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The Werewolf of Chatsworth

Chapter 1

Byron Lattimore leaned on the rail of the foredeck, staring at the dark ocean below. I watched silently from the shadows, ecstatic to stand so close to the living legend on this transatlantic adventure. Byron's dark inquisitive eyes, black hair, and a strong, square jaw gave him a foreboding, dangerous aura and an unmistakable air of confidence. He had an easy, smile, but he rationed it carefully.

"You're missing the party," Lewis Abernathy quipped, as he stepped out of a smoke-filled room where he had been entertaining other passengers with his stories and quips.

Lewis Abernathy walked toward his friend who continued to look into the solitude of a dark, foggy night. The RMS Carmania left New York seven days earlier and many of the first class passengers congregated for one last gathering before docking the next day in Liverpool.

"Don't figure the party's missing me," Byron replied, as he continued to face the empty nighttime horizon.

"It might, if you gave it a chance," Lewis smiled.

"Don't get to see the ocean much," Byron explained. "Thought I better enjoy it while I can."

Lewis smiled at his friend and smirked, "We'll be heading back in month. I don't think they're going to move the ocean."

Byron Lattimore breathed in the moist ocean air and said, "Guess not."

Lewis Abernathy stood next to his friend and looked at the vast blackness in front of them. The slightly built Lewis had thin features that almost made his face look sullen. His hair was straight and sandy-brown and his eyes were sharp and inquisitive. Lewis was a few years younger than his traveling companion, but looked even younger. Unlike Byron, Lewis spoke with little accent that would have placed him from the oilfields of Oklahoma. His tone of voice was precise and strong, which made him sound both intelligent and sincere.

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My ears perked up when Lewis asked, "Have you seen Luke around?"

Byron Lattimore did not take his eyes off the bow of the boat and replied, "He's behind you—spying on me."

"I'm not spying," I defended from the shadows. "Besides, how did you know I was back here?"

Lewis laughed and answered as he turned around to see me standing several yards away, "Byron's half hound dog. He can hear your heart beating and smell your hair tonic from a hundred yards away. Who are you trying to impress, anyway. I've never seen a kid that doesn't shave yet put so much time into combing his hair."

"Leave the boy alone," Bryon commanded. "He's just trying to impress the ladies."

"He wouldn't know what to do if one quit running from him," Lewis mocked.

"Aw—you guys are always picking on me," I complained.

Lewis Abernathy was the brother of my mother. He had let her talk him into taking me on this trip. I had become accustomed to his teasing and believed it a small price to pay to get to travel with the two of them. Byron Lattimore's reputation had been built as a lawman. Although I was not as impressed with my uncle, Lewis Abernathy was successful engineer at Marland Oil. Lewis had arranged the trip, and I was happy to come along.

"When do you figure we'll dock?" Byron asked in his relaxed drawl.

Lewis smiled and said, "Ready to get off the boat?"

"After Titanic last year, yeah," Byron confessed.

"We should dock by sunrise," Lewis shared. "We'll unload the baggage...catch the train to Manchester then to Bakewell in the Peaks District. We'll be there by this time tomorrow."

"It'll be good to feel land," Byron admitted. "What's the weather goin' to be like?"

Lewis laughed and slapped his friend on the back before saying, "A bit cooler than home, but a good time of year to see the countryside."

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“And how did you talk me into coming again?” Byron quizzed.

“I told you,” Lewis smiled. “I needed a nursemaid for Luke here and you were more than qualified.”

Byron stared stoically at me, giving no indication of his appreciation of my uncle’s humor.

“Besides,” Lewis continued. “My friend, Edward Wyman, has a peculiar problem and he needs a favor.”

“Why do you need to do this Edward Wyman a favor?” Byron asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Why does an oilman have any business in England? Last I checked they don’t pump a drop of oil.”

“You right about that,” Lewis sighed, “but England uses oil, and they still control the banking of the world. I met Edward a few years ago at the 101 Ranch. He was there with another fellow, Devon Elliot...actually Major Devon Elliot...for a hunting vacation. Major Elliot was an excellent horseman and crack shot—and a close confidant to Edward’s father, Colonel Wyman. We’ve kept in touch since their trip to America. As luck would have it, Edward’s father has some influence with the banks in London and it’s been a profitable relationship for me. Edward has a unique situation, and you might be helpful.”

