried to crawl to him but her body shook, throwing her chest to the ground.

"Rrrrrroooooooooohhhh..." Mary moaned. The bones along her spine popped. Muscles grew along her spine, pushing the bones of her spine up. Her back spasmed once, twice and a third time as bones were pushed by the new muscles. Her shoulder blades pushed apart as her body widened and lengthened. Fur from her shoulders swept down her back in a wave, growing down her spine before sweeping out to her side. Mary lifted her muzzle, glanced at Richard and slowly turned herself around to look away from him.

Fur was slowly spreading from her crotch to her hips. Richard watched as the skin of Mary's ass disappeared. Mary leaned forward on her hands, lifting her hips up. Her smell was overwhelming. Richard didn't notice when he undid the laces of his pants to let them fall to his ankles. He pushed his small clothes down, freeing his manhood. Its length bobbed in the air, dotted by a small amount of precum. He rubbed himself slowly, watching Mary's change. She looked back at him briefly. Her tongue licked the black skin of her lips in a slow circuit of her mouth. Her thighs spread apart more and she brought a large paw under her and into her vagina, spreading her lips. Her pussy lips had changed to the same black color as the lips of her mouth but inside she was a pink. Clear liquid dripped slowly to the floor.

Mary's hand fell away when her back arched again. A stub of a tail sprouted from the small of her back, extending from her spine. Slowly, the tail grew out, the naked skin looking unusual against the deep brown fur covering the rest of her body. At four feet in length, the tail stopped. Mary held the tail proudly in an arch behind her. The tail bulged as new muscle growth took place. Patches of the tail turned brown and soon, thick brown fur covered the entire thing. The fur continued to grow until the tail was thick and bushy. Mary pushed herself back up on all fours and shook herself.

Slowly, she stood and turned to face Richard. Pale gold eyes regarded him calmly. He tore his gaze away from her crotch to stare at her entire body. She was easily seven feet tall and so much thicker than she had been before. She stood on the tips of her new feet and the claws scratched loudly against the stone floor. The fur of her crotch was thicker and darker than the surrounding fur. Her breasts were massive and he could still easily make out their shape under the fur. Only the very tips of her dark black nipples showed through the fur on her breasts. Her tail moved slightly back and forth as she watched him.

Richard released his manhood. "Together, Mary. That's the other way. Together." His hands worked at the buttons of the vest, trying in his muddled state to work the buttons out of their holes.

Mary stepped forward. She bent to her right knee, bringing her head down to Richard's head. She pushed his hands away from his clothes. She grabbed his hands in her own paws and pushed them against the wall, holding him in place. "Mary, wait." He told her. He struggled but he couldn't move his hands an inch.

Mary brought her head down to Richard's crotch. She looked up at him with her golden eyes and then opened her mouth, letting her long tongue out. She pushed her nose forward into the base of his manhood, rubbing herself on his testicles. Richard moaned at the feeling of her cold, wet nose on his skin. His body jerked when Mary's tongue touched him. She licked slowly, enfolding the length of his manhood with her thick tongue. When her tongue reached his tip, she brought her head down to bring him completely into her muzzle. Richard jerked again and again against her grip until Mary finally released him. He laid his hands on the top of her head, fingers bunched through the thick fur of her neck. His right hand gripped her left ear.

Mary growled and Richard almost spent himself as his cock vibrated in her muzzle. "Ohhhhhh... Mary..." He pulled at the fur on her head. Mary pulled her head up and then down again, slowly and carefully. Her long tongue rubbed and rolled against him. Richard tried again to undo the buttons at his vest but Mary growled again and knocked his hands away. She stood again, grabbed Richard's collar and pulled. His clothing tore down the middle, catching on his arms. He pulled his own arms out of their sleeves and kicked out of his shoes. He was naked except for his socks. When he tried to reach to take them off, Mary pushed him against the wall again. Richard yelled at the sudden pain.

She stared down at him. She topped his head by over a foot in height. Her chestnut brown hair faded into the tuft of fur on her neck, blending in against the rough fur. A lock of her hair fell to cover her left eye. He was transfixed by her form - every inch of her skin was covered by the dark fur but he could make out the contours of her muscles beneath her coat. Her muzzle was closed and he watched her chest rise and fall as she breathed through her nostrils. He couldn't tell whether it was her scent or that he knew it was Mary but he was not scared and, in fact, found her new shape arousing.

