

The Shadow-beast of Severne

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A girl must find a way to cope with her new, unwanted, life.



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Chapter 1-

I couldn't stand it! Being forced what to wear, how to walk, whom to marry; I hated my father. He thought I was just some frail girl who couldn't do anything. I argued with him earlier trying to get him to see I didn't want an arranged marriage once I turned eighteen. He didn't listen and instead I had to stay in my room all day, Which is fine by me. He didn't think I could leave and definitely not by way of window. That I would just sit and think that itâs okay to virtually be a slave. The peasant girls had more freedom than I did. It wasn't fair. After the door locked, I walked straight over to the window and pushed it open. I cringed as the hinges protested loudly, small rust flakes floating in the air, gently gliding down to the summer-dried grass.

I jumped down, landing on the balls of my feet and falling to my hands. I had accidentally landed on a stick, making it crack loudly. I waited a few moments seeing if anybody came to see. They didn't. I stood back up and brushed off myself off.

â Now,â I thought to myself, â where should a grounded girl go?â It didn't really matter, as long as I got away from here for just a little bit. I wandered around the village staying in the shadows in quiet thought. Eventually, I noticed I had arrived at the edge of the forest. I looked behind me. The sun would be setting soon; did I really want to be in the forest after dark?

Yes. The word was like a whisper carried on the wind. Soft but insistent and it gave me the chills. Before I even realized, I was walking. I had pushed through a cluster of shrubbery into a small paradise. A small stream rushed by in front of me and aromatic flowers caught at the edge of my dress. I walked further and tripped. It really was getting hard to see, the only light being the luminescent full moon. Turning back towards the tree I continued into the now Stygian black forest. My long red hair caught in a branch and another scraped past my cheek. How the forest could be so dark with such a bright moon I couldn't be sure, all I know is that it was nearly impossible to see.

As I walked on ever so slowly I thought of all the stories my father used to tell me as a kid. He would tell me dark tales of shadow-beasts, creatures born of darkness and never-ending hunger. They were supposed to

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resemble wolves in a way, but with more dangerous beauty. To keep me from going into the forest he told me stories that shadow-beasts would steal and eat you, or worse change you into one of them. He always thought they were mindless beasts, but I thought they had to be at least a little smart in order to have the guile to snatch children and adults alike.

Finally, I stumbled into an opening, but not for the village. It was a large meadow and the liquid silver of the moon washed over everything. I started to approach the meadow when I saw a shadow-beast. A real shadow-beast! My heart froze and tension flared up in my body. The tiredness from all my walking instantly disappeared. All those stories my father used to tell me, to scare me into staying in the village were true. I had trouble believing still even with the proof right in front of my eyes. It was colossal, every inch full of lithe muscle and strength. It was . . . beautiful. With hair that looks softer than velvet and as it walked it full of gracefulness.

It stopped walking and hunched over something, eating its nighttime supper I suppose. Suddenly, I wasn't so charmed by its beauty. I was frozen with fear; afraid it would come after me next. I was afraid to die. It raised its head as if sensing my fear and looked straight at me. Slowly it stood on all fours, and took deliberate steps toward me. I looked around me, was there nothing I could use to defend myself? There! A rusted ax glinted in the moonlight, left by some thoughtless logger. I sent a silent prayer, maybe I could get out of this alive.

It was coming closer and I quickly hefted the ax. My hopes dwindled as I saw how dull the blade had become. Ten feet away now. . . nine. . . eight feet. It took a small leap of a couple feet making me take a quick step back but being held fast by a tall oak right at my back. Looking back to the beast I noticed how bright its eyes were. Even from four feet away they were bright as the sun. All liquid-y gold and splashes of green. I was mesmerized, no matter how hard I tried I couldn't look away. My frustration was bubbling over and all it took was a small step from the beast to finally break out of my paralysis. I threw the ax and seeing it hit into the shadow-beast's shoulder I turned and ran. Leaves and twigs hit my face, my hands as I ran faster than ever before. As soon as the ax had hit the shadow-beast it howled, a sound so full of pain and anger it brought on another wave of crippling fear. It was chasing me! Throwing my arm back, hoping to hit the shadow-beast it's teeth wrapped around my ankle. I stumbled, and burst through a line of trees.

