

Wylde Switch

A Shift in Time, Book Two

By

Vanessa Brooks

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For Meg who has been Hugo's champion from the very beginning.

Chapter One

"So legally now you're Hugo Wylde and, therefore, Duncan Miller no longer exists?"

Louise cocked her dark cropped head to one side, her large silver hoop earrings swinging as she studied her lover with poignant interest.

"Yes, that is the case. I needed something of myself to survive in this brazen new world. Surely you can understand that, Lou?"

Nodding thoughtfully, Louise said, "I do, Hugo, I really do... but what now?" She watched as the man she had been dating walked over to her living room picture window and stared outside. She realised from his words and his current posture that his mind was once again closed to her.

This was physically the same man she had known for over three years and had dated for the last two but she knew that the man inside his head was a different fellow altogether. That inner man was an enigma to her. This Hugo, a man from another time, a man from a different world, was a time traveller from four hundred years in the past.

* * * * *

Hugo Wylde knew he was a fish out of water. In the Year of Our Lord Sixteen Forty, he had been pacing back and forth inside the barn that was set away from Wylde Manor, his home. Despite the storm brewing, he had been determined to do his husbandly duty which was to properly chastise his wife for her inappropriate behaviour. Ticking the switch he held against his leg, his impatience had grown. Forcing himself to unclench his jaw, he'd sighed and stepped out from the shelter of the barn, once more scanning the yard for Bridey. Shaking his head and hoping the miscreant knew that her failure to appear in a timely manner was doing nothing to abate his ire, he'd lifted his eyes to the heavens as a strange crackling sound sizzled through the air. He had only enough time to see a streak of light before the lightning struck him. Though he supposed it was a miracle that he had not died, he thought perhaps it would have been better if he had for life as he had known it was no more.

Hugo's house, Wylde Manor, his home in the sixteen hundreds was now owned by James and Emily Parker, close friends of Duncan Miller. Duncan had taken shelter within their barn while passing by as a storm raged. Duncan had been stuck by lightning simultaneously with Hugo and flung way back into the past, while Hugo had jettisoned forward into the future and into Duncan's body.

A month ago, the Parkers had opened up a disused chimney, one which Hugo knew had existed during his lifetime, and up to sixteen forty, had been in almost daily use. Inside this chimney the Parkers had found a beautiful wooden casket hidden and tucked away deep within

the ancient bread oven that formed part of the inglenook fireplace. Finding such an item was intriguing. Once the dust had been wiped from its surface, their find became eerily fascinating. Carved deeply within the wooden surface was Duncan's name and address, an address that didn't exist four hundred years earlier.

Once Hugo had taken the casket home and forced open the bottom of the box, he had found gold coin and jewels, sent to him from his long lost family. This cache had been organised by Duncan, the same man who he had switched bodies with during that fateful thunderstorm. Duncan had also written him a letter, a letter that had both at once soothed his troubled heart whilst at the same time, twisted his very gut. It told of the children that he would never know and of the love his wife felt for another man. Yet at the same time, Hugo was glad to know that his family had been happy and well provided for by Duncan.

While it was clear that Duncan had easily stepped into his new life and role within another time, Hugo had suffered greatly from the life shattering change. The noise, the traffic, and the speed of everything within the modern world was beyond his comprehension. Technology and the people of the twenty-first century drove Hugo nearly insane. He simply loathed life here in two thousand and four.

At first he had hated Louise too. He thought her brash, opinionated, and disrespectful. In Hugo's sixteen-forty mind set, Louise was completely unladylike. Though he believed she was still all of those things, he was now aware that she was also loyal, kind, intelligent and sexy. From Louise's explanations, he knew that, without her help, he would have been placed on a psychiatric ward within a hospital. He might even have taken his own life, so great was his inner turmoil.

Hugo knew why he had ended up as he had in the hell that was apparently the future. He was being punished for coveting another man's wife, one of the seven most deadly sins. Not just any man's wife either, but Helena, his brother's wife. Hugo had married Bridey from pity and desperation. When Jack Channing, her fiancé, had jilted her, his own desire to marry and beget children asserted itself strongly.

Feeling that he had waited long enough, in the vain hope that some act of fate would throw Helena his way, he had to admit it was simply not to be. At thirty five, Hugo had finally married but he had not loved his bride, Bridey Tanner. He did not love Louise either. Helena, the only woman Hugo had ever loved was long dead and buried.

Once Hugo had recovered from the crippling shock of life in two thousand and four, he had persuaded Louise to take him to visit the old church at Leaffield. This was where his brother Samuel had acted as Rector some four hundred years previously. The Church had been three hundred years old when Hugo had known it but now it was an ancient building. Hugo had walked slowly down the aisle and sat quietly in one of the pews. With his head bowed and his spirit shaken, he had an overwhelming sense that he was surrounded by the ghosts of his past life.

