

HUNTED

by Were Diggle

Clarabelle could see its sharp horns curving forward from the back of its head and its scale-covered claws drenched with the fresh blood of some animal too slow or too stupid to run away. She wanted to do the same, to run from the forest and never return, but her father depended on those damnable horns. So instead, she checked her ammunition, as her father had been wont to tell her. Five poisoned bolts in the quiver tied to her side and one already loaded into the crossbow. The sight of the metal tip brought back memories of past failures.

She had never done this before, sure there were attempts, but she always froze at the last second. *Deep breaths Clare, deep breaths*, She reminded herself as air rushed into her lungs. If she failed, there would be dire consequences. She kept that in mind hoping that it would awaken some latent predatory instincts. It awakened *something* inside her, maybe it was the desire to make her father proud or perhaps it was just her subconscious urging her to move forward. Whatever it was, it was right.

She gritted her teeth and approached the beast, her legs moving of their own accord. Twigs snapped and dried leaves crunched underfoot, if the beast didn't notice then it was deaf, but it did.

It turned to face her and opened its jaws to roar an audible *meow? ...What?* Clarabelle stood in shock, the beast was gone and there before her lay a dying cat, its mewing getting weaker and weaker.

Clarabelle's vision blurred and a loud ringing consumed her head, forcing the thoughts from her mind. And in her child-like hand, in place of a crossbow, she held a fist-sized rock splattered with blood and matted cat fur. The ground beneath her had been cleared of the various debris to reveal a perfectly manicured lawn. The trees were gone, replaced by a crowd of neighbours keeping their distance from the scene.

"GET AWAY FROM HIM!" A young lady screamed, pushing past the crowd to get to her beloved cat. She wrapped her shaking arms around the dying creature, only to watch his last breath escape. Clarabelle stood in silence and looked over what she had done, a smile slowly crept across her face.

Something dug into Clarabelle's shoulder. It was her father, spinning her around to face him. She looked up at his unkempt beard and frenzied eyes. He wasn't completely sober.

"WHAT HAVE I TOLD YOU!" He bellowed, hitting her across the face, a red mark where his fist had landed. She didn't respond and just stood there in silence.

"We are going to have a very long talk when we get home." said the father. Clarabelle could feel his hands tighten around her shoulders. She could feel the pent up anger leaking into the rock in her hand. She could remember what it felt like to have power, to be in control, to kill.

"I HATE YOU!" She managed to cry out as she jabbed her father's groin with her elbow, weakening his grip on her. She clenched her rock and brought it around to smash

into her father's eye. With her father stunned, she backed up and charged at the larger beast with her shoulder aimed at its stomach. It crashed to the ground, but before it could get up, Clarabelle was already on top. She brought her rock down on the creature's head, smashing in its snout, its eyes, its everything. The creature stopped moving long ago, but Clarabelle refused to stop.