

The Gangster Centaur III

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THE GANGSTER CENTAUR III

by <Snore23>

A Night to Remember

The breathless night seemed abnormally chilly and sullen as if it didn't want to be disturbed. Likely the cold air came from Souther's Peak, already white with early snowfall. Freezing breezes had come that morning from down its slopes, plunging the temperatures to nearly negative numbers before nightfall and nothing had warmed them since.

Vanadium Park suffered the worst under the frosty yoke, being on the eastern edge of the city underneath the very mountain's shadow. It's mixture of fir and maple trees creaked in the cold like arthritic hands, grasping the moon which hung in their tangled branches. The white marble horse fountain, covered in graffiti again, stared sightlessly over the surface of the pond, its waters not yet frozen but getting there.

Pauline shivered even under her heavy coat. She dreaded getting out of its warmth for even a moment and prayed that the cold weather had kept the city indoors tonight.

She glanced hopefully towards the park entrance, partially illuminated by a buzzing light pole, the other shattered with no bulb in it. Greg took no notice, maintaining his relaxed posture on the bench beside her.

She let out the breath she'd been holding, surveying her companion with fearful eyes. His silhouette gave nothing away and she wondered what he could be thinking on this dreary night.

Around them shapes moved in the darkness; other members of the gang struggling to get themselves warm without making any noise.

The Blood Fists were notorious muggers, and had claimed the park as their own turf away from the more fiercely contested city center. Greg talked about the center of town with longing, anxiously awaiting the day his gang would be strong enough to take it away from the 43rd street gang in an epic blood bath that would ensure the whole city would be his.

Pauline wanted nothing to do with those plans at all; she merely wanted to pay off her debt to him and get out of there. She bitterly regretted the day she met him in high school in what seemed a lifetime ago.

Bringing herself to the present, she nearly groaned in despair when she spied another figure strolling along one of the lit trails just a little ways off.

What is that moron doing here? She thought almost angrily. Didn't he know the park was dangerous after dark? Most of the city did now, especially after last week, avoiding the place like it was the plague.

The others leaned forward like hyenas on the scent of prey. They'd noticed him all right.

"Polly, Molly, go do your thing." Greg ordered.

"Right boss." Molly's voice could be heard in the darkness. She didn't sound eager either, Polly thought.

Polly got up and quietly unzipped her coat, knowing the futility of arguing. Immediately she felt her nipples harden under her dress while goosebumps erupted up and down her arms.

It's so co-o-old, she gasped. Briefly she wondered what idiot would be out here in a thin, sexy dress in freezing cold weather at night. She almost wanted to ask if she could keep her coat by arguing that it would be more realistic, but that wasn't the point of the dress, was it?

She took off at near a run, angling to intercept the mark, hoping that she could keep warm while the Kid lifted the man's wallet.

Billy "the Kid" was perhaps the youngest member of the gang at fourteen. Yet his bloodlust was unlike any that Pauline had ever encountered. He often tortured smaller animals that he could catch, leaving their corpses wherever Polly would find them, delighting in her reactions. Despite his brutality, he had the softest touch of them all, able to steal people's belongings without them realizing it.

Closing rapidly, her half-heels clicking loudly on the pavement, she saw the mark stop before he entered the light, leaving his face obscured in night.

"Oh! Help me!" Polly screamed; she was good at that, taking what pride in it she could. With no effort at all, she could convey terror to make people believe she was in trouble without being loud enough to be overheard elsewhere in the park.

"Help me!" she continued, reaching for the man as if he was her only hope. "She's insane! She's going to kill me!"

"Who is going to kill you?" he asked. His mellow voice had a curious effect on her; a tingling ran up and down her spine and her body shivered.

She almost forgot her next lines with a shouted warning, but she pushed on.

"I didn't mean to step on her foot! I just wanted to go...oh God! She's here!"

Polly shrank against the man, still unable to see his face in the dark, as their heads towards the sight of Molly looming out of the fog.

She seemed to be a harriidan of hell itself clawed up and out of the ground with her wild rantings. Spittle flew in specks and landed on the bare pavement in front of them, shining wetly in the darkness.

"You bitch! You fucking bitch! What do you fucking think you were doing, huh? Running through the fuckin' fog like that? Oh, you're going to pay for that!"

Her ink-covered skin stretched over a face distorted by anger. For a heart-stopping moment she actually felt afraid. None of the others had been nearly as convincing as Molly, not by a long shot. Pauline trembled and wished she could climb

inside the unruffled man behind her and just disappear.