“I don’t have any more jurisdiction here than your nephew,” Byron reminded, as he looked coldly at me.

“This isn’t strictly a criminal manner,” Lewis said in a more serious tone. “Edward needs someone that can handle himself against man or beast.”

“Don’t see how dragging me halfway around the world’s going to help,” Byron reiterated.

“All I know is at least three are dead since spring,” Lewis replied

“They have lawmen in England,” Byron noted. “Good ones, I’m told.”

“Right enough,” Lewis admitted. “But they’ve done no good. Oklahoma has a special breed of lawman.”

“We’ve just had more practice,” Byron stated.

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“True,” Lewis nodded. “But you’re the best.”

“Chris Madsen is better,” Byron argued. “Smart and he’s actually been to Europe before.”

“Madsen’s a good administrator,” Lewis replied. “You’re a better shot.”

“Tilghman’s the best of all of us,” Byron said.

“Bill Tilghman wouldn’t come,” Lewis smiled. “Besides he’s not killed as many wolves or buffalo as you. Heck Thomas died last August. That leaves you as the best that’s left and you needed the trip.”

“Yeah,” Byron moaned, as he looked listlessly at the dark water below. “Guess I hadn’t been much use to anyone for a while.”

“It’s understandable,” Lewis consoled.

I had wondered about Byron Lattimore’s sullen behavior the past two weeks and listened with a keen ear to discover the cause.

Byron was eager to change the subject, however, and said, “Tell me again what you know. If I’m going to do this thing, I might as well prepare.”

“Edward wrote that the attacks started in the spring,” Lewis explained. “April, I believe. Three dead...throats torn open while walking in the countryside. Since then, most won’t venture out alone.”

Lewis hesitated for a second before continuing, “A young woman claims to have seen the beast last month, but no one knows for sure. She wasn’t attacked and who knows what might go through a young girl’s imagination with all that gone on.”

“So, it’s a beast of some kind,” Byron said. “Don’t they have hunters in England?”

“Plenty,” Lewis continued, “but they’ve found scant evidence of any animal capable of killing a human.”

“There were tracks found at the killing sight?” Byron clarified.

“Two of the sights, anyway,” Lewis said.

“What kind?” Byron asked.

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“Some kind of wolf maybe...definitely a paw...but,” Lewis answered, “human footprints as well.”

“That doesn’t make sense,” Byron moaned. “Don’t know what an old buffalo hunter can accomplish that those English boys haven’t.”

“This may not be any normal beast,” Lewis explained. “The three killings and the attack happened during a full moon or near full moon. It will be quarter moon this Friday. That gives us a little more than a week. Edward has a place for us to stay in close to Chatsworth House near Bakewell. We’ll have time to sightsee, hunt, and...maybe do a little investigating.”

“I don’t believe in supernatural nonsense,” Byron protested. “I’ve found there’s always an explanation—you just have to look.”

“We’ll see,” Lewis laughed. “At least we’ll have some good times.”

Byron Lattimore looked out across the dark ocean swells and said, “Thanks for the trip Lew. I know I’ve been mopin’ around for months, but I’m glad I came...Glad you talked me into it—even if I have to look after this kid.”

Lewis laughed, as he rubbed my head and said, “We’ll have some fun, and Luke here will watch out for you. You’ll see tomorrow.”

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Chapter 2

A dreary September day in 1913 greeted us as we walked down the gangplank of the massive ocean liner. Fog followed us into the port of Liverpool causing the ship to arrive several hours late. As noon approached, a chaotic bustle of activity erupted around the dock area. Byron, who was more accustomed to lonely expanse of the vast prairie, looked anxious and uneasy around the crowd. Uncle Lewis, however, traveled for a living and was at ease in the bedlam of the busy port, as he effortlessly arranged for our baggage to be transferred to the train station.

Liverpool looked like New York except older. The area designated for the passenger ships overlooked gritty docks for the freighters. The city was loud, dirty, and exciting, as we settled into a train that pulled out of the Liverpool station on the Cheshire Line. By the time we finished lunch, the train arrived in Manchester, a working class manufacturing town twenty miles inland from Liverpool. A few minutes out of Manchester, Byron's demeanor relaxed as we entered a rugged, sparsely inhabited countryside known as the Peak District. He looked silently out at the passing hills as he had stared at the ocean waves the night before.