She leaned forward again, rubbing the bridge of her muzzle against his face and cheek. Her thick, warm tongue licked the side of his neck again. Richard held his hand against the side of her face, gently urging her to look at him.

"I was wrong, Mary. So wrong. You're beautiful." He rubbed his hand against her, feeling the flesh and fur between his fingers. Mary closed her eyes, pushing her head back against his hand.

Finally, Mary brought her muzzle down to his chest. Her eyes were still closed but she opened her muzzle, displaying her sharp teeth. She rubbed her cold nose against his side, going lower and lower until she was below his ribcage. She opened her mouth wider, black lips pulled back. Slowly, ever slowly she took his side in her mouth. Richard began hyperventilating.

"M... Mary. Oh, God, Mary. W... wait. Just wait for one moment. Let me..." She bit, deep but slow. Her teeth parted his flesh like it wasn't there. Richard screamed, throwing his head back against the wall. He would have fallen but Mary held him up with a large paw. The claws of her hand dug slightly into his chest but the pain was nothing compared to his side. His hands clenched Mary's head as he screamed. Blood ran through her muzzle, quickly covering his side in blood.

When his voice failed him, Mary took her teeth away from Richard's side but kept her mouth clamped to his skin. He could feel her tongue working against the wound. He clung to her head, breathing through his nose over and over. The pain was incredible. Mary's thickly muscled arm wrapped around his back to lower him gently to the ground. Her mouth never left his side. He almost blacked out from the pain but it was subsiding slowly and Mary was stroking his chest over and over. The rough padding of her hand was uncomfortable but the motion was soothing.

Mary pulled her bloody muzzle away. The wound was no longer bleeding. Richard sat up weakly to stare at his side. He could see the rows of teeth marks but there was no blood. Around the marks were small wiry growths of hair. He ran his thumb along the hair. His member was small and flaccid against his thigh. He could still smell the exciting scent from Mary but the sudden blood loss and pain made him forget his arousal.

"How... how long? How long until... ARRGH!" Richard's head jerked back, slamming against the floor. His vision swam and he almost vomited. His spine was on fire and he

couldn't control his back. He curled himself into a ball, clutching his stomach. "M... Maaarrrrrrry... AGH! It hurts!" Mary sat back on her knees, legs apart with her hands on her thighs, watching Richard change.

His back felt like someone was slamming on it with a flaming hammer. He felt like the muscles in his back were trying to tear his body in half. His fingernails dug into his side, scratching over and over. Soon, he drew blood as black claws slid from the last joint of each finger, displacing his fingernails in the process. He scratched deeply, briefly cutting down to muscle before the skin healed over. With a loud 'crack!' he lost feeling and control of his arms and lower body as the bones in his back broke and reformed, farther apart. New skin growth came in turning from pasty white to flesh color in seconds. His spine rode a wave of new muscle down to his hips.

A sickening crunch signaled his hips breaking apart. Skin extended from his lower back in a nub, pushing out as his spine extended. He could feel the tail growing and moving against his will. With another crack, his ribs broke. Richard vomited blood in a pink, frothy mess. His vision blurred momentarily but when he blinked, he could see again. His chest was expanding, pushed to grow larger by the new muscles forming below his skin.

Richard's tongue pushed out of his mouth and three teeth came with it - all molars. He spat two more out with a wad of blood. A lance of pain shot from his mouth, through his nose and into his brain, causing him to close his eyes and press both hands against his face. The skin of his palms scratching against his cheekbones made the pain less so he found himself rubbing his face over and over as thick padding grew on his palms. He couldn't feel his mouth but he heard tiny crunching noises. Curious, he opened his eyes. He could see his nose pushing out in front of his face. The nose was flattening. Soon it would take on the same color and texture of Mary's nose.

Feeling returned to his mouth, bringing with it an insane itching in the gums. New razor sharp teeth broke through the gums to line up along his new muzzle. He ran his long, wide tongue gently over the new teeth. After years of knowing how every tooth in his mouth felt, the new teeth were completely foreign. He tasted blood briefly when he rubbed one of the new teeth too vigorously.

Richard held his right hand up to his new face. The fingers were shortened slightly and they felt a little more stiff than he was used to feeling. When his sense of smell returned suddenly, he was floored and his erection was immediate. *Mary*. He thought. Thick skin grew from the base of his testicles and up over part of his manhood, as if he was growing another layer of foreskin. His member was still growing, widening as it did. Eight inches. Ten. More. A thin webbing of skin ran from his abdomen, attaching itself to his manhood to pull it close to his body. His pubic hair thickened and he noticed hair growing up the new foreskin until it was covered. His old foreskin was pulled back by the new growth, exposing the tip of his length.