After praying and reflecting, Hugo had made his way outside and searched for the grave markers of his lost family. He had hoped to find the graves of the children that he'd never known

but who had borne his name or perhaps even a stone indicating the grave of his long dead wife, Bridey. He also looked fruitlessly for his brother Samuel's and his wife Helena's gravestones. Alas, he had found none of them. Oh, he had found the surname 'Wylde' all right but dated the late eighteenth century. Hugo found none dated sixteen hundred, during the time his own family had lived. Some of the older gravestones were submerged in the earth almost to the top of the stone and others were almost smooth where the carvings had weathered beyond any legibility. The trip had not been successful and had left him feeling depressed and deeply saddened. He fell into further despondency until Louise became seriously concerned for his state of mental health.

* * * * *

Louise now gazed sadly at Hugo's back. It was just her luck that the only man for her had been tossed backwards into the past where she could never again reach him. It was torture being with the physical version of Duncan knowing that the man she had loved was gone. Though another man inhabited Duncan's flesh, Louise had finally accepted that she had lost her Duncan forever.

When Hugo had shown her Duncan's letter, Louise had been stricken, stabbed in the heart by the line 'we have found a deep and profound love together'. Whereas Hugo was seemingly unable to accept this modern world, it appeared that Duncan was much more resilient. The pain of learning that Duncan had fallen deeply in love with Hugo's wife, Bridey, cut Louise to her core. Reading that letter, Louise realised that Duncan would probably never have married her because he simply had not loved her the same way that she had loved him.

Louise remembered Duncan's letter and the suggestion he made within that Hugo should seek out a traditional type community where people chose to live a simple life with what many might consider old-fashioned rules if he found the modern world too much for him. She thought this was an excellent plan because Hugo obviously was not settling into a twenty-first century existence. If he didn't make a move to find a better life, then Louise feared he might well take his own life. She could see clearly that the man was desperately unhappy.

Walking across the room, she placed a comforting hand on Hugo's arm, giving it a reassuring squeeze. Hugo looked at her with a distant gaze and a tentative smile. "I am all right, Louise, please do not concern yourself. Are you going out tonight?"

Louise shrugged. "I might. I don't know, do you want to come out with me?" Hugo shook his head negatively and turned to stare back out of the window again, closed off deep within himself. He obviously didn't want her company. Louise sighed heavily and left him where he stood. She went to take a shower. "Sod him..." she muttered under her breath, as she closed the bathroom door with a bang.

* * * * *

Hugo waited until Louise had disappeared into the bathroom; he hated the old pubs that she had initially dragged him to in the evenings. They were loud and overcrowded with people who shouted to one another over the irritating and constant piped music. No one really spoke to anyone else, since they were all staring downwards at their little machines, 'mobiles' that beeped and chirruped with more irritating noise.

Hugo picked up Louise's laptop. She had been extremely patient in teaching him how to use it. The machine made him uncomfortable but he'd found that the ability to browse for any information he desired, could possibly offer a way for him to change his life. He used it now to look again at the information on communities such as those Duncan had suggested. Several were scattered through the United States but he found he was consistently drawn back to one located in Ohio. Fields of crops seemed to go on miles bisected by roads that reminded him of home and not of the slabs of concrete outside Louise's house. Barns sat away from homes that were constructed of wood and not bricks or stones. When he'd looked more closely, he noticed shirts, trousers, dresses hanging on lines to dry. Windmills turned in fields and what he knew was a well could be seen at the corner of one of the homes. Further research showed the community had been established not long after America had been founded and, from the looks of the images, not much had changed since.

The people living in Flussbeken Creek cultivated an intentional counter-cultural lifestyle. They eschewed cars and all modern transport, relying instead upon alternative forms of transport, such as horse drawn carts, buggies, and wagons. They were mainly farmers or worked with their hands to make furniture with tools found in Hugo's time. The more Hugo read, the more hopeful he became. This seemed like a place where he could not only fit in, he could contribute his skills. Even their way of dressing reminded him of his home. The clothing was simple and without adornment. The men wore hats and the women wore bonnets.

Hugo shut down the computer. Drumming his fingers on the closed lid, he pondered. He knew that he couldn't remain living here with Louise much longer; it wasn't fair for the woman. She was obviously in love with Duncan and it hurt her seeing his likeness every day, knowing that it was simply the shell of the man she loved. Louise had been wonderful, kind and generous toward him, when he had been hard and cold toward her. Hugo's lip twitched when he recalled their first encounter.