"Silence, please." He said in a calm voice that nevertheless cut through Molly's tirade.

The two women stopped and stared at him as if he'd grown a third head, looking with uncomprehending eyes.

"Very good. I think we can dispense with the charade now." He continued.

With lightning reflexes he spun behind him, seizing Billy's arm. Continuing to spin, he drug the boy along with a startled squawk until he let go. Before Pauline's eyes Billy flew through the air, striking Molly in the gut. Both of them went down together in a heap of limbs.

The night seemed to come alive with snarls. Figures loomed up out of the dark. Knives glinted and here and there the dull gleam of a gun barrel appeared.

"Oh, you goin' to pay for that, bitch." Greg snarled, raising his fists as he charged up to the man and knocking her down in the process.

She felt the air go out of her lungs as she fell to the pavement and rolled into the grass, wondering in that instance what had gone so horribly wrong so fast.

There came a sound, halfway between a crackle and a scream, and Greg flew backwards into Rocky, Tilly and some of the others.

Polly noticed the mark's palms glowing in the dark. He came forward a little and she saw a death mask. She gave one terrified scream. Blackness swam around her.

Pauline struggled to wake up. From the blackness around her came sobs. A voice told her, "Don't worry, we're doing everything we can to find her. She'll be home soon." A child's sobs came to her ears. She struggled, trying to pierce the darkness as she stretched forth her hand towards the sounds...

The midget beat his bongo drums against her eyelids. Pauline groaned slightly, wishing he'd go away or someone would take his sticks away. Beneath her cheek she felt the cold grass and over her body she felt the freezing air move over her. Her skin tingled with that slightly numbing feeling.

Her first thought was one of disbelief. *Why had Greg left her on the ground like that?* Then the memory of what had happened came to her and she opened her eyes wide with a gasp.

Stars. She frowned. Then she realized she still lay face up on the grass.

"Ah, I see she's awake." A smooth voice said to her right.

Grunting, Pauline pushed herself up on her elbows and beheld a scene straight from a comedy or horror story.

Where the park had once been there turned to be a wall of white in a perfect circle about fifty yards about them. Beyond

that line everything disappeared into thick, dense mist.

Inside the circle the air seemed heavy and dense, full of promise. The grass did not stir and the single light pole didn't flicker but shone forth as if it were brand new again.

In its light she could see what at first glance seemed to be about a dozen statues or so, running back and forth on the green lawn. The only thing missing from the artwork would be a soccer ball for the game to take place, but Pauline only had eyes on the nearest statue.

Molly sat on the grass, her eyes wide and bulging. Her mouth opened in a scream that no one could hear. Pauline thought her terrified gaze seemed locked on hers, and it seemed a lifetime before she could look away.

The mark stood calmly looking down at her, waiting for her to...what? Stand? Gasp in awe of his power? Fall to her knees and beg for her own life?

"What are you?" was the first words that popped to her lips instead.

The man looked at her curiously, as if wondering what she could be thinking.

While he looked at her, Pauline had the chance now to look at him.

He stood maybe six foot, or maybe six-foot-one-inch. He had straight brown hair that fell halfway to his shoulders, though his bangs were cropped short. His firm face wasn't ugly or handsome, with the nose a little wide and the ears just a shade too big, but there didn't seem to be a trace of fat anywhere, leaving him hard and angular like granite.

"I am a warlock, or wizard, depending on how you look at such things." He said at last.

"Huh?" Pauline asked, jarred from her study.

He smiled, as if realizing what she'd been doing. She felt the first pricklings on her skin as she flushed.

"I said, I am a warlock, or wizard, in response to your question."

"Well, which is it? That seems like a pretty crucial difference." Pauline rejoined automatically, still reeling from what he'd told her. Her gaze strayed back over to Molly.

He stared at her again, caught flat-footed. Then he chuckled, and it sounded warm and inviting, so different than before.

"I would ask why. Both mean the same thing: male magic-user."

"Warlocks are evil, hurting people. Wizards are kind and grumpy, seeking to keep from hurting anyone and protecting innocents." Pauline replied.

Shut up! Her mind screamed at her. *What does it matter at this point? Wizard or warlock, he's going to turn you to stone like the others!*

"I see. Well, then I can claim neither." The man said. The

humor was still there, but it was starting to fade. "I use magic for magic's sake, you might say. But for the meantime, I have business to attend to here."