The hair around the base of his member grew up to his belly button and then beyond, running in a line up his barrel chest. The fur continued out as Mary's did, fanning off to the sides when it reached his neck. He rubbed the fur of his belly and wondered at the hard muscles beneath his skin. He caught Mary staring at him, staring at the erection tapping him on his belly in time to his heartbeat. He could smell her need. His tail wagged behind him. Fur grew around his crotch and up the length of the tail until it was as shaggy as Mary's own tail.

He turned onto his hands and knees. When the bones of his legs shattered, he only felt the pain for a moment. His feet grew, pulling the heel and big toe back. Claws already tipped the ends of his feet, a dull black counter point to the blond fur growing along his thighs, calves and feet. He tried to stand but the muscles in his legs weren't finished yet. His long tongue lolled out of his mouth and he felt his ears twitch minutely.

Mary was standing in front of him, large, muscled arms beneath her breasts. Richard tried standing again and found he could. Now he was taller than her - less than a foot taller but more muscular. She looked at him from head to toe, her expression impossible to read. But her scent... Richard's nose knew that scent. He growled at her, a rumbling noise in the back of his throat. The animal in him growled as well. *The bitch should be on her knees in front of me. How dare she look at me like that! Challenging me!* His growl grew in volume. Part of him was yelling to wait, to calm down but he couldn't hear it. His lips pulled back, baring his teeth. Mary's arms came away from her chest and she crouched slightly arms apart.

**HOW DARE SHE!** Richard howled, throwing himself at the bitch in front of him. They tumbled together, biting and scratching. Richard's body was not as familiar to him as Mary's was and she had a slight advantage in its use. Unfortunately for her, Richard was noticeably stronger. He grabbed her arm and twisted, turning her to her stomach beneath him. She was growling at him, barking in her own anger. Richard pushed her down while she tried to twist away. He pushed his giant cock against the wetness of her crotch and howled when it missed. He thrust again and again but Mary twisted below him.

*No. No, this isn't right.* Through the anger, the small voice was growing louder. *No. I am not like this.* Richard stopped moving. He still held Mary down in front of him but he was no longer thrusting. Instead, he leaned forward to lick her shoulder. Mary relaxed beneath him, butting her head back against Richard's muzzle. He growled happily and nipped at her neck. Mary turned to look at Richard and then pushed her ass against his crotch. Richard rubbed his paw through her hair and down into the thick tuft of fur around her neck. He pushed her gently and was pleased when Mary went down willingly. Her ass came up and he could see the dark, wet pussy lips through her fur.

He held his member with his awkward, rough hands and guided himself into her. Her lips parted as his head slid in and he growled at the feeling. She was so tight against him. So tight and so hot. He gripped her hip with his right hand and pushed, slamming into her cervix. Mary jerked beneath him, barking at the sudden movement. The thin skin holding his manhood pushed back, allowing him to push into her until his pelvis was

against her. He pulled out slowly, watching her lips pull apart slightly. The skin of his manhood was a slight red color, almost like raw skin. The contrast between the dark fur of her crotch and her black lips was startling. He was a virgin, had only pleased twice in his life - both to great shame. The feeling of his cock inside Mary was indescribable. He pushed slowly in and out, watching his thick cock enter her. Mary's tail was erect against his body. The fur along its length rubbed against his own chest fur.

Mary whined, pushing hard against him and he took the hint. He pulled out again and slammed hard into her. She yelped, digging her claws into the cracks of the floor. Richard leaned forward on his hand and feet. His new body shape made the position natural, even comfortable. Mary's tail pushed away, rubbing against the side of his body. He moved his hip experimentally and found he could bury himself completely in her. Mary was half whining-half moaning below him, her large breasts flattened against the cold floor. Richard moved again. And again. Slamming into her with sudden need. She cried out beneath him and he bit into her neck, tasting blood.

Richard lost himself in the act. They mated like animals. Pressure built in Richard's lower stomach, stronger and stronger until he was grunting with the effort of holding himself back. Their lower bodies were completely soaked from Mary's juices. The wet slapping noises they made only served to make him slam into her harder and harder.

