There was no place to hide. Each direction only led to a dead end. Garret’s hand hurt as it throbbed uncomfortably. He held it tightly as the pain seemed to intensify with each passing second. He looked around for his pursuer. What had he done to deserve this, he wondered. All he did was walk home for a movie in the middle of the night. In retrospect that was probably his first mistake. But how was he supposed to know he was going to be mugged.

 “Now come on out and we can see how you’ll coming along.” Garret heard the voice of his pursuer. The man was coming closer to him. His hand throbbed worse than ever.

 A wave of pain shot through his entire body. He collapsed on the floor and began to dry heave uncontrollably. His body burned and itched at the same time.

 “There you are.” Garret looked up as the stranger walked towards him, grinning widely like he just won a prize. “Now don’t be scared. It will be over in just a few minutes.”

 “What would be over?” Garrett wanted to ask but the pain made it impossible. He was losing strength in his entire body. He wanted to scream or call for help but no one would hear him while he was trapped in the warehouse. Why had his attacker bring him here? If he was going to kill him, then why hadn’t he yet?

 Garret’s body throbbed again sending a horrible sensation up his spine and shooting across every nerve in his body. He stared at his hand. There it was. The large bump where his attacker had injected him. Garrett assumed it was poison from the way his body burned and hurt. He wanted to die. Anything to make the pain stop.

 “Here we go,” the stranger said.

 Curious to what he was talking about, Garrett looked at his hand again. He yelped at he saw. His hand was swelling up. His skin was turning a dark gray color as it seemed to morph in front of his eyes. Black hair sprouted across his skin and spread quickly up his arm. As it spread, his arms grew thicker as he could feel the muscles expand and increase in mass. His shirt ripped apart as his body grew. The black hair covered his neck and back. His stomach and chest burst outward and become more predominant. The same thing happened to his other arm as it too became to swell as not be outshone but its counterpart. His pants burst open revealing his giant hairy hindquarters. The black hair spread down his legs like a horrible disease causing his legs to shake and crack. The poor shoes on his feet exploded as the feet stretched and flattened. Each toe grew longer until they resembled hands. As Garrett’s body continue to change and grow, he could feel his face change. His skin took a leathery appearance as his nose receded into his face. His lips and jaw jutted outward. His skull cracked and popped as his reformed into a new shape. The entire process drained him of all his energy.

Garret laid on the floor helplessly as his new body became still. It was like he was losing consciousness. A growing darkness was obscuring his thoughts and mind. He wanted to sleep. To give up fighting and make the pain go away. Then a voice in the back of his hand shouted at him. Some primal part of him screamed for him to fight the darkness swallowing him. With a burst of power, he did not know he had, Garrett pushed against the darkness until it was completely gone and his mind was clear once again.

“Now, let’s get you back to the lab so we can begin the tests.”

Garret tried to stand but his legs would not listen to him. He was so weak. He stared at his arm inches from his face. It was so large and hairy. What had happened to him? Wait, did he say lab?

It was like a switched flipped on inside of him. Garret’s body erupted with a new strength. He pushed himself off the ground and stood up. He was unsteady for a second but got it under control. He looked at his new physique. He was huge. His stomach jutted out as did a good portion of his chest. His feet were no longer feet but hands. He examined his arms which were massive like two cannons.

“Come along now,” the stranger said. He pulled out another gun from his pocket. Garrett had already been shot once that night. He was not going to let it happen again.

“Get away from me!” Garret shouted. He clamped his mouth shut at the sound of his voice. It was deep and hoarse.

His attacker froze and stared at him. He looked at Garret with an expression of confusion and rage. “You can still talk.”

“Yeah, I think so.” Garret said still confused by the sound of his own voice.

“That’s impossible. That serum was supposed to be perfected by now.” Taking a deep breath, the man went on to say,” No matter. Once we get back to the lab I can examine you to see what went wrong. You should be a mindless ape right now, but somehow you managed to remain sentient.”

Ape? He was an ape. That would explain the massive size and sudden craving for bananas. The man charged at him with the gun pointed straight at his chest. Garret quickly moved out of the way but his body was so large and heavy, he ended up falling down and hitting the cement floor hard. Luckily, he managed to avoid the man’s attack. Grunting heavily, Garret ran for the door. He tried to run on two legs but his body would not let him. He charged along supporting his weight on his hands and knuckles as he made his grand escape.

Behind him he could hear the man shout at him. “You will never escape me, ape. Dr. Carvan will find you. Your life is over! If I don’t catch you someone will!”

Garret burst out of the warehouse and rushed down the road. The man’s voice echoed in his head. He was right, and Garret knew it. He was a gorilla, that much was obvious. He would be caught and put in a zoo or lab somewhere if anyone found him. That would have to be a problem for another day.

After running for as long as his body could carry him, Garret collapsed beside an old dumpster. The smell burned his nose as he began to realize his senses were sharper now. He examined his body once again as if to see if there was some trace of who he was left. There was nothing. He was completely unrecognizable. Even his voice was different. He thought about calling the police, but that idea was soon shot down. One, he was a gorilla which would be difficult to explain. Two, he lost his phone when his clothes were ripped off him during the transformation. What was he supposed to do?

