

# *The Changing Times*



By wwwolf

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## Chapter 12: The Good Doctor Gone Bad

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“So I should suppose that climbing up this tree never really protected me in the first place?” Emma's voice was sweet as she leaned back against Johnathan's chest. It had taken her some time to come to accept Johnathan's new body, but there was no denying she seemed to enjoy the fur coat.

Johnathan laughed, though the sound came out as more of a amused purr. “You climbed a tree to try and escape a cat? You would have done better to swim across the river. I never would have followed you *then*.”

Reaching up, she touched a hand tentatively to his dry nose, giggling as he pulled away and sneezed.

“But you wouldn't have been able to follow me even when you *were* human.”

Johnathan rolled his eyes. “Be that as it may, we'd best be getting back to the manor. I wouldn't want Manson to be returning before me. If you screamed and ran I'd hate to see what he would do upon seeing my face.”

Emma slipped from his arms and descended gracefully to the forest floor. Johnathan followed a moment later with a clean leap from the branches.

“I won't worry too much about that,” Emma said. “He was the one to go find me. Wouldn't tell father what was going on, simply said you were ill and would appreciate my visit.”

Johnathan's sighed. “That sounds like him. He'll never go against my orders but that won't prevent him from finding a way to get what he wants. He wanted me out of my room and knew I couldn't say no to you.”

Walking back to the manor, hand in hand, the journey was far more pleasant than the chase out had been. Johnathan could almost ignore the knife she still held loosely in her hand.

Back among the flowers and hedges, they past the place that only days ago they had tumbled to the ground in each others arms.

Emma glanced that way as Johnathan did.

“I suppose it will be some time before we're able to do that again,” Johnathan's voice caught in his throat. “I'm... sorry for forcing myself upon you. I know it must not be pleasant to be forced to kiss these lips.”

Emma tightened her hold on his hand. “Your lips are no less nimble than they were last time, dearest.” She laughed. “It’s exotic, like kissing a Frenchman.” She paused for a moment before laughing. “Well, perhaps not, but the comparison is apt enough. If you’re the same man inside that body then I’ll be happy to kiss you every night for the rest of my life.”

Johnathan cringed. “Let’s hope it doesn’t come to that.”

They were only a few feet shy of the still open kitchen door when Emma spoke again. “There is one question that bothers me, Johnathan,” she ran her free hand up the fur of his arm, “You seem to have given up on the civility of clothing. Has the beast come so far with you that you don’t even have such a basic dignity?” Her words were harsh, but the twinkle in her eye suggested she was hardly as hard put upon by his nakedness as she suggested.

Johnathan turned his eyes skyward as if asking the lord for strength.

“My dear, I’d be happy to slip into my finest of evening suits for you if not for the problem that none of them fit me. If you haven’t noticed, I seem to have changed no small measure. Not to mention I’ve gained the better part of a dozen stone.”

She cocked her head to the side, looking at him again. “Truly? I know you have a new face and coat, but do the changes go that deep?”

Stepping into the kitchen, Johnathan took a seat on a nearby stool, lifting one leg from the ground.

“It’s not as horrid as it was yesterday, but my legs have changed, see? They bend backwards like a cat’s. Even my hands have changed.” Resting one of his paws in Emma’s outstretched palms, Johnathan flexed his fingers to expose long, sharp claws.

She gasped quietly. He doubted she’d realized how close she was to such weapons when she’d held his hand. “All so soon?” Her voice was breathless, “How would science explain it? Shouldn’t such grand changes on such short a scale be impossible?”

Johnathan simply shrugged. “A week ago I would have told you that such changes on *any* scale would be within the power of God alone. And I can assure you it is not God who has done this to me.”

Before Johnathan knew it he could feel Emma’s soft hands working thought the fur on his back. A rough purr escaped his lips.

“What are you doing, dearest?” He had to fight to keep his wits about him, the sensation of her strong fingers kneading the stiff muscles of his shoulders nearly sent him to sleep.

“If you expect my help in solving this problem then I expect you to be upfront with me. I need to know what has happened to you.” Her voice suddenly became coy, “I have been teaching at the school house these last years. I know what a lion is. I’ve even taught children about the anatomy of cats. Now I need to learn about *you*.”