Mary suddenly threw her head back, howling as her body shook, legs barely holding her up. Richard thrust once, twice and then, release. Jets of cum fountained out of him, deep in Mary's cunt. He howled with her, still thrusting as he came. Mary weakly pushed back, eager for his seed. Soon, she was huffing again, close to another orgasm. Richard grabbed her around the waist, hosting her into a standing position with his cock still inside. He gripped her breast with one hand while pressing on the mound of her vagina with the other, careful to keep his claws away. He pushed deep in and up into her over and over until they were both cumming again, his seed running down her leg with Mary's own juices. Valiantly, he tried again but his legs betrayed him and they fell to the ground together.

They lay together, hearts racing with their tongues hanging out as they panted. Mary shook beneath him, tears streaming down her furred face. Richard hugged her tightly. His thick rosy muscles held her tight against his body. He could feel her muscles and fur against him, smaller than he was but larger than any bare knuckled brawler he'd seen. Eventually their breathing slowed and they slept, content in each other's arms.

Richard woke to Mary wiggling beneath him. He knew not how much time had passed but the waning moon was above them, shining down. He marveled at his new eyesight. He could see individual leaves in the trees through the dusty windows. The slightest rustle of a bush outside betrayed small animals as they made their way. Scents of all kind flooded his nose, nearly overwhelming him. He could tell there were variations in them but picking out an individual smell seemed an impossible task at the moment. Except for Mary. Her scent was impossible to mistake no matter how far away she was.

They were both still changed, fur slightly wet with combined juices. He could smell her own natural scent – a mix of odors that told him this was his Mary. Along with those smells was the one he smelled even as a human – her need. The smell of their passions made him hard again and they rutted. He mounted her like his bitch and slammed into her until she cried out from the feeling. He was not a total recluse; he knew that a man and a woman made love with the woman on her back and the man above her but it felt wrong in his current shape. He could feel the muscles inside of her as he slid in and out. She was clamping tightly against him, as if unwilling to let him go.

They howled together again with their orgasms. A cry of joy to the feeling of their strong bodies mating. A cry of release. When they were finished, Richard found he had an excess of energy. Mary yipped and ran away from him, out of the asylum and into the dark of the forest around them. He chased her.

They hunted together that night, stalking prey and feasting on the more meatier ones. He thought he would be repulsed at eating raw meat but, as with mating with Mary, his body knew what to do. The taste of blood on his tongue was intoxicating and he was starving. They both ate well. When Richard sat against a fallen tree, Mary joined him, sitting on his lap. Her body was so warm in the night air. He rested one thick, muscular paw on her lower stomach and another on her thigh. She sighed, leaning back against him and they rubbed their muzzles together.

Richard had never felt so alive in his life. The worries of studying, of social graces, of being a man - were gone. Here, in his arms was everything he needed. *I've been a fool. Mary was right the first night I found her outside. The world is so alive. We are so alive. I can see... I can hear... I can smell... Everything is so sharp.* His hand made a gentle circle against her thigh. The skin on his palm caught and dragged the fur of her leg. She wiggled, content with his attention. They slept again.

## CHAPTER 7

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This time, Richard woke before Mary. He was human again but even in the cold air of the misty morning, he was warm. He nuzzled Mary's neck, biting her gently. She moaned beneath him and then woke.

"Mmmmmm... Richard." Her voice was still thick from sleep.

"Mary. Oh, Mary. What a fool I've been. You tried to tell me but I didn't understand. And now I do. I love you. Whether you marry me or not, I will never leave your side. Marriage... I used to want that so badly with you. Now I know. You were always mine."

"No." She told him. "You were always mine." She took his hand from her thigh, guiding it to her wet lips. He rubbed her and she moaned.

"I can almost see what your uncle meant." He said. "The power of man is nothing against this. But, in my case, I see it differently. You are wedded to me by blood and flesh. Whether a priest marries us or not, it doesn't matter." He dipped a finger into her wetness. She cried out. "I almost took you against your will last night, Mary. I'm sorry for that. The beast..."

"No, Richard. No. You were wrong but you were also right. I am not the Mary you knew before. I am not the docile woman to do as she's told. No longer. Last night you thought you could have me because you wanted to. That is why you were wrong. But you were right that you had to try - that you had to win me to your side. If the beast had won you over, I would have fought until I had nothing left. And then I would have killed you when I could. But, it didn't. You came back to me." She reached her own hand out to grip Richard's thigh. Her strength drove her fingernails through his skin. "But I am your equal, Richard. If you ever forget that, I will make you remember."

