

The Changing Times



By wwwolf

Table of Contents

Chapter 1:	The Old Manor House.....	1
Chapter 2:	An Odd Proposal.....	9
Chapter 3:	An Odder Feeling.....	19
Chapter 4:	Tea and Crumpets in the Garden.....	29
Chapter 5:	And We Shall Tell the World.....	38
Chapter 6:	Late For a Most Important Engagement.....	46
Chapter 7:	Dark Roads and High Winds.....	58
Chapter 8:	High Society Braggart.....	65
Chapter 9:	Warm Sun has Bleached me Blond.....	78
Chapter 10:	The Cat and the Mouse.....	87
Chapter 11:	An Animal Passion.....	100
Chapter 12:	The Good Doctor Gone Bad.....	110
Chapter 13:	A Morning to Remember.....	120

Chapter 13: A Morning to Remember

Racing through the trees until fire burned in his lungs and he could feel each beat of his heart in his wounded shoulder like the twist of a knife, Johnathan fell to the forest floor exhausted and bled out.

He'd been seen. He'd been seen by the whole town. He was ruined. Even if he were to become human again not a soul in the county would ever associate with him.

For a moment the thought of having been discovered dominated his thoughts. Then something much worse set in.

Doctor Robenson.

He was gone. The man had clean escaped. And beyond that, he'd said it plain as day that he hadn't a way to change Johnathan back.

Drawing a breath, Johnathan felt as cold as ice despite the warm summer sun, his fur coat and the sweat that poured down over him from his run he felt as chilling as the earth in January.

Struggling back to his feet, Johnathan moved more slowly now.

The journey from the manor to Robenson's warehouse had been impossible before, but now the prospect of discovery hardly mattered to him. Stumbling through the trees, Johnathan expected at any moment to hear the bray of hounds behind him.

That was, after all, what they used to hunt beasts. He was nothing more than a beast now, no hope for salvation.

Coming one more to the river, having skirted the town without so much as a single glimpse of the townsfolk, Johnathan forced himself to look away from the waters.

It was obvious what must be happening. The town knew there was a beast on the loose. They'd holed up in their homes until force could be assembled to kill it.

For just the flash of a moment Johnathan debated changing direction, heading anywhere but home. He discarded the thought almost immediately. They'd be able to find him anywhere he fled. He might as well return home and make the hunt easier for everyone.

Crossing the bridge, Johnathan concluded the long walk back to the manor. Stepping through the door, he could smell the scent of Manson. The man had already returned.

Johnathan didn't make a sound as he crept up the stairs to return to his chambers. He felt like a child, always having to skulk back to his room, but there were few other places he felt safe.

Looking out the window Johnathan could still see the sun in the west sky. It was only early evening.

Barring the door, Johnathan curled up on his now sheetless bed and fell fast asleep. He didn't even spare a thought for the wound that still leaked blood all over the mattress.

Waking the next morning, Johnathan was not surprised to heard the sound of fists pounding on his door. He was however surprised by the voices that accompanied then.

"Johnathan? Open up, right now!" He doubted he'd ever heard Emma in such a state.

"Sir?" Manson was there as well, but his voice was far more restrained.

Lifting a hand to cover his eyes, Johnathan cowered for a moment before a slight laugh came to his lips. He was a lion, the king of beasts, and here was cowering in his own bedchamber!

Taking a deep breath, Johnathan stood up from his bed, swaying slightly as the pain from his wound hit him.

Stepping to the door, it took him a moment to push aside the wardrobe he'd dragged across the entrance.

"Good morning." With all the chipper irony he could manage Johnathan pulled open the door and tried to force a grin to his face.

As expected both Emma and Manson stood in the hallway, and much to Johnathan's relief they were not backed by hunters carrying rifles.

Johnathan barely had time to blink before Emma threw herself in her arms, burring her face in the fur of his chest like his body wasn't the affront to God it so obviously was.

