

Instincts

Ever since I was a young man, I had been possessed by wanderlust, a yearning for adventure, a desire to walk the roads less traveled, to set foot on shores unknown. I had the luck of being born in a rather rich family in the upper crust of London, and thus unlike most youths I actually had the financial opportunities to indulge that passion. It should come as no surprise then, that when I got the chance to catalogue the fauna of a newly discovered island for my master's degree in biology, I went all in. It was mostly a self-financed journey, although the university did offer me a small grant for travel. The rest, including food, guides, and lodging would have to come from my own pocket. Still, what is a few thousand pounds compared to the chance of being the first man to explore uncharted territory, and immortalizing my name in history while at it?

Leaving the foggy streets of London behind was wonderful, but the journey in general was, to put it lightly, not the most pleasant. This mystery island was off the coast of Africa, and while nowadays they have airplanes for impossibly fast travel, I had to perform the journey by train and ship. There is little to remark on that any traveler from England wouldn't know of before I arrived on the Gold Coast weeks after the journey started. I took the train to Bristol, and then joined a trading ship to western Africa. I spent most of my maritime journey sick in my cabin, keeping a journal on everything that happened to keep my mind off the fact that I was floating on the vast ocean, separated from certain death only by the ship's comparably thin hull. Still, despite the frequent vomiting, it wasn't too terrible; the crew were in good spirits, and would occasionally sneak away some of our alcoholic cargo for both themselves and me. They seemed endlessly curious about the purpose of my journey, and figured beer would make me talk. They weren't entirely wrong.

It turns out that news of the island had spread quickly. The natives apparently said it was a cursed place, to which they would not venture. All the better for me, as it meant there would indeed be nobody there to interrupt my studies. I made a mental note to hire some burly protectors at the coast; although the natives were a superstitious lot, they were seldom entirely wrong. If an island was thought cursed, there was typically something unpleasant on it. Poisonous critters, large predators, or the like. Not that I was terribly worried, I told them, although it might've been the alcohol speaking. We have gunpowder; what do animals have? Merely claws and teeth. The sailors guffawed and told me I'd wet my pants if I saw some of the things they had seen: leviathans cresting the waves, bringing ships to their graves. Great krakens, tentacles longer than even our vessel. Mermaids luring sailors to Davy Jones' Locker. As superstitious as natives might've been, it struck me, British sailors were many times worse.

I became fast friends with one sailor in particular. "Pirate" Jack, so nicknamed for wearing an eyepatch, having lost an eye when a wild tiger attacked him, or so he told me. He'd walk around shirtless, his upper body covered in scars of varying sizes, and generally embraced the image of being an actual pirate. As far as I knew, he was just an unusually big and hardy sailor. Regardless, despite his violent tendencies and immense physical strength, he was good-natured enough. He seemed more interested in the island than the other sailors, and volunteered to help me with my task for a suitable pay. I agreed to those terms. Jack was quite happy, not having had much opportunity for adventure. He had to keep working to survive, "unlike you bloody rich pansies", he told me, boasting about how he could survive a month on nothing but crackers and beer. It was in jest, of course, but he wasn't entirely wrong. Not all had the privilege of easy lives like mine. Sometimes I still think back on that life, and wonder.

When we arrived at Cape Coast, Jack and I bid farewell to the merchants as well as the other sailors as they began unloading goods. The heat in that place was sweltering, and the ocean breeze only helped slightly. Jack didn't seem much affected, being one of the hardiest men I have ever known, and undoubtedly used to the scorching sun after years on this route. I wasn't so lucky, and we quickly sought out an inn to hide from the heat; the temperature was similarly ungodly high inside, but at least the sun wasn't burning my skin constantly.

I ordered a beer for my companion, but abstained from alcohol myself. While it would've helped calm my nerves, I was afraid of passing out should I feel any warmer. Even now sweat was pouring down my face, which caught the attention of some other sailors in the establishment.

"Oh ho ho, look at dandy boy over there," one of a group of three bellowed. I tried to ignore them, speaking instead to the bartender about where we might find laborers and guards for hire to join us on our little expedition.

Of course, stupidity never lets itself be ignored, and the three all got up, gathering around me. They stunk of cheap gin and sweat, obviously drunk from the way they swayed, but regardless bigger and stronger than me.

"The island, you say?" one of them spoke. He turned to his friend. "Fancy boy here wants to go to *the cursed island*."

They laughed, and turned back to me. "Yer not going to the bloody island, you twat. No way in hell you'd come back either, if you went." he paused, lowering his voice in an attempt to sound menacing but ending up sounding more like the mumbling drunk that he was. The barkeep backed away, but I saw Jack from the corner of my eye, with an expression like that of a big cat about to pounce.

"So really.." he leaned against the bar. "We'll be doing ye a favour by relieving you of your funds, saving your life even, cuz' you don't want to go to that place, no sir..."

A robbery? In broad daylight? The colonies were worse than I could've imagined. I had arrived prepared, of course, currently clutching a flintlock – old, but reliable – under my coat. It wouldn't do me much good in this situation; even if I managed to shoot one of them, the other two were too close and would just be angrier. On the other hand, I was too proud to just hand over the money either; for as much as I desired adventure, I also wanted to complete this study. Science could not be allowed to be hindered by the ignorant. But that was why I'd hired Jack.

"Let's fucking dance!" shouted Jack, at the top of his lungs like an absolute madman. The sailors turned towards him and he promptly headbutted the closest one with all his might. I heard the crunch of his nose breaking and he slumped down like a sack of potatoes. With their reactions slowed by the booze, the leader had no time to react and still looked surprised as my friend swung for his chin with a powerful right hook. He joined his companion on the floor, groaning in misery.

The third one drew a knife, although he didn't seem ready to use it, his hand shaking even with his body full of liquid courage.

"A fucking knife?" Jack laughed; I couldn't tell if he was actually laughing or faking it. "You wanna know how I lost this bloody eye? A little cunt like yourself pulled a knife on me. Couldn't finish the job, but wished he had afterwards."

That, I was pretty sure was bullshit. Either that, or how he lost his eye depended on whatever was the most intimidating option at the moment. Not that he needed words with his physique; despite being in his 40s, I think, he was a hulking brute of a man, as he had aptly demonstrated with the

other two assailants. The third one seemed to consider his words for several seconds, and then bolted out through the front door as quickly as his legs could manage, suddenly seeming outright sober.