"You mean you're going to kill me too?" she trembled. She hadn't thought about dying before, just trying to move on day after day. But now that death seemed so close, it seemed the only thing she could think about.

"What do you mean, too?" he asked in surprise. Then he looked about, considering. "Ah, I see how you could mistake the situation. No, they aren't dead. I don't like to dispose of life while it could still perform some useful function yet."

Pauline didn't hear him. As soon as he said they weren't dead, she'd lunged for the closest statue, which happened to be Molly. Grasping her cold, lifeless hand she patted the woman's face, getting harder and harder until she seemed to be practically slapping her. If she was screaming or shouting words Pauline couldn't tell.

She dropped Molly and threw herself at Greg, shouting words she couldn't hear, but sounded something like "Wake up you son-of-a-bitch! Save us!"

The warlock just stood stunned at this seeming madwoman who'd erupted right in front of him, moving between the frozen people and trying to rouse them despite not having any magic to do anything.

"Elsanora"

The soft word cut to the night and Pauline found herself frozen next to the others with one foot in the air about to come down leaving her balance precarious, to say the least. She could still turn her head and speak, for whatever reason, but below her neck her body was stiff.

His face seemed blurry to her and she realized tears were streaking her face as she looked pleadingly at him.

"Please, don't kill them. They don't deserve that. Please."

"I already told you that I'm not going to kill them." He said calmly. "But you were apparently...overwrought." He sighed. "But now I have to resume my business here."

"Wh-what are you going to do?" Pauline asked, just barely able to keep her teeth from chattering.

The warlock ignored her, coming up to Greg and looking at the gang leader straight in the eyes. Molten brown met piercing gray. Pauline swore she could see sparks fly between the two men. Greg couldn't look away, so the warlock had too first, though she thought he'd still managed to win their star-off contest.

He stood tapping his finger against the side of his mouth thoughtfully as he looked at Greg.

"You know, I originally thought about turning you and your people into beetles." He said conversationally.

Polly felt her head swim as the thought of being a beetle for the rest of her life washed over her.

"But now I'm not certain that would be the best use of you." He continued. His long fingers reached out and tapped the ink-covered arm that still stood raised with the knife glinting in its fist.

"You have such beautiful artistry potential here. Your skin is so full of ink that I could easily play with it. Perhaps I could turn you into a Dalmatian puppy for a child? But no," he said regretfully. "Your personality is so toxic you'd likely hurt the child in some way. No, it is better to have an animal that people would like to see but wouldn't want to hold or touch."

He looked around, then spotted the green pond underneath the marble horse fountain.

"There we go." He said with some relief, a small smile coming onto his face. Greg's eyes flickered worriedly.

"You'll make do there, I think."

"WAIT!" the shriek tore across the lawn and made the warlock snap around. The statues, of course, didn't move but Polly could swear they'd had an air of shock and then seemed to strain to listen.

"Wait?" the warlock asked after a moment. He seemed mildly curious, though there was a tightness in his voice telling her that his anger was a thing tightly controlled. "Why wait?"

"They don't deserve...whatever you were going to do to them." Pauline's words tumbled over one another so fast she could barely be understood, but she couldn't slow down. If her lower body wasn't frozen so completely she'd probably wet herself in terror. "I mean, they aren't saints, but no one today really is, right? So why do you have to single them out for punishment?"

"Few people lurk in parks after dark seeking to mug people." He pointed out.

Pauline gulped, knowing that he had a point.

"I know, and we're sorry. I--"

"I doubt that you are." The scorn in his voice came to her unmistakably. He might have been about to say more but some kernel sparked to life at his words and fanned into a coal of rage in her belly.

She spoke angrily and forcibly, catching him off guard.

"Hey, this is bad and I know it. But that still doesn't mean they're completely evil! These guys helped me when no one else would or could! They gave me a hand when I was down and out, and for that I help them in return. They may not be perfect but they don't need to be knocked by the likes of you!"

He looked long and consideringly at her for a bit. He shook his head and sighed.

"It's interesting." He said to no one in particular. "But I do believe that you are here out of some misguided loyalty. Perhaps because you love this man?" he jerked his thumb at Greg, who glowered at him hatefully.

"Believe me, he is not worth your effort. I can feel the

rottenness of his core. There is not a thing in this world capable of redeeming him. He has determined to make himself a curse on this society. I will not let him be for that, but will make him somewhat useful to his fellow man."

