

Beast Within

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A cool breeze swept through the alley rolling a discarded foam cup three feet into the rusted corner of a dumpster and causing Jill to shiver involuntarily as it blew up the short arm of her tee shirt and across her braless breasts. The headlights of a slow-moving van caught her attention and she pressed against the cool brick wall in the hopes the dumpster did its job in concealing her presence. When the danger was gone, she leaned back with a sigh and stood up to peek through the dirty window.

Through years of dirt and grime, Jill could just make out a large open room some thirty or forty feet long and wide with a circular pit in the center surrounded on three sides by several rows of stadium-style seating. It was a packed house from what she could tell – every seat filled by well-dressed men and women that were cheering and clapping so loud now that Jill felt as if she were sitting amongst them. And then she saw the cause of their joy. Below, in the pit, two doors had opened and the biggest, most feral-looking dogs she had ever seen sprang out at each other with snarling, fang-bearing snouts and raking claws.

This is it! Jill thought as the two animals pounced at each other. One – a great big beast with jet black fur and eyes that seemed to glow red in the lighting, slammed into the other – an equally large brown and white, and knocked it off of its feet. The brown righted itself quickly, coming up just in time to bite into the black's front right leg. Jill covered her mouth to surpass the gasp of shock as much as to hold back the sick feeling rising from her belly and into her throat.

“RIP ITS FUCKING THROAT OUT! Someone in the audience shouted. Jill could not tell whom it came from only that it was a man that said it and she felt even sicker knowing there were people out there so deranged, so devoid of feeling as to get some form of pleasure watching two animals killing each other.

“BITE ITS LEG OFF!” A woman screamed sadistically.

Jill wanted to run away, but she had a job to do and her own personal feelings came in a close second to the job. Rumors of a dog fighting ring had been making its way through the streets for nearly a year now and after more than four months of investigating, she had finally stumbled upon this small abandoned warehouse in the most crime-ridden section of the industrial district. On her three prior visits she saw nothing out of the ordinary, but the same could not be said for tonight. When the black dog rolled under the brown and came back to its feet with a huge chunk of flesh in its bloody maw, Jill doubled over and vomited.

When her stomach was empty, Jill dared look back inside. The fight went on. No one had heard her. Taking the cell phone from her pocket, she began snapping pictures in the hopes she got something usable through the crust-covered glass. The black dog bit down on the brown's tail and flipped it over onto its back. His claws tore into the helpless animal's belly and it stopped moving. And then something happened that caused Jill to question her sanity.

The black dog stood over the brown triumphantly – his right front paw on the brown's chest. The black let out a howl and stood up on its hind legs as the blood soaked fur began to recede as his body began to contort in painfully awkward ways. Muscles rippled, flesh tore. Bones grew, snapped and rearranged themselves in a matter of seconds and where there was once a feral dog that easily outweighed her by a hundred pounds stood a naked, perfect specimen of a man that outweighed her by a hundred pounds.

“No fucking way!” Jill gasped, unable to believe what she had just witnessed, yet unable to take her eyes away from the naked man in the pit. “No! No, no, no, no! Just...no!” she said

shaking her head in disbelief as the rest of her lithe body trembled like a leaf in the wind. “They can’t be! There’s no such thing...OH MY GOD!”

Jill’s eyes grew wide as a redheaded woman leapt out of her seat three rows back – her form-fitting black and purple dress ripping to shreds as her body contorted mid-jump into that of a sleek reddish-brown dog that landed on the man in the pit’s chest knocking him back, but not down. Wrapping his hand around the wolves’ throat, the man flung her from the pit and into the crowd and all hell broke loose.

The wolf spun on her heels and made to jump at the man in the pit for a second time, but halted mid-stride as he raised his hand and spoke. “Heel!” he said in a deep, commanding voice that even made Jill stop and take pause. The female wolf snarled viciously, shaking her head side to side as her hindquarters obediently went to the floor. “This fight is over!” the man in the pit said. Turning, his glaring red eyes locked onto Jill’s and his handsome face began to change. “WE HAVE AN INTRUDER!” He growled as his body quickly went through the transformation form man into wolf.

Jill gasped in horror and ran from the alley as quickly as her trembling legs would carry her. Tripping over a raised corner of the concrete sidewalk, she stumbled, fell to her knees and rolled right out into the street. A speeding car narrowly missed her as it swerved – glancing a parked pickup truck before righting itself and screeching to a halt. Jill climbed to her feet as she saw two sets of glowing eyes within the alleyway coming her direction. So scared she peed her pants right there in the middle of the road, she found herself unable to move as the hulking beasts stepped slowly closer.

Climbing to her feet just as the two wolves made the edge of the alleyway, Jill ran, fully expecting to be mauled to death at any second for witnessing things best left to stories and nightmares. She ran passed the car that nearly hit her and rounded the corner onto Seventh Avenue. And then she heard a voice in her head. *I have your scent woman*, a distinctly female voice GROWLED. *There’s nowhere you can hide from us now!* Jill ran harder, pushing herself beyond her limit in the feeble attempt to escape her would-be killers. Daring to look back over her shoulder she saw only parked cars, and silent streets, but that did not give her the least bit of comfort.

The muscles in her legs burning as painful as her lungs, Jill finally stopped running only when it felt as if she were going to die if she took a single step further. Bracing one hand against a maple tree for support, bent over gasping for air, she heard something moving behind her. When a young man walked by, she sighed in relief and took a deep breath to calm her shattered nerves.

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Locking all of the doors and windows, Jill ran upstairs to her bedroom and retrieved the glock from the lockbox in the closet and cowered in the corner waiting for the end to come. Meanwhile, back in the alleyway stood a naked man and woman arguing.

“She must die Simon!” the redheaded woman growled. “She saw what we are and you know damn well what that means!”

“Calm down Melissa, no one is going to kill her and that’s an order!” Simon replied calmly. “When you’re pack leader you can make the rules, but until then you follow mine. Is that understood?”

“So you would break the cardinal rule? No mortal may be permitted to live once they know of our existence. No exceptions.”

“What’s the matter Missy, afraid I’m going to replace you as my alpha bitch?”

“What if she goes to the police? Or worse yet, the media? You saw as well as I did that she had her phone to the window. No doubt she has pictures of the fight, of us changing. That cannot go unpunished.”

“I will take care of it!” Simon snapped. “I’ve made my decision so get dressed and go home.”

“Whatever you say.”

Melissa huffed and walked back into the building, but Simon knew it was far from over. He knew his alpha bitch was right, that he had stepped way over the bounds of his authority, but it had been a long time since he last played with a human and his loins were doing the thinking this night. Taking a long, slow sniff he caught her almost palpable scent of fear and followed – not stopping until he was standing outside of the quaint two-story home on Bradbury. Through siding, insulation and wood; through walls and floors, he could smell her and it was intoxicating.

It would have been nothing for him to enter the house and deal with her as the ancient Lychan bylaws dictated, but that would have been the easy way out. There was another option available to him as pack leader, but if she refused then he would have no other choice but to end her life. Closing the distance between him and the house, he slunk around back and opened the door – the lock no match for his strength.