Jack broke in laughter, this time earnestly, sitting down and almost doubling over. "Fuckin' 'fancy boy' they call you and then can't even take a punch... just bang, one right hook, and he's sleeping like a baby, god help me..."

The barkeep seemed equally amused; he insisted that the next round was on the house, that it was about time someone showed those louts what actual fighting was. With only two of us remaining standing, it was an easy gesture to make. With Jack quietly chuckling to himself, occasionally giving the two knocked out men a light kick to see if they were able to get up yet, I engaged the barkeep – who I learned was also the owner of the inn – in conversation.

"So what do they say about this *cursed island*?" I asked.

"Oh, all kinda things. Tall tales of beast-men roaming around, wild orgies with women with the heads of dogs one day, and then fights with similar men the next. It's all bullshit," he said, sounding quite convinced. "If you believed these damn sailors you'd never leave the damn house, it's all monsters and ghosts, all the time, everywhere," he continued. "Either that or you'd drown chasing a mermaid'ta fuck".

He gave us the names of some people who'd probably be up to help us on our journey in exchange for some booze and a handful of coin. Not the kind of help I wanted, exactly, but I figured it was probably the best we were going to find this far from home.

We spent most of the day indoors, both in the inn and at various merchants, but when the sun began to set, I dared to venture outside for a longer time, with Jack in tow to make sure nobody mugged me. The town had begun to grow foggy towards the twilight hours, with the heat of the scorching sun radiating into the air from the ground. It was almost surreal; the air wasn't *cool* by any means, but it wasn't as oppressive as before; instead, the ground, the trees and buildings seemed to emit heat, which quickly formed the fog. And through this earthbound fog, the sun's rays filtered, creating an absolutely magnificent vista of the coast. I wished I were a poet, or perhaps a painter, so I could capture the moment and bring it home with me. Jack, of course, wasn't terribly impressed. "Seen one sunset, seem 'em all," he grunted, taking another swig of beer. To each their own, I suppose.

Still, I was hardly just admiring the sunset. Over the course of the day I had managed to rent a few boats to get us to the island. I had my luggage of medical supplies as well as endless notebooks, references on known species in Africa, and so on. We had gotten enough food and drink for a week or so on the island, although I anticipated that fully cataloguing it would take at least two. Luckily, it wasn't that far off the coast; you could just about see it on the horizon, and it'd be relatively easy for some of us to row back to the mainland and get more supplies.

What I distinctly remember striking me as strange was specifically that the island *was visible*, and yet, none had discovered it before? I had to assume that the locals as well as our colonists had simply neglected to report on it for whatever reason, perhaps considering it unimportant, or otherwise scared by the tales of wolf-men and horrible curses. It had certainly not risen from the ocean overnight, nor was there any way I knew of to hide an entire island from view. Perhaps some type of mirage that typically veiled it unless the observer was close enough? Blind speculation on my part, granted, but it did make me feel uneasy, and so I spent a sizeable chunk of my funding to obtain means of defense for my team and myself. Mostly old-type flintlocks, some machetes to clear

vegetation and fend off smaller predators, but I did also get one of those newer "pepper-box" revolvers. It had a rotating barrel and could fire several shots before needing to reload. Enough to take down anything smaller than a rhino, as long as we saw it coming.

Well, I hoped it would be.

That left us with the last step of our preparation: manpower. We returned to the inn to find its bar full of people – minus the three sailors we'd encountered earlier – moreso than most bars I'd been to in London. It was understandable enough, with the colony still being rather small and only having a few bars to host hundreds of sailors. Most people here only came to trade, living somewhere else, which left the innkeepers' pockets well-lined with newly earned coin.

One by one, we found our men. There were six of them, three British, two Dutch and one Swedish, but they all spoke reasonable enough English. They were bulky men, though none of them matched Jack's massive stature. All the better; I had one man who I could count on as a friend, not just a paid follower, although he *was*, of course, paid rather well. I can't recall their names at the moment, but all of them agreed to our little trip, although the Swedish one said something about there being a dog buried on the island. Some sort of foreign idiom, which I gathered to mean there was something suspicious about it. They would be paid half of their wages now and half when we were done, which they seemed perfectly happy with. I trusted all of them well enough; it wasn't that they respected *me*, but word of Jack brutalizing the three sailors had apparently spread rather quickly, and they respected *him*, and thus by extension also myself.

When we had retreated to our rooms, some sort of strange vanity struck me, and I spent a while looking at myself in the mirror. I was lanky compared to the men who'd be helping me, skinny even, my body not having been forged by years upon years of heavy manual labour. I had all the hallmarks of an intelligent man; high brow, large blue eyes and finely sculpted features. Certainly, I was more attractive than them, but what good would my looks be in the wild? Not much, I suspected. I felt inadequate, somehow, even though my position in life was indubitably better than that of a sailor. Or perhaps it wasn't; after all, if a man is happy with his life, who was I judge the quality of it?

I lied down on the lumpy bed in my room. Somehow, even in the dead of night, the air was suffocating, humid and hot. Understanding that it'd probably never be cool, much less cold, was terrifying, but I was determined to endure it. I tossed the blanket aside; while I preferred sleeping under one, this temperature simply did not allow it. I couldn't understand how the people in the bar part of this place were still drinking, noisy as always; the hangovers brought on by this heat *and* alcohol had to be stuff of legends. I was already feeling dehydrated despite drinking water throughout the day. Opening the window was an option, but there was a considerable risk that my sweat-covered body would attract mosquitoes and the like, which would guarantee that I got no sleep at all. Instead, I stripped down to my underwear, and after half an hour of tossing and turning restlessly, I took that off too.

For a moment, I considered giving myself some relief; it had been a long journey by train and ship, and at this point I was feeling preposterously pent up, my shaft fully erect just from half-erotic thoughts as my body slowly relaxed. I wrapped my fingers around it and gave it a gentle squeeze, sending a jolt of pleasure through my body. The thought of any physical activity was downright ghastly, with how hot I was already feeling, however, and I ended up drifting off into frantic, stressful dreams about our expedition. My mind went through all the possibilities of failure; in my dreams, I failed to find a single animal on the island. My men got slaughtered by natives. The rented boats sunk, taking all our supplies with them. I had to return to London none the wiser and with nothing to show for this massive waste of money. One scenario, I remember more clearly; I was held down by

the strong hands of some sort of animalistic wolf-man pushing my shoulders into the dirt while another drove his arousal into my body, sodomizing me over and over again until he climaxed, breeding me like some bitch, only for another male to take his place. I remember feeling their thick, warm seed running down my body and down my thighs. Probably the sensation of myself sweating in the early hours of morning, filtered through my dreaming mind. One thing was for certain; if I was having dreams this perverse, I had to do something about my arousal. The doctors back home always said that “self-abuse” was bad for you, but worse than dreaming of being mated by wolves? Hardly.