"I was so frightened for you," her voice was muffled, "You took onto the trees so quickly that I didn't even know what happened."

Glancing over Emma's head, Johnathan looked on to Manson. He had to give the man credit, his composure was holding.

A short time later once Emma had let him go, Manson stepped forward. The man looked Johnathan up and down without a word.

"I take it you are still the man within?" He said at last.

Johnathan nodded.

Reaching out a hand, seemingly without concern, Manson grabbed hold of Johnathan's hand and pulled it close to his eyes, inspecting it.

"Most particular," his voice was soft, "I can't say I recognize your particular breed."

"What?" Johnathan struggled to pull his arm back but the man's grip was suddenly iron.

Manson glanced up at him, his grey eyes suddenly hard. "You were never made aware of my time in her Majesty's forces before I retired to a life of servitude. I was assigned to an outpost in Kenya. Dare I say I saw more than my fair share of lions during my posting. Shot enough of them too."

Johnathan shivered.

"But I digress," Manson let go of his arm only to step forward and begin poking and prodding the rest of his body. It wasn't until he encountered the wound on Johnathan's shoulder, still wrapped in the scrap of Emma's dress that he stopped.

A growl of annoyance escaped the man's lips as he pulled Johnathan forward, out of his room.

"What were you thinking, young master? You have been taught better than this! We need to get your wound cleaned before it becomes infected. God know what kind of unnatural diseases you might

pick up with your new form.”

Before Johnathan could even get a word out he'd been pulled down the stairs and into one of the drawing rooms.

The furniture here was stiff and formal, not the soft cushions and blankets of the back parlour. Manson sat him on a chair and left to go find medical supplies.

Face turned down, Johnathan's ears pricked when he heard Emma sit down on the chair next to him.

“I'm sorry,” were the only words he could get out between his numb lips. “I failed you.”

“What?” Emma's voice was soft as her touch came feather light on his unwounded shoulder. “Why?”

Johnathan snorted out a laugh. “Why? I've been ruined, and likely as much taken you with me. The whole town knows what I am now. And you heard the Doctor, the chances of me turning back are near incalculable.”

Emma sat silent for a moment before a chuckle escaped her lips. “Ruined? You didn't see the faces of those who saw you! Frightened, yes. Confused, definitely. But ruined? Johnathan, you're the talk of the town. Every man and woman wants to know what's happened to you. There isn't a soul in all of Hammerwood who isn't speaking your name!”

Johnathan was about to reply with an angry retort when Manson returned carrying a tray of clean cloths and bottles of God knew what.

Lifting a pair of scissors to the scrap of cloth that was still bound tight around Johnathan's arm, all he said was, “This might hurt,” before removing it.

The sound of pulling hair was loud enough to be heard throughout the room. The sound of Johnathan's roar could be heard for miles.

“Really, sir, decorum!” There was a twinkle in Manson's eye as he reprimanded him. For just a moment Johnathan wondered if that had been payback for not coming clean with the man sooner.

Dabbing some of the liquid from a bottle onto a pristine white cloth, Manson preceded to clean the deep wound in Johnathan left shoulder.

The cloth was spotless to begin with but in seconds it was discoloured an orange-red by Johnathan's blood.

It took everything Johnathan had not to turn and claw the man back how with much the wound pained him.

In due time Manson had gone through all the dozens of cloths he'd brought with him and used the last to tie as a bandage around the wound, replacing the now shredded scrap of Emma's dress.

“There we are, sir. I'm no veterinarian, nor doctor at that rate, but you will likely heal cleanly enough.”

“Thank you,” was all Johnathan could work out between his clenched teeth as the last of the pain died away.

“You're welcome, sir,” Manson folded the bloodstained cloths back on his silver tray again and turned to leave, “I will return shortly with your morning meal. I expect you must be famished after having missed last night's dinner, not to mention how busy you've been these last few days.”