A small whisper in the back of his mind insisted that Johnathan should be frightfully embarrassed at having Emma so close to him, having her hands move up and down his body. They weren’t even married yet, and even if they were such shouldn’t be happening with this monster of a body.

But yet... the longer her gentle touch lingered the harder it was to fight. This wasn’t *him* after all. There was no reason to be embarrassed. What he was doing now was little different than showing off a science experiment... right?

Johnathan started awake soon after.

“Gah!” Sitting bolt upright, he almost moved fast enough to collide into Emma who knelt above him.

A slight eep escaped her lips as she teetered over, falling into his lap.

Wrapping his arms around her securely now that he knew they were still alone, Johnathan rubbed the crown of his head into her shoulder.

"Dearest," his voice was little more than a lazy purr, "You'll need to stop me from doing that again. What if someone had happened upon us?"

She let out a annoyed huff and tried to struggle free. Johnathan held her tight until she laughed and fell back into his embrace.

"You're a cat. What did you expect to happen. Sleeping is what cats *do*. And you needn't worry about anyone arriving. Manson arranged for us to have the whole day to ourselves. He's likely as not still going toe to toe with my father over the expenses he's incurred."

Johnathan let out a soft chuckle. "Serves him right. Manson will make sure he regrets his indulgences. I'm sure the old fellow feels every pence that comes from my bank account like it was being pulled from own flesh."

They sat there for a few more moments in silence, simply watching the motes hover in the golden afternoon light that slanted in through the windows and enjoying each others company.

"You said it was the Doctor Robenson that did this to you?" Emma asked.

Johnathan mumbled a groggy affirmative as he slowly began drifting off to sleep. Now that he had Emma back in his life it was so much easier to simply let the world pass him by.

"Then we'd best get you back to him in order to change you back."

Johnathan opened his eyes, suddenly awake at the possibility of becoming human again.

"I can't." He shook his head, causing his mane to sway, "I tried yesterday. There are too many people around town for me to sneak through the trees."

Emma let out a long suffering sigh. "But you didn't try it with my help."

"What do you mean?" Johnathan let her go as she struggled to her feet.

"Come." Reaching out, she gave Johnathan her hand. She didn't flinch at all when he took it in his large paw.

Out at the stable, Johnathan could see that Emma had been busy while he'd slept. Not only was Ginny out and bridled, but the old wagon had been pulled from storage. Johnathan hadn't seen that thing in the daylight for months. The only time it tended to see use was when Manson had something large to bring to the manor.

"What have you gotten into your head this time, darling?" Johnathan kept his voice soft, coming to a stop a good dozen strides from Ginny. Even at this distance the horse was stamping the ground and rocking her head back and forth in agitation.

"Finding you a way to get through town." She smiled and pulled Johnathan forward a step.

Johnathan resisted, digging his claws into the soft dirt. "I can't," he whispered, "Ginny will bolt as soon as I come close."

Emma turned to him and smiled. "I thought as much." Pointing, she indicated a pile of sheets that lay in the back of the wagon. "I brought out your bedsheets to see how she'd react to them." Emma's smile grew wider. "She didn't much care for them at first, but there must still be enough of your own scent left that she could find it."

Johnathan sucked in a deep breath and took a step forward, making sure to keep well in Ginny's sight.

He got all of fifteen feet from her before she reared back on her hind legs and nearly upset the cart.

"Whoa, whoa, girl!" Emma rushed forward to calm her as Johnathan fell back.

Returning to sit on the stone steps of the manor, Johnathan's chest felt like it was carved from

ice. Ginny had turned him away.

He'd known the horse since she was a foal, all but raised her with his own hand. And she'd panicked when she'd sighted his new form.

A shadow fell over Johnathan's face a short time later. Emma stood before him. She wasn't smiling quite so widely now.

"Everything alright?" Johnathan asked as she once again helped him to his feet. The simple act of her offering her hand to him was enough to at least lift some of the pain from his heart.

"Don't worry, Johnathan," she once again led him forward, "We'll make this work. Ginny just doesn't know what to make of you. She can accept your scent, just not your sight."

Walking in a wide circle, they approached Ginny from behind this time, keeping the cart between them. Johnathan could just see the blinders that now sat over Ginny's eyes.