I fell and didn't yet notice that I was back in Severne, my village, even if it was the outskirts. In my pain I screamed loudly and hit the beast as it chomped harder on my foot. My hands wrapped around a rock I quickly, desperately threw it at its' head. In surprise it opened its mouth and I jumped back already scrambling to my feet and running deeper into our village.

My ankle felt like it was on fire. As I climbed back into my bed, collapsing onto my bed, and breathing heavily the pain just seemed to worsen. Excruciatingly the pain slowly climbed up through my legs and spread to the rest of me. I think I might have blacked out once but I couldn't be sure. Not that it helped. I was still in an abundance of pain. Eventually I got the energy to crawl to the wash basin and I cleaned as much blood and grass and dirt from the wound that I could.

It didn't look pretty. The bite had gone all the way down to the bone. I knew that if I didn't get proper treatment for it there was a high chance it could become infected. I definitely couldn't risk that but I was overwhelmed with pain and I was tired. Bone-deep tired.

â Just a little rest Ivy,â I said to myself, â Only. . . for a few minutes. Then you need a doctor.â

The bed felt so comfortable, so welcoming. My eyes were closed before my head hit the pillow.

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Chapter 2-

â Ivy, miss, up and at 'em!â The maid yelled brightly.

â Mm-hrmm,â I murmured back. I wanted to sleep for a year. But I knew that if I didn't get up now then Jenna would just bother me incessantly until I did get up. And people wonder why I am so grumpy in the mornings.

Then it hit me. The shadow-beast, me running for my life. I was afraid to look at my foot and seeing it infected and festering.

â Your so stupid, Ivy!â I thought to myself, â I should never have fallen asleep.â

When the maid walked back out of my room I quickly flipped off the sheets, expecting the worst. But there was. . . nothing. No bite, no more blood and best of all, no infection. I didn't smile though as much as I should have as much as I wanted too. This was nothing short of a miracle but I just had a bad feeling in my gut about this. I should not have healed this fast, it was impossible!

A knock came at my door, â Ivy?â It was my dad, â Are you decent?â

I sighed, â Yes, I am. Come in.â

â I have excellent news,â He said, â As you know Harvest Festival is today and I just got news that the young man you'll be wedding on your birthday will be coming. I have already invited them for dinner. It should be a wonderful time for you to get to know each other. Isn't that what you wanted?â He asked me.

I stared at him, trying hard not to let my jaw drop. Cahal was here already? I didn't know what to think of it. As I sat there thinking about this dad's look of excitement was fading away to disappointment when I said, â Yes, that is what I wanted. When is he going to be here? I don't know what I should wear,â I was worried now. I did want to make a good first impression, even if I didn't want to marry him. Dad smiled

â Already taken care of,â and he grabbed a box from Jenna, who just walked in. He pulled out a soft green dress the color of my own eyes.

â Thank you dad,â I said. And I meant it.

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“Your welcome, hurry and put it on and head on out to the festivities.” He said. He started to walk out of the room when he stopped and said, “Oh and he says he'll be at the artists' corner in an hour.” He winked and left.

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The streets were bustling while the smell of Harvest Festival pastries wafted in the air. I proudly managed to pass the bakery without giving in and buying a pastry but my will crumbled when I passed the candied nuts.

“Thank you Finny,” I said as the plump woman gave me a basket of candied walnuts. I was a regular of Fiona's, I could never walk past her sugared nuts without buying some.

“No problem Ivy, go have some fun today,” She said. I told her I would and continued walking.

The sun shone down warmly. Little kids energetically ran everywhere while their mothers were talking. People danced and laughed. It was a day for celebration but all I could think about was last night and the strange, but miraculous healing of the bite. Finally I made it to the artists' corner where there were easels and canvases and paints strewn about.