Johnathan watched after the man as he walked from the room without a second glance.

“That's all he says? *I can't recognize your particular breed?* He looked at me like this was just another day! Like seeing me turn into a damned lion is just another part of his job!”

Emma raised a hand to cover her lips as she chuckled. “He better have considering how much of a talking to I gave him. I very nearly well painted him your portrait so he'd know what you looked like! He very nearly demand it from me last night. You should have seen how beside himself he was,

the poor man, he could have simply died he was so ashamed to not have known what befell you. He had to wait for the *constables* to track him down and repeat what they saw!”

Johnathan lowered his head to his hands. “The police? They're involved with this now?”

Emma raised a hand to his shoulder. Her weight was warm and comforting.

“It not at all what you think, Johnathan. People are just scared. They don't know what's going on. They still know who you are, they remember what your parents did. They won't abandon you, not so quickly.”

Lifting his head, Johnathan rolled his eyes. “If you say so, dearest. I suppose I should remember this isn't London.” He forced out a laugh. “Perhaps I'll just start up my own freak show and make my pile touring back and forth.”

A slight smile appeared on Emma's lips. “Somehow, *dearest*,” she stressed the word, “I don't think that's quite the life for you. And you're assuming I'll allow it.”

Emma left a moment later to go powder her nose, leaving Johnathan alone in the room. Glancing about, he noticed a pile of post sitting on the table in easy reach. It seemed Manson had not led him to this particular sitting room by accident. He had, like most everything else, planned this out.

Lifting the first of the letters from the pile, Johnathan noticed the date was only that of yesterday. Odd. The mail usually only arrived once per day – it shouldn't be possible for yesterday's mail to be here so soon.

Ripping the letter open with one of his razor claws, Johnathan didn't even notice the use of his claws until the action was complete. He wasn't sure if he should feel calm or frantic that he was adapting so quickly.

Unfolding the letter within, it took him a moment to focus his eyes on the paper. His fingers may be well adapted to reading but his eyes weren't.

The letter was from the local banker, the fellow who held a fair portion of the Pennyfare finances.

Johnathan nearly put the letter down right then and there. A deep breath later and he forced the letter back up.

Much to his surprise, it was for more cardinal than he expected. The words were blunt and to the point, but not aggressive.

He simply wanted to ensure that Johnathan was still alive and to confirm the nature of the rumours that had sprung up. Being one of Johnathan's primary contacts in town the man had been receiving endless questions on what had occurred.

With a sudden overwhelming feeling of dread Johnathan turned to the remaining pile of letters on the table. There were dozens of them.

Ripping through them, Johnathan discovered in seconds that each and every letter without exception was to the same ends.

They all wanted to know if the events of yesterday had been a trick of the light. Even the police force had a missive. They were sending over an officer to confirm Johnathan's safety.

The thought of an armed police officer coming to *confirm his safety* left Johnathan shivering.

Grabbing hold of a pen and paper that also, conveniently, sat within reach, Johnathan began scrawling a reply.

His strokes were stiff and ungraceful, handwriting blurred to near incomprehensibility as he tried to form the words.

At first he tried to write that in fact nothing had happened. Everything that had been seen was nothing more than a trick of the light.

That letter was quickly discarded.

Next he tried to write that he was simply mildly ill, that nothing unbetold had occurred...

That paper quickly followed its mates to the floor.

No matter how many times he started, no matter how tightly he held the pen in his misshaped fingers Johnathan simply could not find the words to lead them from the trail.

He couldn't lie. One of the letters was from the local pastor for the lord's sake. He couldn't lie to a man of God and nor could he lie to the other men and women of Hammerwood.

Swiping a clawed hand across the table with a snarl Johnathan sent the papers flying into the air to land like so many oversized flakes of snow at his feet.

He no longer felt the pain of the wound in his shoulder, he no longer felt the dull ache of his malformed bones, all Johnathan could feel was the agony of being this beast.