Richard growled. He pulled Mary's head back to his mouth, biting her ear, neck and shoulder. His finger plunged freely in and out of the slickness between her thighs. Mary cried out and then turned, pushing Richard to the ground. His manhood was thick and erect behind Mary as she sat astride his hips. Her breasts were large and his hands automatically went to them, pressing them together, digging his fingers into their soft flesh. Mary moaned, sliding herself back. Her pubic hair was bushy and unruly.

"Remember, Richard: you may mount me when you want but I am your equal and I have desires. If I want to fuck you, I will." She slid back further, pressing Richard's cock flat. Mary's hot, wet cunt slid over and around his thickness. She trembled as the head of his cock slid between her pussy lips. As it did, she stopped, leaning forward. Richard had never been one to grow much chest hair before but now his chest was thick with it. Mary gripped the hair tightly and leaned in for a kiss. "And I'll not be denied."



She slid him into her, deep inside. She pulled herself down, thick thigh muscles tensing as she did. The wet lips of her vagina nestled against his testicles. He could feel her uterus touching the tip of his manhood.

"Oooohhh, Richard. You're so deep in me. Can you feel it?" She was breathless. "Can you feel yourself in me?" She moved again, pulling herself forward and then abruptly down, slamming herself onto his cock.

Richard pulled her body down as she fucked him. Her nipples were large and erect, beginning to be sucked. He bent to the nipple on her left breast, taking it into his mouth. Mary moaned, her hand coming up to twine through his hair while the other supported her position. He pressed his face against her soft breast, biting and sucking on the fat nipple. His mouth was restless - biting her neck one moment, taking her nipples into his mouth the next and then kissing her as she moaned into him.

Mary's hips and stomach flexed, pulling Richard out and then in again. Over and over her hips worked against his, legs holding him in place. She turned his head aside to bite at his neck. Her fingers dug under his back to scratch trails down his spine. Richard felt his gums itching, signaling the start of the change. He growled with the feeling. Dark hairs were rising on his arms, muscles growing larger. He pounded his own hips against Mary's, wet slapping noises echoing around the area.

"D... Don't stop. Oh Richard, my love, don't stop don't stop don't.... AHHHHHH!" Mary's legs clenched against him. Her hands, wrapped around his torso, cut deep into his back. The pain and pleasure put Richard over the edge and he screamed as his own orgasm took him. They held each other, panting hard and fast, cheek by cheek. Mary's breasts felt heavy on his chest. Her fat, hard nipples rubbed gently against him.

"I love you, Mary. Now and always."

Mary's laugh was breathless. "You say that after your seed is deep within me. No, don't go. Stay with me like this for a moment longer. I like the feeling of you in me. What do we do, Richard? If my uncle is against us and he's one of... of us, what do we do? Run?"

Richard could feel himself in her - the burning warmth between her legs. He was still mostly hard from their passions. He pulled her on her side, her back to his chest. He draped his arm across her, hand grasping her ample breast.

"When I was searching for you, that was my plan. Run. And keep running until we were old and gray with no meat on our bones to satisfy your monster of an uncle. I had a message sent to my father, warning him of your uncle's plan. He should be safe and I have no family left, no one else to threaten. Before, I would run. Now... Now I am of a different mind. There is a burning in me. A desire to see him before me, defeated and done. I've shied from conflict my whole life. I've always taken the easiest path. Something in me defies that now." Richard held his arm above him. Ridges of muscles lined his flesh from shoulder to wrist and even his hand was larger than before. A thin

rough growth of skin covered the palm of his hand, a pale imitation of the thick black padding he had when the beast was in him.

He placed his hand on her hard stomach. "We fight. I could not run now. It, the beast, wouldn't let me and I find I agree with it."

Mary grasped his hand with her own. "So be it."

They both made their way to the asylum. Richard was astounded at how well he could smell - he could tell his own scent and Mary's scent from the myriad other smells clamoring for his attention. He walked effortlessly; his legs ached to run. They found old clothes left behind by his father and the staff - both wore the men's outfit to account for their new bulk. Richard scooped up the old brass amulet in a cloth bag. Even through the fabric of the bag he could feel it draining him slightly.

"I find myself disappointed to be clothed again, Mary. And moreso to see you in anything other than your naked skin. I'm afraid the taste of freedom I had last night has soured me on the trappings of man. I want nothing more than to feel you beneath me once more."

Mary patted his cheek. "Let us see to my uncle before ourselves. There will be plenty of time to enjoy our ourselves when he is finished."

"No. We'll return the property to the gypsies first and then deal with your uncle. I would like to thank them for their help as well."