“Ivy! Ivy, is that you?” Someone asked.

I turned around and saw a guy walking up to me, “Um, yes I'm Ivy. . . and are you. . . Cahal?” I asked hesitantly.

He flashed a quick smile, “Yes, but please everyone calls me Hal,” He said.

I smiled back at him. He wasn't at all how I imagined him. He was like one of the children running around, happy and carefree and he seemed so interested in all of the different things to see. The sun shone down on his dark hair making red ones show up and his eyes shone like liquid gold with streaks of green. It seemed a bit familiar but I couldn't place it.

He seemed delighted with me as he kept buying things and kept talking. I had expected a bit of awkwardness at first but he drew me in. There was something about him that pulled me, but I didn't know what.

“I'm glad we got to meet before the, er, the wedding that is,” Hal said, “I feel better about it now that I've gotten to know you. To be honest, I was a bit nervous about the whole thing.”

I laughed, “Me too. But I think it will work out. What about you?”

“Most definitely,” He smiled and we laughed. Mine a bit halfhearted though. I still couldn't remember exactly where I had seen those eyes before. . .it dawned on me suddenly. His eyes looked like the eyes of the shadow-beast I had seen last night. Fear clamped down on me and my stomach clenched, though I kept my face blank.

Seeming to pick up on this he said, “Do you want to take a walk with me?”

“Sure,” It was quiet, my voice. Our walk took us farther and farther from the large crowds. Their loud voices becoming quieter with every step. Soon we came to the edge of the forest, the same place I had been bitten by the shadow-beast.

“A-are you. . .?” I started. He sighed.

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â Yes, I am but I didn't think it was you. I'm sorry,â He said.

â Your sorry? Your SORRY?!â I practically yelled at him.

â Really if I knew it was you, I never would have turned you.â

Turned me? This was new. Nobody ever heard of shadow-beast turning anybody. Sooo. . .

â I'm like you now?â I asked. He didn't need to answer, his face was answer enough. No no no no no! He took a step towards me but I backed up and said, â No, stop.â I turned around and ran back to my house.

Dinner went well I suppose. Hal kept trying to catch my eyes but I kept my gaze everywhere else but him. By the time dinner was over and they were leaving it was a few minutes before sunset.

â Dad, I'm tired. I'll see you in the morning,â I said. I was burning up, sweat breaking out on my face. My room felt too stuffy and it was getting harder and harder to breathe. Opening my window the autumn breeze made my skin tingle in relief. Quickly hopping out of the window I raced out of town and to the trees. Before I knew it I was back in the meadow from the other night. By now my skin felt like it was on fire and I dropped to the ground.

I could feel my bones changing, growing longer and muscles and sinews moving with it. The pain was intense, I was being torn up from the inside. Tears were seeping from my closed lids. Eventually what felt like hours later but in reality only minutes the pain receded. I lay there panting. When I opened my eyes I was . . . surprised to say the least. Every blade, every leaf was in astounding detail. I sat there watching a moth fluttering deeper into the woods. The thing was it was dozens of feet away, something I definitely wouldn't have been able to see a few minutes ago.

â Amazing, isn't it?â I heard. It sounded like it came from inside my mind! Oh great I'm going crazy on top of all this.

â No your not crazy,â I felt a laughing in my mind.

â Don't laugh at me. Who are you anyway?â I asked.

â Haven't you figured it out already? Yes it's me, Hal.â

I snarled. . . unbelievable but I actually did snarl at the darkness. I couldn't see him but I could smell him now.

â Now now, there's no reason to act like that,â Hal said.

â There is every reason to act like this and you know it,â I said. He finally came out into the meadow, the moonlight glinted on his fur.

I backed up but he came closer still.

â What do you want from me?â I asked him.

â I'm lonely,â He said, â I need a pack, some kin to call my own.â

â So you . . .bit me to start a pack for yourself?â I couldn't believe my ears.