"There you are, girl, nothing to worry about. It's just Johnathan and I here. No one to worry about," Emma softly said to the horse and they approached.

Johnathan decided it was most prudent to stay silent.

Stepping up to the cart, Johnathan was able to leap in without a thought. A moment later Emma reached over the side to pull his bedsheets up to cover him. It almost looked like she was tucking him into bed, only she made sure to cover over his head.

A few moments later she spoke to Ginny and gently flicked the reins. They were off for Hammerwood and Doctor Robenson.

Only now did Johnathan discover just how bumpy the back of a cart could be. Especially when the only padding was his own pelt.

Johnathan could tell well enough when they'd hit the outskirts of town. The sound of people talking and working was plain to anyone with ears. Even through the fabric of the sheets he could hear the voices crystal clear.

One he was not expecting to hear was that of Thomas.

"Good day, lass." His voice was so close Johnathan was sure he could reach out and touch the man. "I heard you popped out to the Pennyfare estate. I hope Johnathan isn't feeling so rough as we've been hearing."

Johnathan hard to suppress a growl. Did *everyone* know that something was wrong with him? Where was the privacy in this town?

Emma's voice was crystal clear when she replied, and a touch louder than it strictly needed to be. "It's not as bad as all that, Thomas. My beloved is simply not feeling like himself these last few days." She laughed. "With any luck we'll have him feeling well again in short order."

Johnathan could hear the fall of Thomas' feet as he kept pace with the wagon. Emma had never stopped.

"Ain't this Johnathan's horse and cart, lass? What are you doing with it? I know you're betrothed, but you're not married yet. It isn't yours. That's a lesson your father needs to learn as well."

Johnathan couldn't see anything through the sheets atop him, but he could just imagine Emma's face. Thomas was a soft heart, but it looked like he was taking Johnathan protection – both physical and economic – under his jurisdiction.

"You needn't worry, Thomas. I'm just borrowing them for a few hours at Johnathan's request. I need to pick him up a few things to help him feel better."

Thomas laughed. Johnathan could almost see his face turning red. "Sorry, lass. Didn't mean to imply..." he paused for a moment and cleared his throat.

Johnathan was sure he would have said something more, but Emma never gave him the chance.

Clicking her tongue and flipping the reins, she urged Ginny into a soft trot. Thomas was left behind in moments.

“What was that all about?” Johnathan whispered as soon as the crowds pressing in around them began to thin out.

“Get down,” her voice was equally as soft as she spared a hand to press his hand back under the lee of the cart. “I saw Richard coming our way.”

“Who?”

“Richard Bragsten. He was a suitor of mine while you were away in London. I never cared for him but father loved his money. I didn't want to give him the opportunity to get too close.”

Johnathan couldn't help but bar his teeth. “If he should trouble you again you can simply let him back here with me. I'll ensure you hear no more of it.”

Emma snorted as they continued on. “I now have my very own guard cat? Oh dear, how did I ever survive without you, having to face the horrors of the world on my own?”

Johnathan slid himself up, blankets and all, to the front of the wagon, under the seat the Emma rested upon.

With a wicked grin he thrust his hand up between the boards of the seat and was rewarded with a squeak.

The rest of the journey to the Doctor's warehouse was quiet enough. Unfortunately there were enough workers around, even in this part of town, that Johnathan could not simply toss the bed sheets aside and walk. Instead he had to keep himself covered from head to toe as Emma helped him from the wagon. They got a couple of queer glances but no one said anything.

Stepping up to the door, Johnathan noted it was locked. It posed little more than a minor inconvenience. Raising his hands to the door, Johnathan was able to snap the decrepit wood of the frame in seconds.

From behind him he heard Emma gasp.

If she'd been surprised at Johnathan's new found strength it was nothing compared to what she saw within.

The doctor had been busy.

When Johnathan had last been here the floor had been covered with all manner of beast, their pelts and blood staining the boards. The number of animals had at least doubled now. There was hardly enough room to even walk without stepping in something better left unnamed.

That was of particular annoyance to Johnathan as he was now barefooted.

Making sure to close the door behind them as best he could, Johnathan stalked silently through the half darkness of the lab.