When he had awoken, he had, at first, believed himself to be in heaven. The nurses and doctors dressed in their stark white uniforms and caps and the strange bright glowing light, was so like an archetypal vision he had of Heaven. Hugo quickly came to realise that he was actually in a form of Hell rather than the Heaven of his dreams. Though he'd had no knowledge of the contents of his pockets, the administrator had found his identification and had contacted Louise. After a full day and night of recovery following his lightning strike, Louise had collected him from hospital in her car. Hugo had needed to be cajoled into the odd looking horseless carriage against his better judgement. He had squeezed his eyes tightly shut and prayed as the metal box on wheels had hurtled down the strange flat surfaced road, chased along by other similar metal boxes. How they both arrived safely at Louise's living space Hugo had no idea. At that point,

nothing would induce him to climb into another of those dangerous box carriage things ever again!

Then there was Louise's apartment; another box shape but this time one divided into smaller rooms. His first experience of television, another box, was at once fascinating but also horrifying and the content shown was beyond his comprehension! That it was allowed to be broadcast to the population as a whole, Hugo found it all utterly unbelievable.

It was the loudness of all the technology that upset Hugo most of all, the constant invasiveness of permanently annoying noise. Cars, radios, televisions, computers, mobile phones and piped noise, so called music, everywhere No matter the time of day or night, it was never, ever quiet.

Where did he begin about the people, thousands upon thousands of people in these modern times? He'd seen more people in one day than he had seen in an entire decade in his own time. Far too many for a start, and each one clamouring for their own voice to be heard and so very aggressively.

What had happened to the manners that had been so important within Hugo's own time? Then there were these modern women. Hugo shuddered; they were so disrespectful and forward especially toward men! They wore trousers! They were generally *very* badly dressed, unfeminine, most with short, ugly and spiky hair. Hugo's list of complaints was endless. Louise was all of these things and yet she had proved herself to be his friend despite their initial early clash.

This world moved at a pace that totally unnerved Hugo. The speed of everything and everyone was too much for the seventeenth century man of comparative peace and repose.

Not everything about this new world dismayed him. He'd found electric lighting made possible by electricity an admirable, amazing achievement. Though the light was so very harsh, it was truly wondrous. Another wonder was running water. Having a constant source of wonderfully hot water was utter decadence!

After his return from the hospital, Hugo had awoken that following morning and stalked into Louise's kitchen, where he had found Louise making herself a smoothie for her breakfast. Hugo frowned as he remembered what she was wearing that day, a skimpy tee shirt that barely covered her rounded bottom. When he'd demanded bread and sausage with a flagon of ale, Louise had barely turned her head in his direction before telling him 'to go fuck yourself'. Hugo had no idea what that expression meant but he knew that Louise was being totally disrespectful toward him and that he was having none of it!

Hugo had strode over to the unsuspecting girl and grabbed a wooden spoon from a pot of kitchen utensils that stood innocently upon the kitchen breakfast bar. He then dragged Louise into the sitting area of the open planned living room. Sitting down in a wide chair he had thrown her across his lap, smacking her bottom hard with the wooden spoon. Louise had screamed abuse, kicked and struggled and finally sobbed, until Hugo stood and dumped her onto the floor, once again demanding his breakfast.

Hugo winced as he remembered the pain in his privates where Louise had landed a kick before she executed a chopping blow from her hand to his wind pipe. He had collapsed to the floor gasping and choking. Louise had stood over him, her diminutive form stiff with fury as she read him the riot act. She had fetched him a glass of water and sat by his side watching him warily whilst he drunk it. When he had finished his drink, she had suddenly asked him who the hell he was. Louise told him that Duncan would, *never in a million years*, have behaved in such an abusive way.

Since then Hugo had told Louise everything and to his relief she had believed him, even before she had read Duncan's ancient letter found within the hidden wooden casket. Louise had been incredulous at the punishment reference in the letter until Hugo had explained, in detail, a woman's role as a wife in England during the sixteen hundreds.

That night they had shared a bed for the very first time, and although Hugo was uncomfortable with the idea of sleeping with an unmarried woman, Louise explained that it was quite normal in this era for a woman to choose with whom she slept with.

Hugo had learned a great many things from Louise. Most importantly for him, he had learned how to properly pleasure a woman. Hugo had never tried to pleasure his wife when engaging in his marital rights. He had assumed that since he was the only one who could ejaculate, his wife should just lay back and accept him—not too dissimilar to the mating of horses, dogs and sheep. It was a revelation to him on discovering that he could bring a woman to a screaming orgasm. Once he had learned this amazing new skill, needless to say, he wanted to practise—as often as possible.

Initially, Louise appeared content to allow Hugo to practise seducing her body. She taught him how to use his hands and mouth to good advantage, rewarding him by wrapping her own mouth around his manhood and pleasuring him to a powerful climax. Then Hugo realised that Louise was hurting inside; she had loved Duncan and it wasn't Hugo who she was making love to, it was Duncan Miller. Hugo knew that he had to put a stop to their physical relationship and talk to Louise.

