

HAM

BY K.V.L.F.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

MARY – Tcho-Tcho woman in her early-20s. Cheerful and optimistic – but not without practicality. Completely hairless. Wears a stylish, natural-looking wig.

HAMILTON – Human man in his early-20s. Socially awkward but a relatively nice guy. Skinny.

JACK – Tcho-Tcho man in his mid-40s. Mary's father. A man who doesn't waste words. Blunt as a hammer. Completely hairless. Goes au natural, hair-wise.

GRACE – Tcho-Tcho woman in her mid-40s. Mary's mother. Careful, diplomatic – wants what she thinks will make her family happiest. Completely hairless. Wears a wig that is very obviously a wig.

Time: Late 1980s/Early 1990s

Setting: Jack and Grace's home. Specifically the living room/dining and kitchen area. Indicated by whatever props and furniture are at hand.

Notes: A clarification - Tcho-Tchos are a race that originally come out of the Cthulhu Mythos of H.P. Lovecraft and his contemporaries. They are human in appearance save for being hairless, and a need to eat human flesh. In the Mythos work they are part of another plane known as the Dreamlands, with connections to Indochina.

(Lights up. JACK is foraging. GRACE enters the living room, putting on her wig and fussing with things that are already neat, not looking at JACK.)

GRACE

Don't you dare.

JACK

What Grace?

GRACE

I know what you're up to. Put it back. Mary will be home any minute with her Ham.

JACK

She's late, and I'm hungry. One sandwich won't hurt.

GRACE

No snacking before dinner, Jack. You'll get fat, and you make a mess of my kitchen.

JACK

It's our kitchen. I can make a mess.

GRACE

Not when I have to clean it up... Now get in here. She'll be here soon.

JACK

This Ham better be worth the wait.

(JACK noisily puts everything back. As he goes into the living room, there's a knock at the door. GRACE bustles over to answer it. MARY and HAMILTON enter. GRACE hugs MARY.)

GRACE

Oh, baby, welcome home!

MARY

Hey Mom. I missed you too. (*She extracts herself from the hug.*) Hi Dad.

JACK

Hello, dear. You're late.

MARY

Sorry. Traffic was terrible.

GRACE

Well, at least you're here now. Just in time for dinner. (*Turns on HAMILTON, sweetly as possible.*) And you must be Ham.

HAMILTON

Ah, yes, Ma'am. Hamilton. It's a pleasure to meet you both. Mary raves about her folks all the time.

(HAMILTON extends his free hand towards MARY and JACK. Neither take it and stare at him. HAMILTON drops it and fidgets. MARY frowns for a second, then carries on.)

MARY

It's so good to be home... And don't worry about dinner. I've got it taken care of.

GRACE

(*Conspiratorially.*)

I'm sure you do... Dear, won't you stay and chat with Ham while Mary and I take care of the refreshments?

JACK

Alright.

(MARY and GRACE go to the kitchen. HAMILTON sets the food down, and the men sit. JACK studies HAMILTON like a side of meat. HAMILTON shifts nervously under his stare. He tries to start conversations, with strained silences between them while the women speak.)

HAMILTON

So... It really is nice to meet you, sir. Mary has told me so many stories about you.

JACK

Yes?

HAMILTON

Don't worry. All your secrets are safe with me.

JACK

(*Smirking.*)

I'm sure they will be.

(MARY takes off her wig as GRACE fixes drinks.)

MARY

(Excited, nervous.)

We need to talk.

GRACE

(Disapproving.)

Put that back on. That boy is still up.

MARY

The wig isn't important, Mama. Listen—

GRACE

God, he's so skinny. When you called him Ham, I expected you to bring home a porker.

HAMILTON

So... You're a butcher?

MARY

Don't talk about him like that, Mama. He's a really sweet guy.

JACK

Mortician.

GRACE

I hope so. There's hardly enough of him to make a stew, so he better have a nice taste to make up for it.

HAMILTON

Oh... Mary made it sound like... Uh, well, that... That's a pretty different career.

MARY

Mama—

JACK

You would be surprised...

(GRACE retrieves a bottle, fishing out two pills.)

GRACE

Not like that one young man your father brought home from work, the football player who crashed his truck. Now he was a nice, meaty boy. Already marinated and tenderized, too.

*(GRACE prepares to drop pills into the fourth glass.
MARY blocks her.)*

MARY

Mother!

HAMILTON

So... Mary tell you anything about us?

GRACE

What? He was delicious. I can't reminisce?

JACK

No.

MARY

Not that. You aren't drugging him.

HAMILTON

Oh.

GRACE

I know how you feel, but this is hardly enough to affect his taste, and it'll make a real mess if he struggles while your father puts him down—

HAMILTON

Well, we go to school together. We met at an anthropology class a couple of semesters ago. Covered a wide range of people all over the world.

MARY

No! I didn't bring Hamilton here to be dinner.

JACK

Mary's always loved other cultures.

GRACE

Then why in the world did you bring him here?

HAMILTON

She really does. It's something we share, but we really found our common ground talking about Tcho-Tchos.

MARY

He's my boyfriend. I wanted him to meet my family.

JACK

(Tenses.)

How is that?

GRACE

But he's not one of us. He's human.

HAMILTON

I've always found Tcho-Tchos fascinating since I was little.

MARY

I don't care. He's a sweet, funny guy, and I really care about him.