There were no lights here, what little illumination there was came from the narrow slits of boarded up windows. The shadows did all the more to highlight the horror of this twisted mirror image of a butcher's shop.

Unable to smell for the doctor, Johnathan was forced to perk his ears and search room by room for him. He wasn't sure if he should feel dread or elation that he wasn't to be found.

When he next turned back to look at Emma she was still standing next to the door, a handkerchief raised to her nose.

And even in the dim light she looked no slight bit green.

“In the name of God,” her voice was soft, “Whatever happened here? This looks like an image from hell as the Sunday school books would speak of.”

A rumble grew in Johnathan's chest. “It's not far off. Only this is no work of Satan. This was

done by man, a single mortal man. Come,” he reached out carefully for her, “We need to see what we can find before the cad returns.”

Lifting Emma from her feet without so much as a grunt, Johnathan carried her over the viscera and pools of blood to set her on the slightly cleaner far end of the room, next to the bookshelves and various scientific knickknacks.

Looking at the bubbling flasks and beakers, Johnathan watched as an untold number of concoctions mixed and fumed in a vast glass forest of tubes and pipettes.

Emma stood next to him, unwilling to move from his side. “Is this what he gave you?”

Johnathan let out a long breath. It was hard to breathe in here. He quickly began to regret not bringing a handkerchief as Emma had.

“I don't know. I haven't the slightest what he forced into me. I didn't even know the deed had been done until days later.”

For a brief second Johnathan was tempted to lash out at the bubbling contraptions that lay before them, to reduce them to nothing more than shards of glass laying on the floor, but he held himself in check. For all he knew these foul creations might be his very salvation. These may be the very tools that the so called doctor would use to turn him back.

Heaving a sigh, Johnathan turned instead to investigate the nearby bookshelves. Little here was of use to him. Johnathan, like any good modern day student, could read Latin well enough even a spattering of French and Spanish, but the books here were far beyond him. No two books seemed to be written in the same language, and many of them were penned by hand in the most incestuous script. Johnathan would just have soon assumed they were written in code as anything else.

What few books he was able to decipher left the fur on the back of his neck standing stiff.

Lycanthropy. That seemed to be one of the doctor's preferred subjects. There was no shortage of writing on mythical man-beast cluttering his shelves. They covered a range of cultures and languages, only a small percentage Johnathan was able to place.

Pulling a book at random, Johnathan was grateful to see it written in an old dialect of English. Flipping the pages, the book itself was less telling than what had been scribbled in the margins.

The notes were plainly those of the doctor, and it was obvious he saw little value in these old manuscripts.

'Useless', 'contradictory', and 'scientificly impossible' were the more common phrases Johnathan encountered as he flipped the pages. Whole sections had been crossed out here and there, some pages were ripped clean away.

Setting the books back where he'd found them, Johnathan turned to explore deeper into the building when he heard a sound from outside.

“Hide!” Johnathan only just got the word out before he dove through the open door to the kitchen in the back of the room.

The urge came to him to run back out and grab hold of Emma where she stood on the far side of the building but there wasn't time. Only moments later the sound of a key turning in the lock forced him to fall back.

For anything in the world Doctor Robenson didn't even seem to notice that his front door had all but been ripped from its hinges. He walked in and shoved it closed behind him without comment. It wasn't until he saw Emma standing still as stone in the centre of the room that he stopped.

“What have we here, hmm?” Victor's voice was coy as he set down the boxes he'd brought with him. “A pretty little girl, yes? I've seen you about before.”

Johnathan was just short of screaming and lunging at the man when a smile flashed upon Emma's face.



"Yes," her voice was sweet, "I am Emma Talbot, acquaintance of Johnathan Pennyfare. He'd told me so much about you."

She stepped forward, shoes squishing in the viscera and pools of blood on the floor. She almost but not quite managed to maintain her perfect composure.

"Johnathan?" Victor rolled the name around on his tongue for a moment. "Ah, the leijona. Yes, yes. You are the woman to him? How interesting."

He took Emma's extended hand and raised it to his lips. Johnathan nearly burst forth from his hiding place. It was only the momentary flash of disgust upon Emma's features that held him fast.

"The good Johnathan told you of my work, yeah? I knew he would come around. They always come around. He sent you here with an offer, yeah? What will he give me to continue my work?" A watery smile spread across the man's lips.