"It's pretty country," I said, as I looked past Byron to the green countryside outside.

He stared at me a moment, before saying, "Yeah."

"Looks like some of the outlaw hideouts of the old Indian Territory," I offered, trying too hard to make conversation with the quiet man.

"A little," he replied, before resuming his survey of the countryside.

The train clicked along the tracks, as Byron continued to look out the window at the passing countryside. Lewis sat in a seat across from us and studied his papers, as lush green meadows and fields stretched against a blue sky in the area outside of Manchester. The scene reminded me of the rolling prairie from home, except the landscape featured vibrant shades of green instead of the brownish color caused by the dry heat of summer. A few fields hosted cattle fattening up on the grassy pastures, and

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many more fields had sheep covering the green hills like tiny white clouds. When the train approached Bakewell an hour later, the rolling hills gently transformed to the picturesque peaks that gave the area its name.

“You’re missing the scenery,” Byron said, interrupting his friend who stared seriously at the papers in front of him.

Uncle Lewis stretched his back and looked out the window at the rugged countryside.

“I’ve seen it,” he smiled. “I told you it was beautiful country.”

Byron nodded, “Looks peaceful. I thought England would be more...crowded. More like Liverpool. This looks like a good place to take a nap.”

“Many come to relax,” Lewis shared. “The Peaks District has been a prime vacation spot for years.”

“I can see why,” Byron responded. “Don’t know that I’ve ever been on a vacation. My days off work usually involve fixin’ fence or patchin’ the barn. I always wondered what you rich fellas did with all your leisure.”

“I’m working,” Lewis defended. “I haven’t looked up since we left Manchester. You’ll find out what the truly rich do when we get to Chatsworth.”

“You’re not rich?” Byron quizzed.

Lewis shook his head and said, “Rich is relative. I would be what they call nouveau riche. It’s a different mindset than old money.”

“What do folks do around here?” Byron questioned.

Lewis put his papers aside and replied, “A little of everything. The countryside is ideal for raising sheep and there’s plenty of textile manufacturing in the larger cities. Colonel Wyman made his fortune mining lead in the hills. We’ll be staying near Chatsworth House, the estate of the Duke of Devonshire. The 8th Duke passed away in 1908 and things have been a little chaotic since. You see, Chatsworth is

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more than a house or a home. It's been the symbol of power and order in this area for hundreds of years. In the past, most farmers tended the land for the Duke."

"They're croppers?" Byron asked.

"Yes, in a way," Lewis continued. "You'll have generations of sharecroppers that have lived on the land they farm for years. It's not exactly like home, but everyone in England knows their role."

"Don't seem very democratic," Byron suggested.

"Change comes slowly in England," Lewis admitted. "The mining in the Peaks District, gives the lower classes more options. The payroll spent for the labor's not tied to the land. Cities like Manchester and Liverpool are more like America in some ways. Most people like the life, however, and the landscape is beautiful."

"I can see that," Byron nodded, as he once again looked out the window. "What do you think, Luke, ready to do some sightseeing?"

It was the first time on our trip that Byron and I initiated any conversation. It caught me by surprise, as I nodded like a clumsy kid.

"Me to," he smiled, seemingly more relaxed to be in the open country.

The train shimmered as it began to slow down, as it approached the market town of Bakewell: a quaint mountain village surrounded by emerald hills. The station was relaxed, with few passengers getting off at the mid-afternoon stop. Byron and I looked around the old-fashioned train station while Lewis hustled to find a porter. A tall man wearing a dark suit stood at the doorway and looked oddly at us.

In a moment, the man stepped to Byron and asked, "Master Abernathy?"

"No," Byron replied. "He's stepped away."

"You're American, though?" the man questioned.

Byron nodded and asked, "How did you know?"

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The stiff, formal man looked disapprovingly at Byron and said, "The hat, sir."

Byron had not noticed his Stetson hat propped on his head. He was so accustomed to it that he forgot it gave him a unique appearance compared to the people around him.

"There's Mr. Abernathy," Byron awkwardly said, as he nervously removed his hat and held it in his hand.

"Very well," the stoic man replied and he turned to greet Lewis. "Master Abernathy?"

The always calm Lewis answered, "Lewis Abernathy. You must be Mr. Baines."