HAMILTON

They're one of the few entities that can cross between the Dreamlands and our reality with ease, and their need to eat human flesh...

GRACE

We are Tcho-Tcho. We eat humans. We do not date them.

HAMILTON

The debates on why they do it are riveting, although the more graphic ones make me nauseous.

MARY

Do you know how horrible that sounds? Race shouldn't be a factor when I pick my boyfriends.

JACK

Nauseous?

GRACE

It does when one of the people involved is lower on the food chain.

HAMILTON

I'm a vegetarian, and just thinking about blood and violence makes me kind of sick.

MARY

Mother, please don't talk about him that way.

JACK

(Repulsed.)

Vegetarian.

GRACE

It's the truth. We may not hunt humans like our ancestors did, but we still need to survive. It's a sad fact of life... And you shouldn't play with your food.

HAMILTON

Yeah... But anyway, Mary and I spend hours talking about Tcho-Tcho biology, history, culture. She's pretty much an expert. But you already know that, don't you?

JACK

(Coldly.)

I'm aware.

(JACK's tone gives HAMILTON pause, and sits stiffly in his seat, sweating.)

MARY

He's not food. He's family.

GRACE

What do you mean, family?

HAMILTON

Mary really is an amazing woman.

MARY

He proposed to me last week.

JACK

She's a good girl.

GRACE

And...?

HAMILTON

I know. She's smart, lovely, one of the nicest girls I've met. I don't know how I got so lucky.

MARY

I said yes.

JACK

(Chuckles.)

How indeed.

HAMILTON

I mean, the whole hairless thing took some time to get used to, but still, she's gorgeous. I mean, it really kind of gives her this exotic look.

(JACK glares at HAMILTON, who realizes that may be a poor topic of discussion.)

GRACE

Oh... Oh my... How long have you known this boy?

MARY

Almost two years, Mama. You haven't been paying any attention to me when we talk.

GRACE

Oh, I'm sure I'd remember if you told me something like this...

(GRACE takes off her wig and rubs her hand across her scalp. Mary waits, stiff, for an answer.

HAMILTON tries to break the silence with JACK.)

HAMILTON

(Fumbling.)

So... This is a really nice place you have. Walls look sturdy. Thick, too. And not too many neighbors. I'll bet it's really peaceful and quiet, huh?

JACK

Yes. You could make as much noise as you wanted and no one would hear.

HAMILTON

Oh, yeah. I bet that's great for parties or playing music.

JACK

Amongst other things.

HAMILTON

Right... *(Raises his voice.)* Mary! You and your mom need any help?

MARY

(Raised voice.)

No, Ham! We're good. Won't be but a little bit longer! *(Lowers her voice again for her mother.)* I love him, Mama. I'm so happy with him. Please, be happy for me.

GRACE

I don't know what to say. How will you do this? You can't keep what you are a secret.

MARY

I'm not. He knows.

GRACE

He knows?

MARY

Yes. He's known since we started dating.

GRACE

You told him?

MARY

He was starting to figure it out on his own. He's kind of obsessed with everything Tcho-Tcho.

GRACE

Well... That's... Odd.

MARY

It's a bit weird, yeah... But please, Mama. Give him a chance.

(HAMILTON starts at the sound of JACK's loudly rumbling stomach.)

HAMILTON

You okay, sir?

GRACE

Oh... Alright. But if he breaks your heart...

JACK

Hungry. Haven't really eaten since this morning.

MARY

I know, I know. He's on the menu.

HAMILTON

Oh... I'm sorry... You should just get something, then. Don't let me stop you.

GRACE

Well, come on, then. Let's get this stuff out there before your dad eats him anyway... Thank god I can keep this wig off. Itches like hell.

JACK

Thank you. That's very considerate of you, Ham.

MARY

I'd put it back on. Dinner isn't here yet.

(MARY and GRACE put their own wig back on and then get the drinks. At the same time, JACK gets up. He pulls out a pocket knife, snaps it open and reaches for HAMILTON's head. He yanks it back by the hair. The young man struggles and curses as JACK prepares to slit his throat. MARY and GRACE rush in.)

HAMILTON

Mary! Mary, help!

MARY

Daddy, don't do it!

GRACE

Not on the carpet, you don't. Let the boy go. He's Mary's fiancé.

JACK

What? *(He pauses, looking between HAMILTON and MARY.)* This true?

MARY & HAMILTON

Yes!

JACK

Oh. *(He releases HAMILTON and puts the knife away. Pats HAMILTON on the back.)* Sorry about that. My mistake.

HAMILTON

It's... It's alright. Mary told me there might be a mix up.

MARY

Sorry, sweetie. I thought I'd be through talking to Mom faster than that.

HAMILTON

It's fine, really... Everything's cool, then?

MARY

Everything's wonderful.

GRACE

Somewhat.

(MARY hugs HAMILTON and gives him a firm kiss. JACK and GRACE shift, uncomfortable.)

JACK

So what is for dinner? I'm starving.

(HAMILTON lets MARY go, flustered. MARY giggles.)

MARY

Oh, we ordered Chinese on the way in. Noodles for Ham, delivery guy for us. Should be here any minute now.

GRACE

That sounds just lovely.

JACK

Great. Wasn't looking forward to eating Ham. Vegetarians... (*Cringes.*) No fat, no flavor. No offence, son.

HAMILTON

None taken.

(There's a knock at the door. Lights go to black.)

END OF PLAY