He'd been right, he was a freak.

It had only been hours and yet already the men and women of the town were treating him like a freak, like a creature to be pulled along on a string for their amusement.

Half the letters in the pile had asked for a description of what Johnathan looked like, yet more asked for him to return to town to be viewed.

They would put him on parade like an exotic animal.

A snarl grew in his lips. They would do it because that was what he was.

Stalking from the room, Johnathan turned down the hall and moved silently towards the back door to the manor. He had no particular destination in mind. He simply needed fresh air.

Storming through the kitchen like a thunderhead in full force, Manson pulled away from him.

It didn't escape Johnathan, however, that the man now wore a service revolver on the belt around his waist.

Johnathan hadn't even been aware the man knew how to shoot.

Pushing past without a word, Johnathan ignored the food that sat half prepared on the counter.

Out in the back garden, Johnathan slowed slightly, moderating his steps as he continued on to the bench across from his mother's garden.

Taking a seat on the bench, Johnathan had to reach around to carefully thread his tail through the bars lest he kink it.

Letting out a heavy breath, Johnathan looked down at the meagre flowers that fought to grow in the rough soil here.

No words came to mind as he looked down at what little remained of her handiwork.

He almost didn't notice when tears began to fall into his lap.

Odd... Johnathan hadn't known lions could cry.

He wasn't sure how long he sat there, but it was the sound of footsteps on the gravel path that shook him back to awareness.

At first he thought it must be either Manson or Emma, but that was impossible. The footsteps came from the wrong direction.

Turning, Johnathan caught just the faintest glimpse of movement as someone ducked behind the nearby hedge.

It was a human, of that Johnathan had no doubt. He couldn't say why, but he knew positively that whatever it was it walked upon two feet.

Feeling his chest tighten, Johnathan raised his voice, "Who's there? This is private land. You're not welcome here!"

There was no response.

Getting up, Johnathan was about to return to the manor with all haste when he heard feet crunching again in the gravel.

Stiffening a growl, Johnathan turned, sprinting towards the source of the sound.

He couldn't help himself. Someone had invaded *his* land, *his* home. He would make sure they regretted such a foolish decision.

Skidding around the hedge, there was nothing so see. But Johnathan could smell the scent of a man on the soft breeze...

"Good Lord! You're really him?"

Johnathan nearly jumped three feet in the air when the voice came from no more than a stride behind him.

"Gah!" It took everything Johnathan had not to fall back on his rear, not to mention the sheer act of will it took not to swipe at the man's face as he leaned forward.

"So you're him? Johnathan Pennyfare?" The man laughed, high and reedy. "Not that there's likely to be many lion-men prowling these parts, hm?" He cocked his head, looking more closely at Johnathan. "Not what I expected mind you," he paused for a moment, as if grasping for words, "Don't look as ferocious as I was expecting. Mind giving me a snarl, old chap? Needed to make sure I get a good story."

"Story? What? Who are you?" Turning, Johnathan began stalking away, back towards the manor.

"My apologies, chap, Matthew Brass. Reporter for the Hammerwood Times. You don't know what a story this is going to be for me! The first to interview the reclusive Lion of the Pennyfares." He paused for a moment and laughed. "You wouldn't happen to be about to change your name to Leonard, would you? That would make for a grand story!"

Picking up the pace, Johnathan tried to leave the man and his incessant babbling behind but it was all for not. The reporter managed to match him step for step, not even breathing hard.

"Come on, old chap, you've got to give me a talk. You don't know the trouble I've gone through to get here! The bloody coppers have setup a ring about your place and they won't let anyone through."

Johnathan stopped dead. Turning to the man, he fought to keep his voice civil.

"They've what? How did you get in?"

The man lifted a finger to his nose, grinning. "You don't get far in my business without learning a few tricks, what?" He pulled out a large sack he had slung over his shoulder, "Told the fellows I had a sack full o' mail for you, they let me right in. They don't want to keep you from your public."