Mr. Baines had an odd combination of regal contempt and pleasantness. Everything in his manner oozed with formal etiquette, which was so natural to him that it seemed easy. At the same time, he projected an air of superiority that made me feel uncomfortable.

"Indeed, sir," the Mr. Baines answered. "Master Wyman has been called away to London on some urgent business and instructed me to greet you. I'm Master Wyman's personal butler. I must apologize. Your arrival is a day sooner than expected and the Hunting Tower will not be available until the morrow."

"Not a problem, Baines," Lewis cheerfully replied. "We'll find a room in Bakewell."

"No need," the stoic butler replied. "I've taken the liberty of getting room at the Rutland Arms."

"Good," Lewis replied. "This is Bryon Lattimore and my nephew, Luke Seymour."

"Very well," Baines coldly nodded. "I've expected you, and I have a carriage waiting."

We followed Mr. Baines to an open horse carriage waiting outside the station. Byron gave Lewis a smirking-look as the aloof butler led us through a sparse grouping of travelers.

"Lewis?" a voice shouted, as we prepared to enter the carriage.

Lewis Abernathy turned around and smiled as a tall, distinguished man approached. The man wore a tweed suit with knee-high leather boots, which were polished to a high gleam. He stood with confident, erect posture and an air of authority.

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“Devon Elliot!” Lewis exclaimed. “Or should I say, Major Elliot.”

“Devon works for me,” the cordial man smiled. “I’ve been retired enough that I don’t particularly respond to rank these days. What the devil are you doing here?”

“I thought you knew,” a puzzled Lewis replied. “Edward Wyman invited us...I’m sorry. Major Devon Elliot this is Byron Lattimore and my nephew, Luke Seymour.”

“Not *the* Byron Lattimore!” Devon Elliot exclaimed.

Byron awkwardly extended his hand and said, “Good to meet you...uh...Major Elliot.”

“It’s good to meet you!” the energetic man replied. “And please call me Devon.”

“Sure,” Byron nodded.

“I’ve read so much about you,” Devon gushed. “A real wild west hero in our little village!”

“You can’t believe much of what you read,” Byron shrugged.

“You’re all that Lewis could talk about when I visited the 101 Ranch five years ago,” Major Elliot explained.

“He exaggerates,” Byron surmised.

“Exaggerates!” Major Elliot roared good-naturedly. “I’ve personally witnessed him in fabrications close to lies...especially when playing cards.”

“Such fine line between a lie and an enhancement of the truth,” Lewis defended.

“Edward invited you?” Major Elliot asked.

Lewis nodded.

“You didn’t say if it’s business or pleasure?” Major Elliot examined.

“You know I’m always thinking business,” Lewis replied. “But, this trip is mainly leisure, although we did plan to do a little hunting.”

“Werewolves,” Major Elliot replied with a smirk, as he winked at me.

Byron looked on skeptically as Lewis said, “Three dead?”

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“These villagers and farmers are superstitious and exaggerate more than you!” Major Elliot replied. “There have been some attacks, but nothing supernatural, I’m sure.”

“But they’ve found no beast capable of such attacks,” Lewis asked.

Major Elliot nodded and said, “Nothing.”

“Is it normal to have so many fatal attacks?” Byron asked. “How many people are killed in a normal year?”

“None,” Major Elliot replied. “I’m not entirely a good source for that information. You see I’ve spent a good portion of my years in India and Africa. I do know that animal attacks are rare if not unheard of—even man-eaters.”

“Will you join us for supper?” Lewis offered. “Edward is putting us up at the Rutland Arms for the night.”

“Outstanding idea,” Major Elliot beamed. “I could have easily put you in one the Chatsworth rooms had I known you were coming.”

“We’ll be there tomorrow,” Lewis smiled. “I think he wrote that we’d be staying in the Hunting Tower.”

“I say,” Major Elliot gasped. “I knew Edward had reserved the Hunting Tower, but I had no idea he had reserved it for you. I’ll make sure everything’s in order myself. You’ll find the tower has a splendid view of the valley.”

Major Elliot looked at Byron and me before explaining, “I’m the comptroller at the estate and responsible for the entire property. I have some errands to attend to right now, but perhaps we could have supper this evening.”

Lewis looked at Byron for his silent approval before saying, “That will be a great way to spend our first evening in England.”

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Looking at Byron, Major Elliot said, "I'll anxiously look forward to hearing some of your friend's exploits."