Yet, I never had the time. Morning came, dispelling darkness, dreams, and mists. I hardly felt like I had slept at all. My body ached, my jaw was sore, presumably from grinding my teeth all night, and worst of all, I was feeling even more sexually pent up. None of the experiences in my dreams had apparently led to any sort of release in reality. I got dressed again with a sigh, and had a cold bath drawn. Not *cold* as we Englishmen like to think of it, but at least slightly below body temperature. With the sun just barely having risen, the air was breathable for a few blissful hours, and the fresh, clean water did wonders to revitalize me. That, and it gave me time to plan out my next move. With other things to busy my mind with, the arousal passed for the time being. More or less, I’d have four men set up some kind of base camp near the shoreline, while I, Jack and the remaining two ventured towards the centre of the island. I needed them mainly for the protection and pathfinding, as although they were sailors by profession, they had skills more practical than mine, and were more used to wielding weapons like machetes.

By the time I had dried and dressed myself, the heat had begun building up again. I had Jack go and wake the other men up (we had paid for rooms at the inn so we’d have them close by), while I ventured to the docks, where our boats were awaiting, already loaded by workers. The island seemed to have disappeared from view again, with the horizon covered by fog, but I knew what direction it was in relative to the mainland, so getting there shouldn’t be a problem.

Soon enough, Jack and the other men arrived, most still groggy and complaining about the early wake-up call. Such complaints were quickly silenced when I handed out their first half of the pay; a heavy purse of coin does wonders to, rather paradoxically, lift the spirits of even the grumpiest man.

With their hangovers seemingly dispelled by money, we set off rowing towards the island. More accurately, they were rowing. Four of my workers in one boat, me, Jack and the remaining two in the other. The seas were calm, with only the gentlest of waves, which was good, because after an hour I was somewhat worried over my choice of transport; being in the merchant ship had been unnerving enough, and that had been positively gigantic compared to our current vessels. The mainland faded into the fog as the island appeared from it, surprisingly large. It had been described to me as rather small, but as we drew closer, I knew there’d be no chance of us cataloguing everything on it even with double the allocated time. Still, I hoped we’d at least have long enough to describe all the major species; mammals, reptiles, perhaps birds. Insects and the like would have to be left for whoever came after me.

Although the sun was burning bright in the sky, the dense fog seemed to shield us from the worst of it; it may have been hot and humid, but I was at least spared from suffering a sunstroke. I’d guess it took us about two hours to get to the island, with the men rotating on the rowing duties, two at a time. I participated in it as well, feeling it to be my duty to lead by example, although I didn’t last very long. Still, our hired brawn seemed amused that someone like me was willing to do physical labour when necessary, and I wasn’t laughed at despite my frankly disappointing effort.

Soon enough, we were pulling the boats onto the shore and unloading our supplies. I made sure to be the first to set foot on those sandy shores. I doubted I was the first human to visit it, but I was

almost certainly the first Brit to do so, and definitely the first scholar. It felt like a beach like any other, my feet – I had taken off my shoes to avoid getting them wet – sinking into the wet, warm sand. Everything was quiet, but for the ocean breeze blowing in, rustling the leaves of the trees further inland. It was almost foreboding; I heard no birds, much less any larger animals, as if nature itself was holding her breath, waiting and observing us, trying to determine our intentions with our intrusion on this virgin soil.

And then, a howl pierced the silence, shattering it utterly. It wasn't loud, but the tone would stick with me forever. A long, mournful, baying cry. My compatriots all stopped what they were doing; some drew their guns, Jack among them. But nothing came.

"Do you think it's wolves?" I asked Jack.

"No wolf I've ever heard sounds like that, and I don't see how they'd have gotten here to begin with," he replied. "I'd sooner guess an ape of some kind."

I was inclined to agree. My first instinct had been wolf, but it had sounded more human than a simple canine. Yet not human enough to *be* human; perhaps a baboon or gorilla. All the more reason to secure a camp and be ready to defend it; I doubted that a colony of great apes would appreciate our studies.

I ordered our small camp to be built at the edge of the trees, and my hirelings went to work quickly, likely fuelled as much as by adrenaline as they were by potential earnings. The axes I had brought with the other supplies came to appropriate use; trees were quickly felled, sharpened into poles and dug deep into the earth, in a rough perimeter around where our tents would be. In the middle, we dug a firepit; not only would it help us see when night fell, but it would do wonders keeping wildlife away. Man alone had mastered fire, after all, and all of god's other creations still retreated from it in fear. I never thought about the creations of *man*.

There was no time to waste. Although we had almost a full twelve hours of daylight before us, the island was so big that we'd never get through all of it. I picked out two of the men, a Brit and the Swede, to accompany us into the jungle. If we weren't back in twelve hours, they should attempt to find us, I told the remaining ones, and then our exploration started in earnest.

Entering the jungle felt like being transported into another world. The verdant, lush foliage covered everything, dampening any sounds coming from outside, as well as the wind. This left the jungle even more eerily silent than the beach had been, though here it was to be expected. The air was humid and the heat oppressive, but yet I felt as if the air was downright primordial, full of oxygen to the point I could almost feel the energy coursing through my body with each lungful. The Swede remarked on this too.

"Very fresh air we got here. Although I'd prefer if it was not hot as in a sauna," he chuckled in his slightly awkward dialect. He seemed quite cheerful to be in nature again after years at sea. I suppose the more primitive Nordics had kept a closer connection to Mother Nature than us industrialized nations. I watched him unsheathe his machete, eyeing the many vines hanging from the trees. He took the front with Jack, and I watched the two slash their way through the undergrowth with almost childlike glee punctuated by grunts and growls.

The British man and I remained behind them, with him tying red strings around the occasional tree. It hadn't been my idea – I thought we could easily find our way out by following the trail of destruction – but he insisted on doing it anyway. Must've not been used to forests, I mused. Worried about getting lost because of the trees. That was the cost of having cut down most of the ones on the Isles.