He threw out an arm and pointed towards the fountain with its green waters. "There is a object of the park that was once a source of pride for the city. Instead of hurting people, he could have helped clean it up. Now he will do so, but not as a human. Instead, he'll keep the fountain clean for the rest of his life, as a carp!"

Greg's eyes widened. For a split second Pauline thought it was in surprise, but then she realized that his eyes really were widening. They started to migrate around his head while scale patterns appeared on his skin and began popping out like 3-dimensional tattoos becoming hard and shiny scales. His arms shrank and grew feathery, the veins popping out as they turned into fins and his body shrank right out of his clothing

Pauline watched in horror as he became a Koi fish, the ink changing color into orange and spreading into a beautiful, artistic pattern. One small segment, near the back, caught her attention. Looking closer she realized that it was actually Greg's face, done in a tribal portrait, looking at her.

"Hmm. Not particularly native, but I guess it *is* decorative." The warlock mused, staring at the fish that rotated slowly in midair like some trophy on a glass display pedestal.

"Nooo." Pauline groaned, looking at the creature that had once answered to her one-time boyfriend's name. "Please."

The warlock didn't seem to hear her, turning the others one at a time into Koi. He stopped when he got to Billy.

The sheer animal rage coming off the boy made no effect on him other than a pursing of his lips. Pauline recognized that something terrible was about to happen.

"Please," she tried again. "He's just a boy."

"Is he?" the warlock asked softly, his gaze never leaving Billy's. "Is he indeed?"

"Yes." Polly said more vigorously. "He's just a kid, a youngster. Hasn't been with us very long—"

"That's a lie." His cold voice made her jerk her head back.

"It's true." She said stubbornly, knowing even as she said it they were dooming her. "He hasn't learned the ropes yet, that's why you probably felt him. Let him go, he hasn't done anything wrong yet."

"Silence." His voice, laced with contempt and anger, shut her up.

"It is good," he continued normally, "That you are defending him, in a way. It proves that you are not completely hopeless, like this man is."

"He's not a man." Polly insisted feebly.

"He's not a child, either." He insisted. "The blood already on his hands proves it."

He reached out with one palm and touched Billy's foreheads, underneath his curly blond locks.

"See?" he asked, as a strange black symbol appeared. Polly's eyes were fastened on it.

"This mark is only given to those who have killed, and liked it." The man said calmly. "He enjoys death. Who was it, this person that you killed?" he demanded, snapping his fingers.

The vitriolic garbage that poured from Billy's mouth was unprintable, but the warlock popped him over the head with the flat of his palm, and Billy's eyes glazed.

"My grandfather." He said at last. "Took a knife...gutted him while he slept. He used to beat me, felt so good to get back at him. The sheets turned beautiful...black and red." He smiled rapturously at the memory.

Polly felt sickened, turning away while trying to breathe through her nose. Her eyes met Molly, and she saw the same feeling in them. For a moment, the two women seemed strangely connected, companions trapped in the same nightmare, then the warlock's voice snatched back her attention.

"See what I mean? He is evil throughout. This is a service I can do for his future victims."

His hands glowed and he rammed them on Billy's head. Billy let out one spine-shivering howl that cut off. His blackened corpse fell backwards onto the ground and fell into dust.

Polly gave a half-sob and tried to turn away, tears dripping down her face. Gorge rose in her throat as she tried to control her gag reflex.

Silence fell except for the occasional rustle that Pauline marked as another associate turning into a fish. She opened her eyes in time to see the tail of Rocky zoom morosely towards the lake.

He now stood in front of her and she realized that besides Molly, there were no other gang members left.

"So that just leaves you two." He said. He looked at Molly. "One more fish." He said, raising his palm.

Polly didn't know what made her do it, where she got the gumption or courage, but she whipped her head forward hard enough to move her body and strike his arm as she fell, her efforts earning her a muffled grunt as he stepped back to let her fall.

"What was that all about?" he asked her as he squatted next to her.

Polly spat out some grass and panted. "Please, just stop it." She pleaded. "Let us go. Haven't you had enough yet?"

"Still you plead for their lives. That is unexpected." He looked at her shrewdly. "Yet you've made quite a considerable effort for this one. Is it possible that she is your...friend?"

Polly didn't want to lie again, she didn't really know Molly all that well other than she was fairly new, but she wasn't going to abandon her either.

