The Beast

Her hands trembled uncontrollably. Snowflakes fell in fat chunks, the wind pushing them ever so quickly against her. She breathed deeply, but her throat just tightened at the act. She had to get home, as fast as she could; she just had to get home. In the distance she could hear the unearthly howl. If she were to survive the night there was no doubt it would find her again. The beast never left his victims alive.

“Vivien!” she cried out in a hoarse voice. There was no chance he’d hear her from here. But she was so desperate she forgot about the fact that it was the middle of the night and not a soul walked the streets. Her shaky hands touched the handle of the tavern. Once again, she struggled to find breath. Her chest was so heavy the color was quickly draining from her face. The door was locked, so all she could do was thump with her fists. Her knocking became like a heartbeat, rapid and fierce. She would at least fight to stay alive. She wouldn’t go so easily.

Finally, the door opened. Vivien was surprised; this was night of the Red Moon. Folks would be near insane to be out so late when the moon was full in the sky. When he caught sight of her however, Vivien immediately recognized her.

“Violet, what are you doing out tonight?” he asked, quickly grabbing her and dragging her inside. He noticed she was wearing nothing but her nightgown and the scarf he had given her for her birthday. The hem of her nightgown was slightly torn and she was sported no boots. It only took a second for the man to realize that she was wheezing.

“Simon, come quick!” he called, moving slightly to the stairs of his tavern. Simon was a travelling doctor that had been paying for a room ever since last week. He knew the doctor stayed up late so there was chance he would be up.

Violet struggled to breathe as Vivien lifted her onto a table, quickly moving over to the bar to wet a rag with water. He pressed his palm to her forehead; she was burning up beyond compare. His brown eyes met hers, flooded with concern. He had seen this before, the work of the beast.

“Violet, it’s alright. Just breathe,” he instructed her, but he knew there was little chance of her surviving through the night, even if she managed to breathe. The fever always killed you.

Her face drained of any color and Vivien recognized the blue skin of a corpse, but her eyes were still wide and her chest heaved up and down. Soon the footsteps of Simon trudged down the stairs. The doctor came into view, eyes immediately falling onto the young woman on the table, slowly slipping away.

“Consumption?” Simon questioned.

A headshake from Vivien. “Consumption is easier to cure,” he replied, pressing the wet rag against Violet’s forehead. Her whole body began to shake and her hand flew out to grab Vivien’s wrist. Her grip was ice cold, and he could tell that she was afraid. Violet finally swallowed down a deep breath.

“The beast,” she whispered.

Simon was confused at her words, but Vivien was not surprised. He turned to the doctor, gesturing to the girl. “He drains the life from his victims this way… slowly taking each of their breaths. Please… is there anything you can do?”

Simon studied the girl for a second. A beast? No beast could cause illness like this. He moved over to the two, pushing Vivien away slightly to give him room. Simon lifted the rag, touching the girl’s forehead before moving her up into a sitting position. He removed her scarf, unbuttoning the back of her nightgown to press his hand gently on her bare back. He could feel her wheezing, and her violent shakes, but he was calm.

“Can you take a deep breath for me?” Simon asked softly. Violet did, her cold hands touching her throat slightly. Breathing was hurting her, and both men could tell.

“Are you sure she’s not ill?” Simon asked, quickly looking back at Vivien.

Vivien shook his head. “You do not understand, Simon. She was more than fine this morning. The beast… the beast did this.” His eyes now filled with desperation. Simon could tell there must be a connection between the two but he wasn’t quite sure of what yet. But he knew a desperate man could be dangerous if a person he loved was taken away from him, and Vivien had an awful amount of access to alcohol.

“Tell me about this beast, then,” Simon said. All he could do was play along with Vivien until he was given information that could truly help him in aiding Violet, some clue to what sort of illness she was fighting.

“The beast attacks on the night of the Red Moon…” Vivien began slowly, straightening his posture as he watched Violet. “The beast just wants to be alive… and he will do anything to obtain it. Young women and men… children too. He wants their youth, their lungs, their life. The beast first takes their warmth, and then this breath slowly. The body tries to fight it, but the fever can make them delirious. People can go mad within seconds; just knowing that you won’t survive can scare a person more than the pain itself. The sickness… it will take her.” As Vivien finished, Violet’s back arched and she wheezed deeply. She let out a croak as her mouth began to foam and her entire body shook violently.

Simon had seen this before, and quickly took the rag and placed it into her mouth so she wouldn’t bite her tongue off.

“Violet!” Vivien yelled, appearing beside the girl immediately. He watched as she thrashed and Simon noticed the man’s eyes filling with tears. Even though it was but a week of knowing the man, Simon could tell he wasn’t a man of tears. He was light hearted, but looking at the man care for the girl, he could tell that even if someone’s surface was sweet there was really no telling what lay deeper.

Once her shaking stopped, Simon took the cloth from her mouth, gently wiping her face. Her eyes were dilated, but they quickly met Vivien’s.

“He’s here,” she whispered, before her eyes rolled back and she closed them and became limp. Simon watched as the girl fell back on the table, watching as grief poured over Vivien. But it was her last words that dwelled in his mind. It was all silent apart from Vivien’s soft sobs. Then there was a violent bang on the door, nothing like the girl’s knocks had been.

“The beast,” said Vivien. Simon furrowed his brows, turning to the man besides him. Another bang on the door and Simon tensed up with fear. He couldn’t explain it, but he knew that no mere mortal could so violently bang a door. The beast must’ve been a giant himself.

“He still hungers… Follow me, quickly,” Vivien whispered, gesturing the man upstairs. Simon went first up the stairs, followed by Vivien just as the door was slammed open.

Vivien pushed Simon forward. “Quickly!” he shouted in a whisper. Simon spared no time on the second floor. Vivien took the lead this time, moving towards his bedroom before dragging Simon inside and shutting the door.

“Help me,” Vivien directed. Moving to his bed, he began pushing it in the direction of the door. Simon could hear loud noises coming from the stairs now. This beast defied all of the doctor’s logic, yet he still found himself afraid. Simon quickly helped Vivien block the door.

Once the two men had placed almost everything in the room against the door, all they could do was wait. Loud noises had reached the second floor and were moving closer… and closer… until a bang came at the door and everything in the room flew away. The door came off its hinges. A dark figure reaching the height and width of the doorframe stood before the two men. Simon backed up towards the window, but Vivien stood his ground.

“You killed her!” he shouted. Vivien flung himself at the beast, much to Simon’s surprise. The doctor watched as the man simply vanished into the darkness of the beast.

“Vivien…” Simon whispered, and he trailed off. His heart raced as he reached for the window, pushing it open. The dark figure moved towards him and the doctor simply panicked and did whatever any man would do in this situation. He jumped.

The ground reached him quicker than expected, his legs burning the moment he touched the ground. The doctor fell down onto his knees, turning back and looking towards the window he jumped out of. The dark figure was gone. Simon was confused, but only for a second.

Then his back arched and he let out a wheeze.

Word Count: 1,498