We cut a swathe through the undergrowth. It was difficult, at best, to find anything in this sea of trees; our lines of sight were perhaps a few meters, and the trees absorbed sounds from further away than that. Still, I expected to find *some* of the typical slow jungle fauna, such as snakes or toads. Yet, there was nothing for us to see.

"Maybe nothing lives here?" the Brit suggested, as we were taking a break on the trunk of a fallen tree, sipping water to replenish what we'd lost from the heat and exertion.

"Bah, *something* lives *everywhere*," Jack answered before I could open my mouth. "There are critters all over the north pole, all over the deserts of Sahara," he continued. "If there's nothing here it's because something's killed 'em."

He was right, and it worried me. If there really was no life on the island, that was one of the few possibilities. A plague of some sort, perhaps. I couldn't think of anything else that would eradicate everything reptilian or mammalian.

Granted, saying there was no life was an exaggeration. There was no *significant* life; certainly, biting and stinging insects were swarming us constantly. Mosquitoes, gnats, unfamiliar biting flies; everything wanted their share of our flesh and blood. I didn't have the equipment to study insects. For all I knew they could be the same ones we had in Europe. I wanted to find something substantial, like a big cat, a giant reptile, maybe the missing link between man and beast. Foolish hopes, in retrospect. Childish. And yet, one of them would eventually be fulfilled in the strangest way imaginable.

For all our efforts, we returned to camp sweaty, half-drained of blood by insects, and with nothing to show for them. Even Jack was silent and seemed frustrated with hours of work for nothing but his pay. What we found back at the treeline was much worse.

Our camp laid scattered, tents torn down and the palisade felled. The men were nowhere to be seen, and my first instinct was that they'd left with all the supplies and money, but then we saw that the boats had been scuttled, sunken into the shallow waters of the beach with great holes smashed into their hulls. Both boats were accounted for, so if my hirelings had done this, they'd have had to swim all the way back to the mainland; an unlikely feat even for the hardiest man. That left us with only one explanation, a terrifying one that seemed to dawn on us all simultaneously.

"This place ain't uninhabited," Jack growled, pulling his flintlock out of his belt and scanning the forest for any signs of life. The Brit and the Swede followed suit. That left me to frantically attempt to decide on what we should attempt next; there was no immediate way off the island with our boats destroyed. We couldn't stay at this particular site either, because whoever had ruined the camp and taken the men would likely be back for another go later. At this point, we only had a few hours of sunlight left; *perhaps* enough to repair the boats but doing so would leave us sitting ducks for the attackers. We were drained enough as it was, and with this turn of events we had to conserve what little energy we still had to defend ourselves. I was overcome with a panicked state of paralysis, freezing when I should've been acting, staring emptily at the ocean.

Jack saw this and took command. "We'll find a defensible position, a cliff or cave, and we're going to spend the night without a fire," he stated, in a matter-of-fact tone. "If the fuckers come, we'll take them down one by one."

He started walking along the beach and the rest of us followed, no obvious goal in mind but with our weapons out, should someone be watching us for an opportunity to strike. Jack explained that he was looking for one of three things; a cliff with an unobstructed view of the surrounds, a cave with a

narrow, defensible mouth, or a smaller island not connected to the main one. These would be what he considered defensible positions, where we would either not be found or where we'd have time and opportunity to set up a defence in the dark of night. Four men could easily hold a narrow cave against a hundred, he boasted.

It sounded like he was looking forward to it. I wondered if I'd underestimated his lust for violence. The other two and I were terrified of what was to come, but he spoke of how he was going to enjoy testing the mettle of whatever savages lurked here. They had never seen guns, probably not machetes either, he told us, and he looked forward to introducing them to the future. The man seemed to feel no fear whatsoever. Either that, or he was a damn good actor, seeking to inspire the rest of us to fight, like a pirate captain with his men. I had no doubt that he could murder a dozen people, but what if they were a hundred? A thousand? At some point, even the strongest man would suffer a fatal injury; not even the greatest general was impervious to the lowliest soldier's blade. I placed my hopes in the attackers being only a scouting party, having caught the other four by surprise; even an island of this size couldn't support a tribe much larger than perhaps a hundred, especially if it was devoid of animal life.

Despite the sweltering heat, I found myself shivering. Every time I looked towards the jungle I thought I saw things moving, but they might as well have been but leaves in the breeze.

We eventually found a smaller island, perhaps a dozen meters away from the shore. It was only a few meters wide, but Jack deemed it enough for one night, and so we waded to it.

We still had the remains of our tents, which would at least keep us warm, as well as some blankets that I had accidentally packed into my own rucksack instead of that of the crew. Small mercies, I suppose. We did the only thing we could do; sat down and waited. We talked about this and that to pass time. The Swede had a wife and kids at home, although he hadn't seen them in almost a year. The Brit planned to use the money for his time on the merchant ships to buy a house before he settled down. Both of them were somewhat older than me; I'd estimate around 30, although I didn't dare to ask. That left me the youngest one at 24, as Jack was surely either over 45 or he'd lived the hardest life of any of us with how many wrinkles and scars adorned his body.

The sunlight dimmed as the sun disappeared below the horizon, and although it was very much a beautiful sight to behold, none of us were in the mood to enjoy it. It painted the skies first orange, and then blood red, like a dread omen of what was to follow.

All our preparation didn't do us much good. The darkness shrouded the shadows, Jack said that he saw something move, and all four of us drew our guns. A blood-curdling howl – the same one we'd heard before, but much closer – echoed over the beach, but I couldn't see what made it. I heard a whistling sound, then a thud and a sting as something hit me; a dart? It looked primitive, but it had a metal point, I realized, as I yanked it from a shoulder. I could feel liquid dripping from it, but I couldn't tell if it was my blood or something else before a sudden sense of vertigo overcame me. My legs felt like jelly, refusing to carry my weight, and none of my companions noticed how I fell backwards into the sea before the splash.

For a few moments, everything was peaceful. I floated in almost perfect darkness, in utter silence, the water the same temperature as my body. My body felt sluggish, my mind hazy, and I felt no particular urge to breathe. Somewhere far above me I thought I saw the stars, and I felt as if I could touch them if I could just reach out, but my arms wouldn't obey me. I realized I was going to die like this. A footnote in London's population register, a fragment of text on a cenotaph over an empty grave. It was oddly comforting; no more struggles, and perhaps I'd get to explore beyond the stars,

far beyond where any living man had ever been. The stars, as if sensing my desires, grew closer. Perhaps it was a lightshow created by my suffocating brain, something to distract me from the terror of death. I suppose there were worse ways to go.