"Yes." She said. "She's my friend. I wasn't much of one before, but I am now." She added, wondering if that would be enough to get around this lying detector that he seemed to possess.

He stood up and waved her hand. She felt an eerie sensation of floating as her statue righted itself, leaving her standing upright again.

"Well, let's see what she has to say." He said calmly.

He waved his hand and Molly came too.

"Leave Polly alone, you son of a bitch!" she cussed.

"You've scared her enough tonight." He waved his hand again and she resumed her pose.

"Well, it seems that she does care for you, after all." He said. "Perhaps I won't split you two up."

He looked at Pauline closely. "You've turned out not to be what I anticipated." He said almost crossly. "You've actually impressed me tonight, which is a rare feat, but you've also angered me, which I cannot allow."

He stared at her as Polly grew uncomfortable and frightened, shrinking back as much as her frozen form would allow.

"Very well." He said. "You bear further investigation. Perhaps you might be redeemed after all. I shall have to see. For now, you will be my servant. That way, I can keep my eye on you and determine what my next course of action shall be."

Polly's worst fears were confirmed, he was going to own her body like some commodity! Yet she didn't realize exactly how bad it could be.

"Now, let's get you ready for your new role." He smiled, a genuine smile of pleasure, she noted bitterly.

Too tired now to beg, she hung her head and waited like a witch at the stake awaiting the executioner's torch.

"Golna Kri Moldros felunos getabos le sep ku na tefnakos dek centauros mepbeknalak fe tumos grenkos feldopris crow!"

she was too busy fighting the feelings invading her body. There was a brief moment of being *stretched*, like play-doh in the hands of a toddler, and a strange itching sensation that crawled across her skin. There was a tearing sound and some of the pressures surrounding her ceased. A moment later, the feeling died away leaving her gasping for breath.

"Well, now that's perfect!" the voice interrupted her thoughts and she looked up and saw...nothing? Where was the warlock? As she swiveled her head to keep looking, she had a disorienting moment where she saw the park bench seemed a lot lower than she remembered it, then it clicked and she looked down. Sure enough, she was taller than she had been before; the warlock stood about the height of her torso, which meant he was now at a perfect height for an eyeful. The tattered remains of her clothing fluttered at her feet.

"What did you do to me?" she asked terrified, rearing as

she slapped an arm across her chest. Wait, she reared? Twisting at her stomach, she saw the body of a sleek glossy chestnut horse stretching behind her. With her free arm, she reached back tentatively and touched...herself! She could feel the featherlight sensation of her hand on the horse's back. Yet her upper body was still a girl, or so she thought until she felt something moving in her hair. Reaching up, she felt a horse's soft ear twisting around on her head!

"Wha-how-wh" she stammered, unable to form a coherent thought.

"That's better." The cool voice pulled her eyes back down to the warlock who studied her with a critical eye. "You will serve admirably for my purpose."

"And...what purpose is that?" Polly asked breathlessly, wondering what sick perversions this man would force on her.

"Transportation." He told her, his face smooth and expressionless. "I have a need to get to point A from point B, and you will provide that locomotion after your normal chores are complete."

Polly stared, then spoke before she could stop herself.

"You know they have cars for that right?"

The corner of his mouth turned up in a smile.

"Yes, but this way is more conducive. Automobiles are rather large and cumbersome, and can be a deuced nuisance, such as when apprentice magicians accidentally transport themselves into a narrow building with the car. Having a smaller, more responsive transport eliminates some of the dangers inherent in travel."

He turned away as if that explained everything. But Polly found herself more confused than ever.

She didn't have time to ponder the riddles though, as the warlock was looking down on Molly.

"Now, what to do with you." He said calmly, the cold gray eyes staring into her terrified baby blues.

"I have promised Polly to spare you the indignity of becoming a fish, but that does not mean that you are to escape punishment for your crimes entirely."

Molly said no word, but her eyes flickered worriedly. There remained a spark of defiance in them, however, and she held his gaze challengingly.

"You have spirit, which I do not particularly care for. It will cause disruption in the household, I am certain."

He shook his head. "I should never have agreed to spare you, I think--"

"Don't go back on your word!" Polly said urgently. "You agreed to spare her!"

"I did. You do not listen well." He said testily. "Do not speak again, or I will punish you."

Feeling the matter settled, he looked back at Molly who now looked at him angrily.