For a moment Emma was silent before she forced herself to speak. "I'm sure I haven't any idea what you're talking about, my good sir. I'm simply a humble follower of the scientific arts myself. My good friend Johnathan told me of your works and I simply *had* to come and see them for myself. Whatever is it you do here?"

The tone of her voice was light and flighty, like that of an upper class social butterfly that had come out to this lair of evil thinking it a grand romp in the garden. She played the bit of her appearance well. For all of the world Emma looked like the perfect imbecile of a woman, simply poking her nose in where it didn't belong.

"Yeah, yeah, my lovely creature," Victor kept hold of her hand and pulled her deeper into the room, dodging back and forth between the decomposing animal carcasses. "You want to see? Perhaps you want to fund my research as well, yeah? I've heard of the Talbot family. They have a grand estate. I'm sorry to say I've never seen it." He paused for a moment, bringing his free hand to his lips. "I've never had a woman aid my in my studies before. It would be most... enlightening to have you with me, my dear."

"Yes, Doctor, I'm sure it would." For just a moment Emma's mask of innocence faltered and Johnathan could hear the blood boiling disdain she held for the man. He, however, didn't even so much as seem to notice as he led her deeper.

A few moments later he'd given her a quick tour of the lab, almost word for word the same Johnathan had been given. The only exception being he didn't bother with the coloured papers this time.

Never having let go of her hand, Victor led her into the small kitchen area in the back of the building, the same one Johnathan hid in.

Scrambling for a hiding place, Johnathan fought to conceal his massive form behind a small pile of crates in one shadowed corner. It seemed he'd hardly needed to, the Doctor was too intent of Emma to take any notice of his surroundings.

They pattered about for a moment, but Johnathan narrowed his eyes the moment Victor put the kettle on and offered Emma a cup of tea.

Raising from his hiding place, Johnathan stalked silent as the night towards the vulnerable, unprotected back of the doctor.

For Victor's part, the man was completely oblivious to Johnathan not three strides behind him. He prattled on to Emma, asking question about how well-to-do she was and how much money she had in her possession.

Emma on her part spun a fantastical tale about being what practically seemed to be the richest woman in all of England. It just short of left Victor's mouth watering.

He shut up quickly enough as soon as Johnathan closed his hand around the man's scrawny

neck.

All Emma had to say about the matter was, “Ah, I see my betrothed has come to join us. Johnathan, I do believe you've met Doctor Victor Robenson.” Her voice was light and pleasant, but the hint of venom under its surface left it smouldering.

“Johnathan? Johnathan! Yeah, yeah, good friend Johnathan!” Victor's voice was rough and high as thick leonine fingers tightened around his windpipe.

For just a moment it almost looked as if the madman was about to try and salvage the situation before a deep, inhuman growl escaped Johnathan's lips.

The few words that escaped the man's lips now were not in English, but Johnathan could catch their meaning well enough.

Shifting around to stand before the man, Johnathan watched the Doctor's eye grow wide. For once the man had no words to say.

Finding a spare set of seats, Johnathan sat the man down and released his throat, but never moved so far away as to give the illusion that he might be able to escape.

Johnathan wasn't sure what to expect next, but elated laughter was not atop the list.

Like a maniac the Doctor laughed and gibbered away in God knew what language. It wasn't until another growl escaped Johnathan's lips that he fell silent.

“What... have... you... done... to... me?” It took every ounce of strength Johnathan possessed to keep his hands from returning to the man's neck and his fangs from ripping into his flesh.

He had to keep repeating to himself over and over again that he needed this man to become human again.

“Aha! It works! Eureka, I... I've done it! After so many years, I've finally done it!” Victor's voice was still rough, but the smile that sat alight on his lips was something he couldn't hide.

Pulling back a razor tipped paw, Johnathan readied it to swipe at the man. Only Emma's quick motions saved the Doctor's life.

“Dr. Robertson,” Emma's voice was far more measured than Johnathan's, “We're here to undo whatever it was you've done to him.”

“Undo? No, no! It's a miracle! Interconnected, everything interconnected! It works!”

All but tossing Emma aside, Johnathan reached forward to wrap his hands around the man's lapels, lifting him from the ground.