Just before I faded entirely, I felt something grab my arm; something warm, soft and slick, like a wet animal. Then, there was only darkness. Death seemed to welcome me with open arms. But of course, I didn't die.

Instead, I woke up somewhere else. I was confused, at first. I thought I'd been on an uninhabited island, but this was clearly some kind of... hospital? White walls surrounded me in a small, nondescript room. I couldn't move. It took my sluggish brain almost a full minute to realize that I was strapped to a gurney, two leather straps across my torso and several more keeping my arms and legs tightly bound to the metal. I thought the place had to be a hospital, and given my splitting headache, maybe I had fallen and struck my head while exploring the island. That had to be it; my companions had taken me back to the mainland, perhaps even back to England if the damage was severe enough, and I was just now recovering enough to communicate.

I had just barely managed to calm my nerves when the door to my room swung open, and a creature straight from the depths of hell stepped through. It had the head of a jaguar where the human one should've been, and its gait was unnatural, like... a cat. I realized it walked on its toes, the feet, too, replaced with the animal equivalent. My brain refused to accept what I was seeing, so unnatural it was, and yet the creature stalked closer to me, its yellow eyes revealing nothing in the way of intent. I considered struggling, briefly, but the fact that I had a humanoid jaguar monstrosity approaching me had convinced me that I was already in hell.

It grunted something, barely articulate. *Awake. Good.* A spotted arm reached out, fearsome black claws on each finger, but instead of ending my life, it took a hold on the gurney and wheeled me out into the corridor outside. A horrid wolf-hybrid was waiting outside, its tongue hanging out, and I saw its tail wag when the jaguar came out with me in tow. This one was more animal than man, like a wolf that had been granted human arms and legs, rather than the jaguar's seemingly human body with bestial limbs and head. What madman ruled this place?

The wolf walked by my side as I was wheeled through the winding corridors. Occasionally, it would reach down and stroke my head or chest, as if wondering what kind of creature I was. Or, I realized, what I would *become*. It was repulsive; I could smell the animalistic musk as it touched me, and I felt myself quiver, struggling in vain to get away from it. It stared at me, with the look of a dog sitting next to its master's table, begging for scraps. Then it spoke.

At first my brain refused to understand the creature. Yet, I couldn't deny that it sounded like English, and soon enough I could make it out. It spoke in a low tone akin to the deep growl of a wolf, but it spoke my language, I was sure of that.

"...taking you to see the master. What fun we will have," I think it said, its toothy maw stretching into a predatory grin that sent chills down my spine.

"What have you done to my friends?" I asked, surprised at how fragile I sounded. Like a scared child.

"Escaped. They saw you fall and started shooting. Not enough of us out scouting," he growled. "Does that ease your fears?"

It was surprisingly open and even sympathetic, at least superficially. By this time, it told me, my friends would already have repaired the boats. He claimed that nobody here wished us any harm, but that they had to protect their territory and their master.

"Who is this master?" I asked.

"A visionary. One of your people. Wants to combine animals and humans into something better..." the wolf-beast answered, sounding softer now, perhaps even dreamy. "Oh..." he sighed. "It's wonderful. I was like you a long time ago, until I came here. He gave me this gift," he paused, stretching his shoulders, looking at his clawed hand as he splayed his fingers.

"Just imagine how wonderful it is to shed all human inhibitions, all our societal standards," he went on, talking about how the wolves could fuck each other without any shame or jealousy, how they'd run wild every night, exploring a whole new world of scents and sounds that humans could only dream of. I had to look away, his depraved grin was too much for me to bear. That only led to my eyes falling on his crotch; he was wearing a loincloth, like some tribal, and it did little to hide his growing erection. Just thinking about that kind of perversion of human nature was turning him on! I realized I had to get out of there, but I couldn't even lift an arm.

We passed several "cells", or "guest rooms" as the wolf called them. In some I saw various animal faces looking out; some far oversized compared to their natural variants. In others yet I saw humans with looks of desperation, undoubtedly waiting for their turns to be turned into these mutated monstrosities; I recognized some of them as part of the four men who had gone missing initially. Yet, I couldn't deny that the work of the "master" was exquisite; while merging man and beast like this horrified me, I couldn't help but be fascinated at how perfectly everything fit together. There was no sign of the crude stitching that medicine used back home; every part blended perfectly into another. The jaguar's head-fur grew sparser where the human parts of his body began; the wolf looked like god had plucked a regular wolf and put him on two legs, and yet he was perfectly balanced. I wondered if any of them were trained animals with human bodies rather than the other way around.

Finally, we reached what seemed like an operating theatre. I could feel my heart skip a beat; fighting to keep myself from screaming for help. It wouldn't do me any good, and I risked having the beasts sedate me again.

In the middle of the room was a table, and next to it, a short, swarthy man with glasses, wearing a black suit and bowtie. He had to be the one responsible for all this. Although he was fully human as far as I could see, he looked the most animalistic of all the creatures I had seen. His eyes were black and emotionless, and he appraised me like a cut of steak.

"Oh yes, this will do nicely. It's so rare to get an *intellectual* to work with..." he muttered.

I begged him to let me go; I had a home to return to, wouldn't say a word about his operations to anyone. I didn't even know where on the island this building was!

He dismissed my concerns. "I can hardly interrupt the march of science for some fop's vainglory," he declared, bombastically. "Besides, the big man you brought with you – the one with the eyepatch – killed Sharpfang's mate," he continued, gesturing towards the wolf. "That simply will not do. We'll have to get him a replacement."

It didn't need to be said; I was to replace her. Or him. I had no idea how degenerate these animals were. Only in my darkest fever dreams could I even think of sex between two males, much less sex between two of these *animals*. I strained against the straps, pulling with all my might, but only

succeeded in making my body sore, the thick leather completely impervious at my attempts of stretching it.

The madman picked up a syringe and began drawing a murky black liquid into it from a small vial from a side table. I had thought of running for it when they transferred me to the operating table, but it was obvious that they planned to put me under first. The wolf stared at me in a way that could only be excitement about having a new “mate” soon. I could only imagine what such relationships were for these beasts.