Johnathan raised a hand to his face. He could feel the beginnings of his claws pricking through.

"Mr. Brass, I would be much obliged if you were to simply turn about and leave." Despite Johnathan's best efforts a hint of a growl slipped through into his voice, "I am have more than a trying time and don't wish to share it with the public."

For all the ingenuity the man seemed to have displayed getting to Johnathan he simply couldn't take a hint.

"But Mr. Pennyfare," his voice was concrete, "The public has a *right* to know. We're living next to something no one has ever heard of before." He paused for a moment, lifting the tip of a pen to his lips before scribbling on a pad of paper that suddenly appeared in his hand, "We're living next to a *monster*, what?" He laughed as if he'd made a joke.

Unable to hold back the fear and anger the stormed in his gut, Johnathan felt his lips lift in a snarl.

For just an instant Johnathan feared he was about to send the man screaming into the forest. The reaction, however, was quite the opposite.

“Cracker!” In a heartbeat the man had stopped scribbling notes into his pad and instead begun sketching a picture.

Johnathan could only see the faint outline of a form as it sprang to life, but it was undeniably him.

Roaring in all his bestial fury, it was Johnathan's misshaped face showing his fangs to the world.

Turning without another word, Johnathan ran as fast as his two legs alone could carry him as he was dogged by the reporter.

“Again! Just once more, Mr. Pennyfare! I promise you I'll make it a good likeness! It'll be on the front page of the paper tomorrow, what?”

Sprinting to the door, Johnathan only just made it though to slam behind him before the man skidded to a stop, still calling out.

Storming through the kitchen, Johnathan didn't say a word to Manson as the man held out a tray of food for him as he passed. He did however take it.

Sparing a glance over his shoulder, Johnathan grinned as Manson pulled the revolver from his belt and stepped towards the back door. He had no doubt the two men would have words.

It was unlikely the reporter would be bothering him again if he had any sense.

Returning to the sitting room where he'd last seen Emma, Johnathan was disheartened to find her missing. There was, however, a short note on the table.

She'd had to leave. Didn't say why or when she'd be back. Just that she had to go.

Johnathan balled the paper up and tossed it across the room.

A few seconds later he collected his meal and retired to the back parlour.

Working through the pile of letters that had arrived – in addition to even more that appeared while he'd stepped out – Johnathan was flabbergasted by the sheer volume.

It seemed like *everyone* wanted him.

He had at least three letters from each paper in town, not to mention letters already arriving from East Grinstead and Edenbridge. Given the way news was travelling he'd likely be hearing from London in only a couple of days.

A shiver passed through Johnathan's body from the tip of his nose to the very end of his tail.

This was not the way to live his life.

Tossing the papers aside he was about to leave the parlour, if for nothing more than to simply stalk the hall, when Manson arrived.

“Young master,” the man was perfectly composed. Johnathan noticed the revolver back at his hip, seemingly unused, “There is a gentleman here to see you.”

Johnathan couldn't hold back his snarl. “I'm not taking visitors.”

Manson raised his chin a fraction. “I am aware of that, sir, but it appears I really must insist. It's a member of the constabulary.”

In a heartbeat Johnathan had gone numb.

The police, here? Already?

Were they here to take him away? Cage him up? Couldn't be. They wouldn't knock politely on his door if they were here to take him away.

Drawing a deep and uneasy breath Johnathan sat slowly back on his chair. “Very well.” It took everything he had to keep his voice from trembling. “Show him in.”

Vainly wishing for a mirror, Johnathan quickly went about trying to straighten the fur that covered his body, to become presentable in even the loosest sense of the word.

It wasn't until it was too late that Johnathan remembered the massive mane of hair that encircled his neck. There was no way for him to battle *that* under control.

Letting out a sigh, Johnathan did his best to relax back into the familiar seat. He'd have to meet this new menace as he was.