"What, you do not approve of discipline?" he asked mockingly. "Perhaps if you'd had it earlier in life, you wouldn't find yourself in this pickle, now would you? No matter. Whatever life choices sent you down this path, it is a thorny tangle of your own making." He said dismissively. "But I still am drawing a blank on what to do with you."

At last he shrugged. "Perhaps you have an idea or two?" He waved his hand.

"Yeah, I've got an idea, dickface. Why don't you let us go?" Molly sneered. "You're in enough trouble as it is."

"So rude." The warlock said, his mouth a firm, thin line. "For that, you will suffer."

He raised his hand and Polly felt her heart stop. Molly's face looked a lot less unsure of herself a moment ago, but her chin jutted out as if daring him to do his worst.

"No! Please, she didn't mean it." Polly said urgently, grabbing his hand before he struck. "Please, don't do anything... unnatural to her." She pleaded.

His face took on a closed look.

"You have spoken again, when I told you to be silent. It appears you have real trouble holding your tongue when commanded. Very well. I will be able to help you in this."

He snapped his fingers, murmuring something.

Polly started to say something when her tongue stuck to the bottom of her mouth and refused to budge.

Try as she might, the most she could manage was a cawing sound. Her vision blurred as she realized that he'd effectively silenced her.

Molly stared dumbstruck at Polly. Her blue eyes seemed on the verge of completely losing it.

"Listen," she said in a much different voice, but the warlock wasn't interested.

"Shall I do the same to you?" he threatened softly.

Molly's jaws snapped shut with a click.

"Very well." He nodded, satisfied. "It seems at least one of you can follow orders."

Polly shivered.

"Now, I was deciding what to do with you when Polly interrupted."

He looked calmly down at her, and she seemed on the verge of saying something, but each time her eyes would stray across Polly and she would close her mouth with a snap, making her seem like a fish underwater.

The warlock stood there, thinking as the night grew even colder. Polly shivered, covering her upper body as best she could to keep warm, though her horse half apparently put out a great deal of heat, she noticed idly.

"I have decided." He said at last. "That you will have to be a fit companion for Polly until she's earned the right to regain her voice. As such, you will have need to keep up when I

am with her. But, I do not have need of two centaurs in my household. Cat's are fastidious creatures, so a cat you shall be."

He pointed and muttered an enchantment.

Soft downy fur began replacing her pants, seeming to grow out of them as her rear bulged and extended backwards. Three bumps appeared and rapidly grew, becoming a long pinkish tail with two rear legs that ended in...paws? Polly stared. In seconds the fur had caught up, covering the now changed portion of her. On her human half, the tattoos that she had been covered with ran down to her white half, covering it in large spots. The tail had immensely thick, fluffy fur on it. A moment later, thick short ears appeared on top of her head, replacing the two human ones she had before. Long hair grew to cover the missing ears, though it looked strangely...normal for that.

"Wha-?" Mary asked dazedly. She looked behind her, and turned on the sorcerer with a snarl of rage. Her fur bristled and great sharp claws extended from new paws. With her contorted face, and angry slitted eyes, she looked wonderfully like a cat who's had its tail trod on.

"Hmm. The coloring is wrong for a housecat." He frowned, looking closely at her.

Polly realized that was certainly true: no cat she'd ever seen had such wonderful midnight spots on ashen gray fur with cream underbelly. The extra-long, fluffy tail twitched erratically behind her.

"If I had to guess, I would say you are of the leopard variety, probably snow leopard." He guessed. "You don't happen to have any Tibetan ancestry in you? No? Well, it doesn't matter. Sometimes magic simply has a will of its own."

He turned away and walked towards Polly.

Trembling, she shrank back like an abused horse, wondering what fresh torture he was going to inflict on her.

Instead, he simply put his hand on her horse back and lightly vaulted onto her bareback.

"I shall have to make you a saddle." He said conversationally. "When we have more time. For now, we will go home. Forward!"

He tapped the heels of his boots into her flanks lightly, but the sensation startled her and she walked forward.

They set off along the path. Molly followed like a leashed pet, though her muffled curses and quiet growls suggested that she wasn't following willingly.

Polly followed his directions as he tapped her shoulders to guide her through the dense fog that apparently only he could see through.

As they left, she peeked behind them. Trampled grass was all that remained of the night's activities, disappearing rapidly into the wall of fog that closed in behind her. Soon it was as if none of them had ever existed.