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â You make it sound so selfish. Come on, we are already supposed to be wed soon, we can be the alphas in the pack.â

No matter how much I loved reading about adventure and how much I wished I was my favorite characters I realized that it is so much different when it's really happening to you. What would my father think if he ever found out? I couldn't face him. The townspeople would kill me if they knew I turned into a shadow-beast. I didn't want to die but I didn't want to stay as is. My only choice is . . .

I turned my head to Hal and without warning I slashed my claws on him, hearing his scream of pain and betrayal reverberate through my mind, and ran. If I wasn't so upset I would have reveled in how fast I flew through the forest. The wind rushed through my fur.

I never stopped running until dawn. My fur slicked with sweat and morning dew. I was at the edge of the forest, in new territory, and no idea of where to go. On shaky legs I walked over to an abandoned cabin hidden in the shrubbery. I walked through the door and painfully I felt myself returning to my normal self. Lying on some leaves I drifted off into a sweet, dreamless sleep.



Chapter 3-

I slept through the entire morning and the entire afternoon, waking up as the sun was setting. The transformation wasn't nearly as painful tonight, but still wasn't pleasant. First thing I did as a shadow-beast was find food. At first, I was disgusted at myself, eating an animal raw, but my instincts kicked in and I didn't have a second thought for it until afterward.

As soon as I finished I went back to the cabin and curled up. I missed my father and our maid Jenna. It was a thought I never though I would have. Everyone knew I didn't like my father, we have so many arguments and about the most petty things, but I found that I missed having those fights.

My ears perked up. What if there was a cure? Surly there must be someone who can reverse this. I would just have to find somebody who knows how to cure me.

So I set out on my new mission. I ran a few steps then faltered. I had no clue where to start. My mind drifted to my school lessons, to all the countries and cities and capitals. I suppose I could start at Arcadia, it was a very large city and there must be magick men or scholars who have knowledge of shadow-beasts that could help me. And if I needed money then I'm sure I could always find a job to work at until I made enough.

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I sighed, "Your so naive Ivy," I thought to myself, but I changed my direction and started running anyways.

2 Years Later-

Another dead end. I sighed.

"Alright, I admit defeat," I thought to myself bitterly.

For two years I went from person to person searching frantically for somebody, anybody, who could help me. At least only a couple of them tried to kill me, it could have been worse. I pulled on my hair, it had turned darker ever since I first changed, from a bright red to a deep, beautiful auburn.

I heaved another sigh.

"Hey. . .are you Ivy?" Someone asked.

I turned around. A girl was standing behind me. She was slight, with short mousey brown hair and gray eyes.

"Can I help you?" I asked warily.

"Well you see, I-I've heard stories about you-" Oh great, "and I was wondering if you would let me, er, join you?" She asked.

"You want to be like me?" I asked, "Why? You won't be able to see you family or your friends a gain."

She was silent, her eyes staring at her shoes.

"My. . . parents died, a couple of months ago, from pneumonia and I've never had much luck with friends." A small, wistful smile appeared as she finished speaking.

She looked as if she had nothing else, and she probably didn't. I thought of the possibility of having another like me. I was getting lonely, moving from place to place never having even one constant in my life. I realized that this girl could be my constant. Maybe I would start my own pack. . . maybe.

"What's your name?" I asked her.

"It's Amara," She said.

"Well Amara," I said, "meet me tonight in the woods, doesn't matter where, I'll find you." A smile lit her face.

"But don't think I'm doing this for you, you're just lucky I'm selfish enough to do this," I said.

She nodded her head ecstatically. A small smile played at my lips.

"Now get out of here, pack whatever you want as long as its lightweight, 'cause I'm not going to carry anything for you. You pull your own weight, got it?" I asked.

She said, "yep" and practically ran to wherever she lived.

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The sun was going to set soon. I stood up, brushing dirt and grass off me. Like I had all the time in the world I strolled closer and closer to the forest. As I entered, I changed. Sniffing the air I caught the faint scent of Amara. I was running before I knew it. I saw her lone figure standing in a small clearing.

Well, here we go.

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