“At least tell me your name!” I called out, desperately stalling for time. Maybe my friends would appear and save me. I had to cling onto the faintest thread of hope.

“Oh, you may call me Doctor Moreau,” he answered, approaching me the syringe full of that dark drug. “Didn’t you come here to pursue science? Now you’ll be *part of* science, rather than merely a *pursuer* of it! A brush-stroke on my grand painting of a new humanity!”

The wolf huffed. I didn’t dare look at him but from his breathing I thought he had to be pleasuring himself. Like Pavlov’s dogs, salivating at the conditioned stimulus. The jaguar simply stood still, observing me with its feline eyes, making sure I didn’t move.

I felt a sting in my neck as the needle sank in.

“Oh, I almost forgot. Would you like to be male or female?” Moreau asked, his tone unchanged by my struggling and pleading.

“Neither!” I yelled, and that same soothing relaxation started to spread through my body. I had to pick something, or he’d choose for me. “Male! Male!” I shouted. I immediately regretted it, as it’d mean having the male wolf force itself on my male body, an even greater transgression than simply an animal mating with another. I tried to correct myself, but my mouth wouldn’t produce any sounds, every muscle in my body relaxing against my will. Unlike when I had nearly drowned, I couldn’t even hope for death here; I knew everything would be different when I woke up. I’d be like one of those damned beasts. I tried to scream but nothing came out. Like a black satin sheet, the merciful darkness enveloped me again, in quiet, perfect peace.

I was stirred awake by tainted thoughts what seemed like mere seconds later. But time had passed, and irreversible damage had been done. I heard birds for the first time on this island, and their songs sounded alien. Not only the melodies, but the very chirps they consisted of. Every sound seemed fuller, with more nuances. I kept my eyes closed and listened. I didn’t want to see what’d happened to me, what I’d become. I’d just lie here in the warm sunlight and listen to the birds forever. As long as I didn’t move, didn’t think, everything would be alright.

My thoughts felt mostly human, at first. A little fuzzier than normally, perhaps. Thinking was harder, but I *could* think, reason, even. The obvious differences came when I scented something edible on the breeze. I could feel my nose twitch. I knew *exactly* what the smell was; raw meat, most likely from a cow. The wealth of information just from the slightest whiff of it was overwhelming. My head turned on its owner, nose sniffing for the source of it.

As a human, one’s instincts are, at best, urges. Desires to do something, like eat or fuck. A loose tether that feels good to follow. As whatever I was now, it was different. The instinct to eat the meat I could smell – despite it being raw, which should’ve disgusted me but didn’t – was extremely strong, like a chain wrapped tightly around my very soul, pulling me towards it. Resisting was painful, my muscles twitching as my body threatened to move on its own. A hundred different excuses popped

up in my head. It'd feel good to eat, and I needed to eat anyway. The damage was already done, eating something wouldn't change anything. I didn't want to give into it.

And yet, I opened my eyes. I could see a grey muzzle sticking out where my nose should've been. Instead, the nose was a black, canine one, and I found myself licking it. So much for pretending I was still normal. I looked down over my body. Other than dark grey fur covering every inch of my body, I was naked. My legs looked bent, unnaturally so, but I knew they'd carry me just fine. Raising my arm, I discovered it to be the same, fur-clad and with sharp claws on each finger. Even the fingers were stubbier, halfway between human digits and animal toes, but they still responded to my commands, bending and flexing. I have to admit, using my sudden bestial physique felt good, and I stretched, feeling like I hadn't moved in a year. My nakedness only bothered me on some superficial level, although whatever had happened to my manhood was more disconcerting. I saw no shaft at all, but rather a fuzzy sheath into which it had retreated, snug against my groin. I had seen enough dogs to know how that worked, and I resolved to not get aroused enough that I'd be forced to see it.

I stood up. It felt natural enough, even if it wasn't. My strange digitigrade legs kept my balance almost perfectly. Every fibre of my being was pulling towards that delicious smell of meat, and I didn't have it in me to resist. I'd save my energy to resist the more perverse urges I was sure I'd feel.

Sure enough, there was a good slab of meat not too far from me, placed on a flat rock in the little clearing I had awakened in. I approached it slowly and deliberately, feeling my fur bristling with anticipation. There'd be no point in placing out traps now, though, since they'd already turned me into one of them.

I crouched down, sniffed it, and found myself dropping. I hadn't even realized that my new maw was open, but it made sense given the heat. I was panting. Too hungry to think more of it, I grabbed the meat with my strange pawhands, holding it down while I tore off a piece of it with my teeth. It was amazing how sharp my fangs were, easily piercing through the flesh. The taste was oddly muted; not the feast I thought it'd be, though the smell alone would've made me enjoy it already. So there I was, momentarily forgetting my humanity, intellect subsumed by the first primal need of many. I tore off piece after piece, shaking my head like some feral dog to make it easier. It was exciting, somehow; I got my face messy with blood and my own saliva and didn't think more of it. I'd just lick myself clean afterwards. Besides, it was a good kind of messy.

I heard someone chuckle behind me. I let out a snarl and jumped to my feet, turning around. Embarrassing at best, as if I was actually a wolf trying to defend my meal from an intruder. I faced another grey anthropomorphic wolf, and recognized him as the same one I'd met in the master-Doctor Moreau's strange facility. I think his name was Sharpfang. He looked at me with canine curiosity, smiling. I felt my large wolverine ears pull back, almost flattening against my head. I didn't understand what was happening. I felt an odd warmth in my chest, a soft pressure down my spine that startled me as my tail – which I hadn't even realized I had – dipped between my legs.

Sharpfang smirked. "Good boy, it seems you know your place," he spoke, softly now. His tone was completely different than it had been when I was still a human. I tried to reply but ended up producing only a strangled whine. It was hard to remember what I even had wanted to say.

"We'll have to give you a name. Hm..." he said. I wanted to protest but couldn't. Those instincts restricted me as surely as the leather straps had. He looked me over. I suddenly noticed that my tail was wagging, automatically. I suppose I was happy, though I didn't know why. I *did* feel it, too. Something about Sharpfang's attention made me feel content. "How about Wagtail? We don't all need to have fierce names like mine."