"See you then," Lewis said with a slight bow, as Major Elliot walked away from our carriage.

As the horse trotted away from the station, Byron asked, "What lies have you told about me, and why is this English fella so eager to question me?"

Lewis laughed, "I've told nothing but the truth. Devon is retired military and spent most of his years in the colonies. I think he identifies in some ways with our wild west. Edward, on the other hand is a gentleman that tries to invent adventure. What you would see as the drudgery of work they view as high adventure. These dime novels make men like you seem exotic. They have original manuscripts from William Shakespeare and William Caxton in the library at Chatsworth, yet read Zane Grey like it's an authentic depiction of the west—our west."

"He'll be disappointed," Byron stated. "The reality is less interesting than the fiction. He'd get better stories from you nephew."

"Maybe, but you'll be quite a celebrity here," Lewis said. With a sly grin he added, "Thank what they would have thought if I could've talked Tilghman into coming."

"Tilghman would never be talked into hunting a wolfman," Byron sighed.

Lewis laughed at his no-nonsense traveling companion. The carriage moved through a web of narrow, rock streets and across an ancient five arch bridge stretching over the serene Wye River. A large open market was empty and obviously closed for the day. A scattering of people walked leisurely on the town's cobblestone streets. Small rock houses crowded the narrow streets with short rock walls crowned with thick hedges above. The picturesque atmosphere seemed immersed in tranquility.

As we traveled through the small town, Byron watched the citizens on the street carefully.

"What's wrong?" Lewis asked, as he observed Byron's arching eyebrows.

"This seems familiar," he moaned.

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“What?” Lewis quizzed.

“Fear,” Byron explained. “I’ve seen it before.”

I stretched my neck out the side of the carriage trying to make the same observations that Byron had deduced. Although I was not experienced or particularly perceptive, even I could sense the anxiety in the eyes of the people, did not match the serenity of the landscape. We would soon learn the apprehension would magnify, as the full moon approached.

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CHAPTER 3

Our carriage clicked through the narrow streets of Bakewell. Uncle Lewis was prone to constant conversation, but he sat in quiet reflection. Byron Lattimore, had rarely traveled east of the Mississippi River and was admiring his surroundings before realizing his travel companion was uncharacteristically silent. Byron looked at me, but all I could do was shrug my shoulders.

Although Byron seemed to enjoy the rare pause in the typical chatter coming from Uncle Lewis, he asked, "What's buggin' you?"

"Huh?" the distracted Lewis answered.

"You're not one to stop and enjoy the scenery," Byron noted. "You haven't said a word since we left the train station. Baines up there is more talkative than you."

The regal butler rode stiffly with the driver up front and did not appear to hear the comment; although Byron was sure he heard every word.

"Just thinking," Lewis smiled.

"You're thinking awful hard," Byron coaxed. "Want to let us in on it?"

"I'm surprised Devon didn't know about my trip," Lewis confessed. "It's not a big deal, but I always saw him as such a close confidant to Edward."

"Humm," Byron hummed.

"What?" Lewis said as he lean close to his friend.

"You're right," Byron smiled. "That is no big deal."

Lewis leaned back in his seat at the teasing and mockingly gestured surrender at the sly insult.

"I think I'll catch a nap before dinner," Lewis shared. "How are you going to spend your afternoon?"

"First, I'm going to buy a different hat," Byron replied. "I figure if I can keep my mouth shut, maybe I'll fit in a little better."

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“You won’t have trouble keeping your mouth shut,” Lewis smirked. “I don’t know if we’ll be able to disguise that bowlegged strut of yours so well. How about you, Luke—what’s your agenda?”

I was somewhat intrigued by the prospect of unsupervised time as I replied, “I’ll probably take a look around town.”

“Don’t get in any trouble,” Lewis smiled.

Byron looked sternly at me and said, “I’ll keep an eye on him.”

The carriage slowed in front of an old, three-story, stone building that dominated a square in the center of the town. Above the single door entrance, a sign read, “Rutland Arms Hotel.” Baines took care of our arrangements and even scolded Byron kindly when he tried to carry his own baggage. Byron asked for directions to a shop that might sell hats. After settling in, Byron headed to town with me following behind. He did not say much, but we enjoyed a lazy afternoon in the small market town.