Richard took Mary's hand as they walked. She turned to him, a sly grin on her face. "Well, sir, are you certain your honor can survive such a scandal?"

He squeezed her hand. "Honor be damned. I no longer care what anyone else thinks. Let them see us." He kissed her, boldly on the lips. She laughed when they broke apart. "I've missed your laughter, Mary. Now, if only I can remember the way..."

Mary pulled at him slightly. "I..."

Richard hushed her. There was a scent coming from the amulet – scent that was unique and not Mary. He turned in a circle taking deep breaths as he did. There – northwest of them. There was a thread of the same smell leading off to the distance.

"There we are, Mary."

"I knew where it was, Richard. Only now I believe I won't need my mastiffs for tracking." She patted his arm. "You'll make a good hound."

Richard led Mary through fields to find the gypsy camp. There was a road that eventually led to the encampment but he found he enjoyed the open fields more than

dusty roads. Camp dogs howled at them as they approached, cowering behind wagon wheels.

Mary smiled as a group of young men and women approached. Richard glared at the young men when they openly stared at Mary's well endowed form.

"Good morning!" Mary called. "Is Tsura still here? I've brought her amulet back."

A handsome young man stood apart. "My grandmother is here. Shall I tell her the stars have come down from the heavens to the form I see before me to grace us with their beautiful presence?" Like the other men, he stared at her as if appraising her value as a wife. His gaze lingered longest on her chest while he toyed with his oiled mustache.

Richard growled, baring his teeth. He'd never struck anyone in anger and rarely even argued with his friends but he was ready to tear this man's throat out.

Mary laid a hand on his wrist. "No, sir. But you may tell her that her wolf has returned and brought her mate. And if you continue to stare at my chest, I shall break your jaw for payment."

The man's face drained of blood while the group around him stepped away mumbling. Richard heard one older man call the grandson a fool before walking away. The boy ran off, stumbling in his haste to find his grandmother.

Soon the old woman was coming toward them, grandson in tow. The old woman stopped to regard Richard before turning to her grandson. "So?" She told him.

"I... I'm sorry for the way I spoke to you. I meant no disrespect in front of your m... man."

"I forgive you." Mary told him. "Richard?"

Richard's lips drew back, showing his canine teeth. "Richard?" Mary repeated.

"Your mustache is ridiculous." Richard told the man.

"Behave, Richard." Mary took the bag holding the amulet, handing it to the old woman. "I won't need this after all, grandmother. We took a different path."

The old woman nodded her head. "I see that. Yes, I see it. It will be difficult but what can't two such as yourselves handle? If our paths cross again, I hope you'll look kindly on this old woman."

"We shall. Goodbye, Tsura. Thank you for everything."

“Eh. It was nothing. Be safe. Be happy. Have a little of fat, happy babies. Name one of the girls after me and she’ll be lucky.” The old woman smiled and turned away, tugging her grandson after here. “Come, fool. We’re shaving your mustache.”

Richard and Mary left the camp arm-in-arm.

Only a few travelers met them on the road back to town. They took their time, delighting in each other's company and the scenery around them. Only when they reached Mary's family estate did they pause to look at each other.

"I..." Richard began. He found he couldn't finish the sentence.

Mary rubbed his arm. "There will be time, Richard. Let us greet mine uncle."

They found her uncle deep in the woods surrounding the estate. Both of them could smell him soon after entering the gates of the estate - a harsh, sour smell. He was wearing a simple robe of Indian design and seemed not the least surprised to see both of them.

Ranjit stood behind William, holding a leash to which his serving girl was attached. The strange man held Richard's gaze for he was no man at all. Ranjit had the shape of a man but the face of a tiger - short orange, black and white fur lining his face. Long white whiskers dotted the creature's cheeks and deep green eyes regarded both him and Mary. Ranjit's left hand was low to his side, holding the leash while his other held the lapel of his frock coat. His hands were fur lined with sharp, pointed fingernails. The woman stood behind Ranjit wearing the same silk garment from the day before.

"The skin of a man indeed." Richard said, aloud.

"No man." William said. "A Rakshasa and important to my plans. Where I may terrify men into obeying me, Ranjit has talents of a different sort. Mary, come here to my side and I will forgive your ways. I cannot imagine what held you back in killing this man - perhaps he ran when wounded and you were distracted by other prey or..."

"No, uncle. Never once when the beast had me did I consider doing harm to him. This is the man I love. I will marry him."