We? I had only seen my alpha- Sharpfang so far. Yes, of course the wolves would have a pack of some sort. That's how they'd attacked us earlier. I'd have to meet them eventually. As horrible as it is to admit, I realized I couldn't survive as a lone wolf. That, and I trusted Sharpfang for some reason. Trusted him to protect and take care of me. It was getting harder and harder to distinguish between my "real" thoughts and those of the wolf, but at that point, the thought didn't make me terribly nervous anymore. My old self was slipping away, lost in a sea of scents and instincts.

He just had such a powerful presence, lanky yet muscular, with those piercing amber eyes. I could smell his masculinity as he stepped closer, and it made my head swim and my nose twitch. I wanted to bury my new muzzle in his neck or under his tail and just lose myself in his embrace. But that'd be the end of me as a human being. I grit my teeth and focused on breathing through my mouth. Yet, he had me spellbound. I couldn't move as he reached out, running his fingers through my scruffy fur, across my chest and down my side, sending shivers of pleasure down my spine. My tail was wagging again.

He pulled me tightly against himself and I felt his comforting warmth even through my thick pelt. It was a possessive, sensual hug of sorts. He nosed at my neck and my head instinctively tilted back, baring my throat for the grey wolf. He very gently nibbled at me, seemingly knowing exactly what to do, and I let out a happy whine that felt like it came from someone else. I leaned into his beautiful body, my knees weak with an emotion I couldn't quite identify. I felt his firm shaft press against my thigh, and he rolled his hips suggestively, grinding that hardness into my fur with only a thin loincloth separating us.

"That's it, good boy," he murmured right into my ear. "You don't need to think, just let your alpha take care of you."

I desperately wanted to obey him. I wanted to throw myself on my knees before the beautiful wolf and worship, to surrender my body and mind for his caretaking. I felt like I was regressing to base animal instincts, but it felt good, the desire to submit burning in my chest in the best conceivable way. I knew I'd be happy, wouldn't have to worry about anything ever again, free from the burden of choices and consequences. I'd just be a happy, tail-wagging wolf with a content smile on my face.

I guess that was Moreau's plan. Reduce humanity to beasts that'd be easily controlled by their pack leaders, who'd then in turn be controlled by him. No more conflict, no more chaos.

The worst thing was how good giving in felt. As I sunk to my knees in front of Sharpfang, it felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt almost dizzy, a lightheaded feeling akin to the rush of nicotine. As I gave into my instincts, letting them guide me as they wished, intense joy resonated throughout my body and I whined happily, pushing my muzzle into my alpha's crotch. I sniffed deeply, taking in his musky scent. It was so masculine, so lupine, spicy yet utterly wonderful to my changed senses. I could feel his warm hardness against my nose, and some sort of perverse pride at the fact that I was the cause of it. Proud that my master found me attractive. I had never felt any sort of desire for other males, but there I was, pleadingly looking up towards the wolf's eyes, seeking conformation that I was allowed to remove the cloth. He nodded, scratching me behind my ear, and I pushed my head into his paw for a moment.

Of course, I needed to actually behold him. All of him. With trembling hands, I undid the simple knot above his tail, which kept the loincloth in place. It fell down by his feet, and I was left eye to eye with his erection. His sheath was bunched up behind the slightest hint of a knot, his shaft fully outside, almost fully hard. He glistened in the sunlight and I watched as precum pearled at the tip of that dark red bestial cock. I tried touching it but Sharpfang took my hand and placed it on his thigh. I was to

please him like an obedient dog, with my mouth. I think I blushed underneath my grey fur. Of *course* a silly submissive wolf like myself would have to use his mouth.

I nosed at his length and watched in fascination as it twitched. I'd never been this close to anyone's cock before, much less a lupine one. But I couldn't deny that I wanted it. My tongue darted out as if it had a mind of its own, licking up his length and scooping up some of the precum at the tip. He tasted tangy, almost like copper, adding to the plethora of new erotic scents and tastes I was experiencing for the first time. I didn't really know what I was doing, but the wolf was grumbling with appreciation, so I opened my maw and wrapped my canine lips around his shaft best I could, slowly sliding my muzzle over it. I couldn't really *suck* on him like a human, but I let my tongue play along the underside, sliding my head back and forth, getting maybe five of his eight inches in my eager mouth. Then suddenly, something wet splashed against the back of my throat. I coughed and pulled off his length, afraid that I'd done something bad.

"Oh, don't worry, it's just a sign of pleasure. We wolves produce a fair bit more precum than average... a little treat for my good pup" my alpha explained, his tongue hanging out in a quiet huffing pant afterwards. He pointed at his maleness, now at full mast and wet with my saliva.

I went back to work, teasing him best I could with my tongue and lips to coax out more of his tangy offering. I felt his paws wander around the back of my head, stroking, caressing, and scratching here and there as he began to gently roll his hips, penetrating my submissive muzzle with a growing eagerness. Soon enough, he twitched again, more of his watery precum splattering across my tongue, covering me with his flavour. It was subtle; just a slight bitterness that tasted like pure male arousal, and I could feel my own neglected cock stiffen up even more. I was already hanging out from my sheath, I knew that much, but I was afraid of looking down still. I knew I'd look just like my beautiful master, but I was nervous about fully letting go of my humanity. I'd rather let the dominant wolf guide me through it. Of course, there was no way I was stopping now, with his hot preseed pooling in my mouth between thirsty gulps.

He was huffing louder, now. The twitches came more frequently. Suddenly, he held my head, telling me to stop, and I did. With a husky voice, he told me to worship his balls too, feel how full of his cum they were. I followed his guidance and nosed at his heavy sack and the orbs within, gently taking one into my muzzle and then the other, getting the short fur wet with my drool. His hypnotizing dominant musk was strongest there, and together with the weight of his balls on my tongue and lips it excited me. I wondered if I was good enough to be properly bred, to have the wolf on my back, spurting his seed into me in thick ropes. Just like in that dream...

I didn't have to wait for long. Sharpfang turned me around gave me a shove, forcing me onto my hands and knees. There was no doubt of what that position meant, and my tail rose automatically, baring my rear for his appraisal.

"Oh, you're such a good boy, yes you are," the wolf cooed, rough paws spreading and kneading my cheeks. "My good boy."

Hearing him say that made my heart skip a beat, a warm fuzziness flooding my mind and body, and my alpha noticed my reaction, continuing to praise me. "Just look at that happy smile of yours. That's right, just let those thoughts of submission and pleasure replace all other thoughts, all you need to do is let me mate with you as often as I want to and take my seed..."