After a deep, and on Louise's part, an emotional, discussion, they mutually decided to drop the physical side of their relationship and become platonic friends. He explained that he wanted once again to take up his own name, Hugo Wylde, to make it made legal and dispense with Duncan Miller for good. Louise helped him to fill in the complicated forms for changing both his first names and his surname and then she had mailed them for him.

Today the legal documents had finally been delivered, duly approved and officially stamped. Hugo was once again himself, Mr. Hugo Wylde.

Once Hugo had made the decision to leave for America to try to become a member of the community in Ohio, Louise helped in every way she could. That meant research, of course, but more importantly, it meant teaching Hugo about using ATM machines, buses, taxis, trains, airliners and travelling in a car.

This was perhaps the most difficult of Hugo's lessons, how to remain in a moving vehicle whilst petrified. Every time he got into the car, they travelled only a few yards before Hugo

wanted to get out yet again. It took some weeks before they could travel from Battle to Hastings, a driving journey of twenty five minutes or so, without him turning white and demanding that Louise pull over, so that he could throw up at the side of the road.

Once remaining as a passenger in the car had been achieved, Louise decided that they should have a day trip to Hastings to celebrate Hugo's successful bravery. Louise could not believe that Hugo had never seen the sea and so they set off on a bright and sunny morning, Hugo's jaw was tightly clenched for the entire journey. Louise was grateful that not only was his nausea under control but he remained a model passenger-silent and unprotesting.

After she'd parked her car near to the sea front and they walked to the pebbled beach. Hugo was, at first, dismayed but astonished by the vastness of the grey rolling ocean. However, once he turned and surveyed the overdeveloped shoreline behind him, Hugo realised the sound of the waves rasping on the stony shore, coupled with the vast emptiness before him, was less intimidating. In fact, after staring for a while at the repetitive moving waves, it all began to seem rather tranquil and preferable to the overpopulated town at his back.

Louise wanted to buy some fresh smoked fish from the smokery situated on the beach so they walked along the shore, stones crunching underfoot. Hugo began to enjoy the briny scent of the sea and the sense of peace that the watery expanse bought to him, seeing for the first time its unrivalled beauty. They arrived at the wooden smokery whereupon Louise made her selection from the numerous fish available, purchasing some smoked haddock. Fish was a food which Hugo had never been particularly fond of as the smell of fish reminded him overwhelmingly of the scent of sex. Coming as he did from the sixteen hundreds, people smelt rather more pungently than they did in the present day!

Eventually they made their way back to Louise's car, and during the journey home, Louise expressed her amazement that Hugo had never before today visited Hastings, especially since Leaffield was situated relatively near to both Battle and Hastings. Hugo explained that on rutted muddy tracks, travelling in a heavy wooden wheeled cart with no suspension, was simply not a journey that he had ever cared to undertake. The furthest he had travelled from Leaffield was into Battle, a place unrecognisable as the tiny hamlet from which he had once bought his provisions.

The driving situation accomplished and behind him, Louise then moved on with Hugo's education, onto buying food goods and eating out within pubs and restaurants.

When Hugo had first ventured out alone into this strange new world, he had watched as people walked into the local supermarket to buy groceries and the like. Hugo had been impressed that, in this modern world, folk could go into these large food stores and collect the food they required. What a munificent step forward for mankind, Hugo had thought pleased to have finally to have found something that he approved of in this modern world.

It was only when he had walked out of the building containing such manna, pushing his own metal cart full of exotic food stuffs, that two security men had jumped him. Ignoring his protests they'd dragged him back inside the store.

When Louise had collected him from the police station later on that day, she had giggled at Hugo's sorry and irate tale of 'shop lifting'.

Hugo was totally unequipped to do Duncan's lecturing job at the university and so after a long discussion during which Louise persuaded Hugo to allow her to draw him up a letter of resignation, they had walked into town and posted it together. Thankfully Hugo had been paid some money from Duncan's employers, while he was on 'sick leave' due to the lightning strike.

Then the casket of coin and jewellery had been found which proved to be an utter godsend to Hugo. Some of the coin had been sold and the jewellery auctioned, bringing Hugo a healthy sum of money to place in his new bank account.

Before he left England to fly to America, Louise drove Hugo to Wylde Manor. Louise went inside and joined the Parkers for coffee, leaving Hugo to take a final walk around what had once been his family home centuries earlier.

Hugo stood in the open door of the barn, the site of his devastating time shift. He allowed his mind to flood with memories of his past, his home, Bridey his wife, Samuel his brother and dearest Helena, his sister-in-law and of course, his poor dear mother. All now long dead and buried, their ghosts fleeting and ethereal. Hugo could summon no sense of their existence and he shivered. It was definitely time to move on with his life.