"Marry... Are you mad? The beast took you and you let him live? Are you flawed in some way? Did the gift passed on to me flounder within you?" Spit flung from William's mouth as his jaw elongated. "Did I squander it on you?!" He bent over double, bones cracking and moving beneath his skin. "RARRRGH!" Fur grew in a wave from his head to his legs as muscles bulged. "The beast take you both! I will fuck her while you watch, Richard! And then I will kill you both! I take no man's seconds! RANJIT!"

The Indian opened his mouth, hissing. Half of his tongue was missing. He clapped his hands together and when he pulled them apart, a sphere of fire hovered between them.

He threw the ball left-handed toward Richard and it shrieked through the air leaving a line of smoke behind. Richard yelled, ducking out of the way. The ball hit a tree behind him, tearing a large chunk of it away before igniting the whole tree in flames.

Seeing the miss, Ranjit tugged the leash holding his woman and hissed a command. She dropped to hands and knees, yowling at Mary and Richard. Short orange, black and white fur dotted her pale skin. She leaped at Richard, arms and legs propelling her along the ground at an enormous speed. As she ran, her tail grew, thick as her own arm to trail behind her. Richard felt the now familiar itch as his own body began its change. *Too slow*. He thought. *Far too slow*. The other woman's breasts bounced up and down freely, tearing the thin fabric as they grew. Her large pink nipples were soon covered by orange fur. She leaped, arms out and teeth bared in her short muzzle. The studded collar around the woman's neck vanished beneath a tuft of fur.

When the woman was inches away from him, Mary slammed into her and they both tumbled to the side, yowling and growling. Richard howled when his own transformation finished. Another ball of fire streaked past, tearing a piece of his left ear. He snarled and charged the creature in front of him. Ranjit had two fingers to his mouth, whispering in some queer tongue when Richard slammed into his chest, knocking him over. Whatever spell was on his lips was lost in the interruption as Ranjit held his hands in front of his face in an ineffectual attempt to ward off attack. Richard swiped at the creature, only to be pushed off at the last possible moment.

William had him in his monstrous grip. William's beast was a huge black creature with red and gold eyes. There was no humanity left in the gaze, only madness and death. Richard pushed away, barely breaking free of William's grasp and slamming into the trunk of a large tree. Richard kicked off, the claws on his hands digging into the packed earth, chunks of the dirt flying behind him as he ran on all fours. William met him with force and they wrestled, snapping at each other's necks.

Behind him, Mary was trying to hold the other woman down but the tigress was lithe, fast and familiar with her own body. The lady tiger was a blur of claws and teeth and, soon, Mary was bleeding from her stomach, arms and legs. Her body was growing heavy with every wound. When Mary finally got an arm around the woman's neck she bit the woman's furry ear off, resulting in a feral scream of pain. Seizing the opportunity, Mary bashed the woman's face against the ground, over and over. At the fifth time, the woman, eye dangling from its socket, twisted, flinging Mary away with her powerful legs.

Mary's tail whipped around her, guiding her flight as well as it could. She slammed into a large oak tree. Leaves fell around her as she jumped to the ground. Her large breasts annoyed her as she ran, first on her legs and then on all fours. The tigress was trying to insert herself into the fight between William and Richard but couldn't find an opening. Mid-stride, Mary grabbed the trailing leash and yanked. The woman's hands grabbed at her throat, short black claws trying to dig into the now overly tight collar. Before she could get a grip, she was airborne. Now she held her hands out to land on all fours, her own long tail lashing out up and behind her. Before she landed, Mary yanked again,

pulling the woman to her. The tigress spun, her tail wrapping around her thick leg as she was dragged along the ground. Mary dropped on her at the last moment, pulling back the woman's muzzle. As fast as she could, she wrapped the leash around the woman's neck, tightening as she did.

The woman's claws scratched at Mary's arms and face but soon she was trying to cut through the chain around her neck. Mary's bicep muscles bulged as she pulled. She pushed herself back, sliding fur against fur along the other woman. She shoved her foot against the woman's shoulder blades and pulled even harder, grunting with effort. The large muscles of the other woman's back strained in protest as her body bent backwards. Suddenly, she heard a loud cracking sound and the other woman's lower body stopped moving. Mary howled in delight and turned the tigress over. The woman's one good eye was rolled back while her long pink tongue lolled to the side. Mary dug her hands into the orange and black fur between the other woman's breasts and pulled, cracking open the woman's ribcage with a fountain of blood. She tore the woman's beating heart out of her chest. A part of her demanded her to eat it but, in her mind, the woman was still human. She tossed the heart aside and turned to Richard.