“You *will* undo this, Doctor. You've made me a *beast*!”

“Ha! I have, I have!” Only then did the gravity of the situation, being held as he was a foot above the floor, seem to hit him. “You want to to *undo*? I...” he gulped, “no can do. It took me a decade to come up with what I have. It would take me a decade to change you back.” A sly smile spread across the man's face. “It would take much time, much money. Take much *research*.”

With a snarl Johnathan threw the man across the room, tossing his frail human body like it was no more than a rag doll. There was the crash of china and glassware as he impacted a cupboard and spilt its shelves.

“Johnathan! You'll hurt him!” Emma raced towards where the man lay on the ground, stunned and surrounded by shard of glass. “We need him alive.”

Turning for just a moment, Johnathan fought to let some of the tension drip from his muscles. Emma was right. He needed to get the Doctor to work *for* them. No matter the cost.

Turning back, he narrowed his eyes. “Alright.” The word almost sounded human.

The moment of relative calm was short lived. When he looked up the good Doctor was holding a shard of glass to Emma's throat.

A cruel sneer pulled at Victor's face as he held Emma before him. She struggled in his grasp but

couldn't escape. The man's thin arms were far stronger than they looked.

"Yeah, was right. You are a *beast*. Ha! Huge step forward. I thank you, good friend Johnathan. You show me that I am right. No matter what others say I am *right*. But you are not. You are, as you say, *beast*. Not good for my research. You stay here. I find new subjects. They be more pliable. Perhaps try dog, not lion." He laughed.

"Let her go, Victor." The words that came from Johnathan's lips were perfect, no hint of a growl, but the storm that rolled in his gut was like a cataclysm. Johnathan's vision was slowly turning red until all he could see was the man who held his mate hostage.

"No," his sneer grew, "She make good subject. Have lots of money. Family pay well. She be next."

The words hardly escaped his lips before they were followed by a piercing scream.

Emma had kicked backwards with her foot to connect solidly with his groin. Victor nearly doubled over in pain as she slipped away.

Launching forward, Johnathan sailed over Emma's head towards Victor, murder on his mind.

The Doctor, for all the pain he was in, could still see the threat of a lunging lion as greater than all else. He threw the shard of glass in his hand fast and straight like a dagger at Johnathan.

Twisting in midair, Johnathan fought to change course. It was all for nothing. The shard of glass cut into the meat of his shoulder. The chunk was heavy and dug deep.

Unable to reach out with his wounded arm and grab the foul man, Johnathan passed harmlessly by him, slamming full force into the same cupboard he'd so recently hit.

Seeing stars, Johnathan fought to regain his footing but managed to do little more than cut the pads of his feet on the glass that covered the ground.

Yowling in pain with a voice that was most certainly *not* human, Johnathan clutched a hand over the glass embedded in his shoulder and *pulled*.

The shard came free with a sick sucking sound. A moment later Johnathan couldn't smell anything but his own blood.

About to clutch his hand over the wound to staunch the bleeding, Johnathan nearly jumped three feet in the air when he felt gentle fingers wrap a torn cloth over it.

Turning, Emma was at his side, pulling the scrap of fabric tight. Johnathan could see a ragged tear in her dress where she'd pulled it from.

Blood soaking though in little more than three heartbeats, Johnathan began after the fleeing Victor.

Back into the main room, Johnathan had to adjust his sight to find the man as he sprinted towards the door.

Doing his best to follow, Johnathan didn't know the clear patches between the corpses that scattered the ground. Every other step he either lost his footing as flesh shifted under his toes or slipped in pools of clotting blood.

Making it at long last to the door, Johnathan threw it open with an ear shattering bang.

The Doctor was nowhere in sight.

The Doctor, however, was no longer Johnathan's primary concern.

Drawn by the noise of the battle, dozens of townsfolk clustered around the warehouse. All went silent when they saw Johnathan.

Heart suddenly feeling so tight that he feared it might explode, Johnathan turned without a word and sprinted as fast as his two legs would carry him towards the nearest corpse of trees.

He would have fallen to all fours, but this shoulder was far too wounded.

"Johnathan!" From behind him he could hear Emma's voice. He didn't stop or even slow

down.

A moment later her call was followed by the hard shriek of a police whistle.