A moment later Johnathan's ears twitched as he heard two distinct sets of footsteps come his way down the hall.

In some small measure that made him feel better. One set was Manson, he knew as much. The other set sounded familiar...

One last deep breath and Johnathan waited for them to round the corner.

"Sir, may I introduce Constable Rowan." Manson bowed and stepped from the room a moment later, closing the door behind him.

"Thomas?" Johnathan blinked, looking up at his friend, "What the hell are you doing here?"

For the life of him Johnathan couldn't see even so much as a glimmer of recognition in the man's eyes. He stared back as if he was looking at a complete stranger.

No, change that. There was a faint spark of fear there, as if he was looking at a wild animal.

A quick glance failed to make Johnathan feel any better. Not only did Thomas have his regulation baton, but he also held a revolver clutched in one hand. And that didn't even factor in the barrel of a rifle that poked over his shoulder.

"Johnathan Pennyfare?" His voice was clinical, almost bordering on cold.

"Damn it, Thomas, of course it's me! What the hell is going on?"

Did his finger tighten ever so slightly over the trigger of his revolver.

"I am here on behalf of the Hammerwood police force. It is my duty to ensure you pose no danger to the citizens of the village."

Johnathan let out a long sigh and slumped back into his seat.

"So this is what it comes to? They send my old friend to analyse me? What can I do to convince you I'm still in here, Thomas? I can tell you of all the days we ran through the streets, the night we stole into Mr. Harnwell's and made off with all his candy." The slightest grin toughed Johnathan's lips, "Or the time you tried to kiss Mary and she slapped you straight on the mouth."

"Your memories aren't what I'm here to assess, Mr. Pennyfare." Thomas' tone hadn't changed, nor had he sat down. In fact he hadn't taken a step from the door, blocking it. "I'm here to assess your action *now*. I have been charged with ensuring you are not a danger since your... change."

He narrowed his eyes, Johnathan could feel him studying his face. Putting all his will into it, Johnathan tried his best to fall slack, let himself become an open book. He wasn't sure how well he accomplished it with his alien features.

"Thomas, I'm not a..."

"There have been reports, Mr. Pennyfare, of a beast prowling the forests these last few nights. Even a report of one assaulting a young girl. Was this you?"

Letting out a long breath, Johnathan nodded. "More than likely. I had some bad nights before... this." He waved a hand at his body. "And the girl was most definitely me. For that I apologize. Though," he cocked his head, "I most certainly did *not* assault her. I was trying to get to Doctor Robenson's establishment and stumbled upon her unawares. She surprised me as much as I her. And I can assure you that I did not lay a hand upon her."

Thomas grunted, nodding slightly.

"There is also the matter of the so-called Doctor Robenson. What is your relationship to him?"

Johnathan closed his eyes for a moment before responding. "Have you heard the phrase, 'the road to hell is paved with the best of intentions?' It's true."

Johnathan quickly retold his story of meeting the foul man.

If anything the stone hard expression on Thomas' face grew deeper.

"In that case, Mr. Pennyfare, I have unfortunate news for you. Doctor Victor Robenson was spotted in Lingfield this afternoon. He was acting in a most aggressive way and attempted to abduct a young woman and steal a horse. He was shot dead."

"Oh," was the only word to come to Johnathan's numb lips.

Thomas watched Johnathan closely as he sat back in his chair, closing his eyes. Neither said anything.

"Is there anything else I can do for you, Constable?" It took Johnathan a long moment before he could speak again, when he did his words were brittle, hardly more than a whisper.

"No, Mr. Pennyfare. I believe I have enough information for my report. The service will be in contact with you shortly."

"I'm... sure you will."

A moment later the man was gone and Johnathan was alone in the room.

Victor Robenson was dead. The only man in the world who had even the least idea what had happened to him was dead.

Every breath came difficult through Johnathan's flat nose. Every motion seemed to highlight his alien nature, every twitch of an ear, of a tail.