Richard was doing less well against his adversary. William had Richard pinned to the ground with Richard's arm up behind his back. Mary snarled, launching herself against her uncle. He somehow anticipated her attack and rolled away at the last instant. Richard immediately sat up on knees, panting with the exertion. Three of his teeth were missing but he could feel an itching in his gums that he hoped were new ones growing in. Mary crouched beside him, butting his head with her own. A low growl started in the back of Richard's throat before being picked up by Mary. He pushed forward to his hands and feet, tail erect behind him. They ran, together. William howled loud and long when they crashed into him.

William's massive paw crashed down into Mary's shoulder, crushing through bone and muscle, nearly separating her arm from the shoulder. Mary howled in pain, her good hand clawing curiously in front of her. Richard latched onto William's other arm and he did bite through. Blood and fur flooded his mouth in a torrent. Richard spat the piece of forearm to the side and then jerked back, narrowly avoiding a swipe to the muzzle by William's other arm. Mary was still scrabbling when her paw found William's manhood. Something like a grin pulled the lips of her muzzle back and she yanked, tearing William's thick member away from his body. William's scream was inhuman. He twisted, throwing Richard and Mary away before collapsing in front of them. He was mewling while kicking his legs over and over in the dark earth.

Richard pounced, slamming the breath out of William. Richard's muzzle worked furiously at William's neck, tearing and biting through tendons, muscles and veins. Blood spurted in time to William's heartbeat. His kicking slowed. Still, Richard bit and tore until William's throat was a red ruin. The beast kicked once, twice and then lay still. Richard looked to Mary and found her tapping the claw of her index finger against her breast. Richard finally understood. He bent over William, digging expertly to extract his

heart. He pulled and it came away easily. Like Mary, he threw the heart aside rather than devour it.

Both Mary and Richard were covered in dark brown blood. Mary's long tongue made a slow circuit of her muzzle, clearing away blood, dirt and pieces of flesh. He went to her but then stopped. *Ranjit!* He remembered suddenly. He whirled but the creature was gone. Where Richard had tangled with him lay a dusty, rotted hand. *I got him after all.* He knew he could follow him if he had to but he risked exposing himself to the townsfolk - a risk neither of them was willing to take.

Instead, they collapsed together, simply happy to be alive. Their change back took a long time but it finally did. They buried the bodies of the unnamed woman and her uncle - both still locked in their half animal forms. Ranjit's hand turned to ash when they tried to move it.

The sun hung fat and red on the horizon. They bathed together inside, making love slowly in the hot water and again on the bed when they were finished. Every time felt different - every position wondrous. He could barely remember why he had bothered waiting; it felt natural to physically share their love.

By nightfall they finally rested. Mary's head rested on Richard's shoulder while she made little circles in his chest hair with her fingers.

"Where will we go, Richard? I can't stay here. Not any more. The town feels too small now. I want to stretch my legs and see the world."

Richard considered for a moment. "To India. Or wherever that creature is headed. I feel as if the world is new to me, Mary. Creatures like Ranjit and the woman, ourselves - what else is there? I want to see it. He will show us. We will track him and learn about this strange new world. I have enough money saved to fund our journey until the asylum and cottage are sold and I can offer my services as a traveling surgeon with you as my nurse."

He kissed her forehead gently. "Miss Havers, if you would do me the honor of accompanying me?"

Mary grinned at Richard - a toothy, impish grin. "No, Richard. But Mrs. Miller would follow you anywhere."

## EPILOGUE

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*October 13, 1835*

*Dearest Father,*

*I am writing to you from the HMS Vindictive. I've signed on temporarily as the ship's surgeon (secondary) while on route to India where I will make my own way.*

*I have unexpected news! Mary Havers and I were happily married this past night by the ship's captain. She is accompanying me to India while acting as my nurse. I have shown her a few things useful for the trade and she is a quick study. I love her dearly and I know that, in time, you would love her as your own daughter. Perhaps one day we will visit – if our journey takes us that way.*

*I pray this letter finds its way to you via our mutual friend. I'm sure you received my message earlier and, if so, please pay it no mind. Mary's uncle has decided to find his fortune in other lands far away from here and will no longer be a threat.*

*I have learned quite a lot since we were together last and I expect I shall learn even more before we meet again.*

*Your Loving Son,*

*Richard Miller*