At that moment, he heard a loud rattling noise from above him. Had that guy found him that quickly? Garret looked up and saw a shadowy figure standing on the roof across from him. It was only there for a second but that was long enough for Garret to know that whoever it was had seen him. It was time to move again.

It took all night but Garret successfully made it to his apartment. Without his keys he could not unlock the door. Fortunately, the door was quickly removed with a little gorilla muscle. He shut the door behind him and looked at the broken lock. He would deal with that later. He strolled through his living room and headed toward the back room where the majority of his belongings were kept. He was not sure what to do but he knew he was not safe there. That guy, Dr. Carvan, would find him. His driver’s license had his address. If that guy was smart enough to turn a human into an ape, then surely he could use a gps or google maps. All Garret needed to do was pack a suitcase, find the spare key to his car, hit the road. He could hide at his parents’ house for a little while. It would be tough to explain what happened but they’ll work it out.

When he entered his room, the first thing he noticed was the smell. It reeked of a strong cologne. There was someone already there. Sure enough, sitting in his desk chair was a man in a black suit. It was not a business suit but some kind of full body suit like something a ninja or spy would wear. Garret froze in the doorway and stared at the man. It was not the same person who attacked him in the alley but still seemed familiar.

“Hello, Garret,” he said in a calm voice.

Garret froze unsure what to do. He could make a break for it. He did it once already. But this man looked faster than Dr. Carvan. Garret could tell by looking at him that this man had seen something and was not someone to mess with.

“Who are you?”

“So you can talk, good. That will make this easier.” The stranger stood up. Garret took a step back. It would be so easy to run. “Don’t try to leave. As soon as you turn around I will have no choice but to tranquilize you. This will go a lot easier if you listen to what I have to say.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to help you. Or at least I want to help you help yourself. My name is Grey. I work with for a organization that specializes in cases such as yourself.”

“You work with people who have been turned into animals?” Garret asked skeptically.

“Therians, yes.”

“Therians?”

Grey sighed and typed a few keys on Garret’s computer. “Therian or Therianthropy is the term used to describe a human changed into some kind of animal. This can occur through a variety of means.”

He gestured to the computer screen. Garret carefully and slowly made his way over. Not taking his eyes off Grey for a second. Once he reached the desk he looked at the screen. It was a website that describe all the different types of therians.

“You see this is a common occurrence in the world. So much so that it is it up to people like me to stop it or control it. My job is to either find a way to reverse the process or transfer the victim to a haven.”

“What’s a haven?
 “A haven is a special place that is officially recognized by the Magic Alliance as a refuge for therians. This can be a zoo, farm, ranch, or other area where the people in question can be safe while also avoiding exposing them to the general public?”

Garret’s head was spinning. Magic Alliance? Haven? Therians? All this was like something out of the movie he saw that night.

“So you’re here to take me to one of these havens?” Grey’s words sunk into his skull. “You want to put me in a zoo?”

Garret was scared again. He was not going to be locked up like some animal. The prospect of escape was looking pretty good. He might just take his chance with the tranquilizer.

“That is one of the possibilities.” Grey said calmly. “In cases like your own, a Zoo Haven would be the best option. You would be your own private exhibit. Each animal in the zoo would be therians like yourself so you would be in good company.”

Seeing the look of horror and disgust on Garret’s face made Grey smiled. “I can tell that is not what you want.”

“No, I don’t want to be a zoo animal. I want to have my own life.”

“I’m afraid your life as you know it is over. A new chapter is beginning for you. Now it is your choice on how it is written.”

“What do you mean?”

Garret reached over and typed a few commands on the keyboard. A new screen popped up. “You have a choice. You are unique. You can talk and retain most human function like walking upright and intelligence. That being said, you have two options. Be sent to a haven like a zoo or some other kind. Or you can join us and be a Shepard.”

“What’s a Shepard?”

Grey pointed at the screen once again. As Garret read it, an idea formed in his head.

“So what will it be?”

Garret read the screen again. A Shepard was basically a therian that went around and protected other therians either but taking them to havens or saving them from potential threats. They worked for the Magic Alliance as foot soldiers against what are known as Changers or someone who transforms a human for their own personal gain or amusement.

“Will I be able to keep my normal life as it is?” Garret asked.

“Yes, if you become a Shepard, you will be able to continue to live here under the supervision of the Magic Alliance and your superiors. We will have to fix the door you broke. You will be provided with everything you need. All you have to do is complete each mission you are given. And maybe you can find the man who changed you.”

“You know him?”

“Dr. Carvan is a known fugitive. We have been trying to find him for several years. You are not his first victim but the first one to escape unharmed.”

Garret gave Grey a dirty look. “Mostly unharmed. On the bright side you are much stronger and good looking for a gorilla.”

Rolling his eyes, Garret looked again at the screen. He could faintly see his reflection in the monitor. It was the face of an animal. Like looking at a gorilla in the zoo. He opened his mouth and saw the long pointed teeth that filled it. He knew deep down that the possibility of changing back was low if even possible. But he was going to retain what little of his life he had left. It was like Grey said, this was a new chapter of his life. Not a new life all together.

“I’ll do it.”