Standing unsteadily to his feet, Johnathan looked around the back parlour, he eyes briefly brushing the photo of his parents.

A moment later his mind was made up, he strolled smartly out.

A step through the door and Manson was at his side.

"Sir, you have another..." he petered off when he saw the expression on Johnathan's face. There were some emotions it seemed that were obvious, even between species.

Never slowing down, never turning his eyes from the door at the end of the hallway, Johnathan's said, "I'm going for a walk. I may be some time."

Stepping through the door and out into the back garden, Johnathan never slowed. It was only a matter of time before he passed by the flowers and hedges. He walked no more than a yard from his mother's flowerbed without even glancing its way.

On past the lawns and skirting the trees at the edge of the property, it wasn't long before he reached the fast running river.

The waters were not as swollen or quick as they had been last time, but they would still do.

Pausing for a moment, Johnathan sat down on the steep bank. Dangling his legs over the edge he was able to reach the waters below.

The cold was shocking.

There was little more Johnathan could think of. This was his new life, *this* was all he had to look forward to. He was a beast, an animal. A freak. If he was fortunate he could look forward to a life as a sideshow attraction, a beast-man to scare the children. If he wasn't he had little to look forward to at all.

Even Thomas, his old friend that he'd spent so many lazy summer days with, no longer saw him as anything but a monster. The weapons he brought with him and his stoic demeanour were evince of that.

The police would be back, Johnathan had no fear, and they would come in numbers. The barrier they'd set up around the property was not to protect *him* it was to protect the town and ensure he could

not escape.

He was almost in the zoo already. The men were the bars around him, and Johnathan could feel them closing in ever more tightly.

From behind him he heard a set of feet on the garden path. They were soft, quiet and fleeting. Johnathan froze. They were the footsteps of someone hunting him.

"No," Johnathan's voice was soft, "I won't be a beast. I won't be your toy to dance on a string."

Huffing a deep breath, Johnathan looked at the rushing waters before him.

Without taking so much as a thought he leapt forward, diving into the centre of the river.

The cold of the water hit him like a razor, stealing his breath away and near instantly sapping the strength from his lungs.

In some distant part of his mind he realized the water couldn't be any colder than the last time he'd been here. The only reason it felt so bone numbing was that he didn't fight it.

Sinking down towards the riverbed a good ten feet below, Johnathan could feel his body being picked up by the currents and carried along.

Twisting, he could see back up to the surface of the river above him. It was like old glass, warped and stained a million dancing colours.

There was a shadow looking down at him from the riverbank. He could only just make it out in the distance as he rode the current away from it. For just a moment the figure stopped before beginning to run along side.

Johnathan tried to laugh. The action did not end well.

For a moment there was a hot pain in his nose as he took in a deep breath of water. The heat quickly cooled as the river ran away with the warmth.

Embracing the water like a lover, Johnathan forced his lungs to draw a deep breath. It made him heavy, moments later he quickly sunk to the riverbed.

Vision growing dark now, he could just detect a disturbance in the waves as something heavy joined him in the river.

It was of no consequence. Johnathan closed his eyes as the form moved closer. All they would dredge from the river would be a corpse.

They could skin him and send his pelt to a taxidermist for all he cared. It mattered not anymore.

The last thing Johnathan remembered before the blackness finally closed around him was the soul sapping cold of the water.

And then there was a single point of warmth.

The world coming back to him in a rush, the pressure of the water on his lungs was suddenly unbearable. Fighting to draw a breath, he stopped short upon the water that filled him.

A cough that was more like a vomit wracked his body as Johnathan's chest constricted, purging the river water from him.

A second later it was replaced by sweet air.

Only then did Johnathan realize he was alive.

Tears blurred his vision, not to mention his mane that was matted up over his face, but he could see the sunlight streaming around him. It was warm.

"That was a damn silly thing to do."