He circled me once, and then dropped down onto all fours as well, looking fierce and feral, almost more so than he did on two legs. I braced myself for what was to come, and in a heartbeat he leapt

on top of me, his heavy warm body resting on mine. I felt his length poking between my plump cheeks, rubbing here, grinding there, slowly nudging into my vulnerable hole, seeking to claim me utterly.

I whined for him to fuck me, to breed me, to claim me as his, and he did. With one mighty thrust he spread me wide open, sinking deep into my body, lubricated only by his frequent spurts of precum. It stung, but I was determined to pleasure him no matter how much it hurt. "Just relax, pup... that's it, deep breaths, you'll adjust..."

His cock was burning hot inside my silken depths, soothing the pain. At first, I couldn't stop clenching at the unfamiliar sensation of something pushing into my body, but Sharpfang kept licking and nibbling at my neck, gradually easing his girthy cock deeper, grunting about how good my body felt, how tight I was, and soon enough I was relaxing, feeling the pain subside as my tailhole became slicker and slicker with his juices, making the sensations less rough and overwhelming and more... something I'd never felt before.

For a moment, he was still. Then, he began properly mating me, his hips rocking back and forth, that stiff wolfcock sliding into me, then out, then in again, each time setting off sparks of pleasure deep inside me, setting alight nerves I didn't even know I had, and before too long I was panting, huffing in sync with the wolf's thrusts claiming my utterly submissive body. Oh, if it felt this good to let my mate breed me, why would I ever want anything else? I pushed back against him, trying to get him deeper into me.

While many of the sensations were new, some of them I knew, like the exquisite pressure building up in my loins as my balls rose, tightening against my body, threatening to unleash a mind-shattering release. There was a strange sense of finality, as if letting myself climax would seal my fate as the wolf's mate. Of course, it was symbolic at best; I already belonged to him. Spilling my own seed even as he filled my body with his was just a visible, undeniable mark of my full submission and his mastery of me.

I felt his knot, slamming against my already stretched hole with every thrust, as they grew more and more insistent, more feral, faster. I had no idea how I'd be able to accept something that thick and hard into me, but my body knew, instinctively relaxing and pushing back against him. My eyes went wide as it suddenly slipped into me; it felt like someone stuffing a melon in there, but much hotter. I heard my alpha panting on top of me as shivered as he grabbed my neck with his jaws, his arms holding onto my chest tightly, possessively, as he teetered on the edge of climax.

It was me who gave in first. I had tried to hold my orgasm back until my alpha came, but I couldn't; the constant hammering of the hidden pleasure spots inside me had gotten me there, and the sudden stretching sensation of his knot was the last drop. I whined with pleasure, my back arching and my ring clenching down on my master's shaft as my release came like a crashing wave, the last bit of my thick human cum spilling uselessly onto the ground, followed by the runnier lupine seed that'd be all that filled my testicles from now on. I couldn't hold it, whining wasn't enough, and I let out a howl of ecstasy, every part of my body burning with pleasure. I was only dimly aware of Sharpfang's climax as I felt a wet warmth fill me in spurts as he joined me, howling triumphantly as he filled me, his cock throbbing inside me, seeding me. Making me his. I forced myself to remain standing, letting him finish filling me, before we both fell on our sides in the grass.

He remained tied to me for what felt like a hazy eternity of pleasure., but eventually his knot shrank enough that his cock could come free. We didn't speak; everything we could've said was already

understood. I knew I probably looked entirely mindless, lost in that ocean of happiness, a vacuous canine smile on my muzzle and a satisfied grin on his.

He didn't give me any opportunity to clean up before we met the rest of the pack, not too far from where he had mounted me. No doubt had they heard our wild mating, but I didn't feel ashamed like I should've. Instead, I only felt pride over having been claimed and seeing no reason to hide it. I felt his cum leaking from my well-bred hole even as we walked around the others, and I knew they could both see and smell it, a thought that only inspired happiness in me. That one day will forever remain in my memory, but eventually it had to come to an end, me and my wonderful dominant mate curling up together on our own.

The next morning, I awoke to frantic chaos all around me. The first pack member I managed to stop from running around erratically told me that the humans had landed in a *ship*, armed to the teeth, led by a one-eyed giant of a man. They had already begun hunting down all of Moreau's hybrids. Apparently, Jack had managed to convince the residents of the mainland that something had to be done. I wasn't surprised, but it was too late for me. All I wanted was to live with my alpha and the rest of the pack. But there was no way any of us would survive a confrontation, not with the people out for blood. The entirety of Moreau's operation would quickly fall, and we would go down with it.

At that point, thinking and reasoning was outright painful, and I felt my head begin to ache as I tried to plan an escape. Likely there wouldn't be many guards at the ship, with everyone searching through the forest. I found Sharpfang barking orders to the rest and told him of my idea, and I felt that strange sense of pride again as his eyes lit up, that alluring predatory grin forming on his muzzle. I was rewarded with a pat on the head, with a promise of more to come. It was all I really wanted.

Indeed, my hunch had been correct; Sharpfang led the pack to the beach. We presumed that the humans would be searching through the forest, so we walked along the shoreline where we wouldn't be seen. The ship was guarded by a skeleton crew of perhaps five men, and with twenty-five or so of us surprising them, they weren't much of a challenge. Even a small ship was rather difficult to sail, but given that some of us had been sailors before this – still were, I suppose – we managed to get it moving. Towards new lands, somewhere new where we could be ourselves.

While it's obvious that Moreau's plans for changing the world didn't work, with us being the only survivors we knew of, perhaps it was a relief that they were foiled. It meant we'd eventually die out. Then again, at least our lives until then would be pleasant. Full of feverish mating until the end of our days, never able to truly overcome the animal instincts for any longer periods of time. Some of us regressed to the point that they failed to speak any human language and ended up running on all fours best they could. I never fell that far, perhaps because I had my wonderful alpha helping to keep me stable.

Of course, there was a cost. I'd never again pursue academia, make much in the way of choices, or anything. But what is free will worth in comparison to instinctual contentedness? Sometimes, I still write in a quiet fit of rebellion, terrified of what I've become, when my human mind briefly resurfaces, though the words don't flow like they used to. But some stories must be written down as memories fade. This is mine. Now, I return to my alpha so that he can fuck me back into blissful, animalistic ignorance.