The sun was setting by suppertime. We were surprised to see Uncle Lewis dressed formally for dinner, but we quickly followed his example. By the time we entered the nicely furnished dining room at the Rutland Arms Hotel, Major Devon Elliot had already seated himself. The last beams of sunlight glowed off rich gold wall paper and the fine brass chandeliers hanging above were already lit for the evening. Major Devon Elliot was an imposing man with a barrel chest and neatly groomed mustache. His military demeanor was impossible to hide even though he had been retired for several years. One could tell he was accustomed to having his own way, which gave him a somewhat boorish personality.

“I took the liberty of ordering,” Major Elliot informed.

“I’m famished,” Lewis Abernathy vigorously replied. “Rested and ready to eat.”

We took our seats, as Major Elliot said, “I ordered a quarter lamb, fresh salad, tarts and jellies. Later we’ll have the specialty of the house—Bakewell pudding.”

“Does that work for you?” Lewis asked.

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I nodded as Byron replied, "I took a walk around town and can eat anything that doesn't eat back."

"You've switched hats," Major Elliot observed.

"Yeah," Byron sheepishly explained as he removed his cap. "I thought I would try to blend in a little more."

"You fellows must tell me about your trip," Major Elliot coaxed. "I was surprised to see you in Derbyshire."

"I have some business later this month in London," Lewis explained, "and decided to mix a little pleasure with business. My sister asked me to take her son on a trip and I needed to get Byron out to see a little of the world. I managed to talk him in to being my companion, and Luke hasn't been too much in the way, yet."

"Have you chased down all the outlaws?" Major Elliot teased.

"There's always outlaws," Byron responded, "but there seems to be more in the state legislature than the hideouts these days. I guess civilization is even taking over the wide-open spaces."

"Ah," Major Elliot sighed. "I remember the great prairie well. I think we were there in '04, Lewis."

"That's right," Lewis affirmed. "That's the year before the Miller Brothers took their show on the road. They're planning to come to England later this fall."

"To England?" Major Elliot replied.

"England, France, Germany," Lewis nodded. "They've leased a steamship to take the whole show to Europe."

"I will have to look the Miller brothers up when they arrive," Major Elliot stated.

"What did you think of the 101 Ranch?" Byron asked.

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“Outstanding,” Major Elliot replied. “I was disappointed to find there were so few buffalo left to hunt, but the wide open spaces and scenic sunsets reminded me of my days in Africa.”

“Africa?” Bryon asked.

Major Elliot nodded and continued, “I spent much of my adult life in the army and the last years in Sudan. I served under Lord Kitchener at the Battle of Omdurman. We had 8,000 British regulars and militia from Egypt and Sudan in the fight. Abdullah al-Taisha had 50,000 of the Mahdi’s men stood against us. They had plenty of fight but were not soldiers. At the end of the day, less than half of them retreated...it was a bloody mess.”

“I hadn’t heard your account of battle before,” Lewis noted. “That was just a few years ahead of your trip to America.”

“Five years,” Major Elliott affirmed. “I had seen the pyramids of Egypt and the head waters of the Nile and about any other of the wonders of Africa. Colonel Wyman served in the regiment. He wasn’t a professional soldier like myself, but a valiant man none the less. Several of the old regiment retired to Derbyshire, probably because of the Colonel. He’s had business relationships with the Duke of Devonshire and he has an estate north of Chatsworth near Castleton. Colonel Wyman was anxious to give young Edward an adventure, and asked me to escort him to America. Edward always had an appreciation for the Wild West he read about in the books. The trip was exceeding entertaining for the both of us.”

“You’re an adventurer,” Byron said.

Major Elliott shrugged and replied, “I’ve seen a lot of the Empire, but by the time we put Abdullah al-Taisha down, my time was up. I was ready for a more leisurely life, and Colonel Wyman arrange for me to be the comptroller at Chatsworth. Although I served with the Colonel, Edward is closer to my age than his father and I think of him as the little brother I never had.”

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“Sounds like Byron and me,” Lewis smiled. “He’s like that big brooding brother that I have to nag to have a good time.”

“I shouldn’t be boring you with my stories,” Major Elliot apologized. “I’m really more interest in your tales, Mr. Lattimore.”

“There’s not much to tell,” Byron assured.

“Not from what I’ve read,” Major Elliot replied.

“You can’t believe all you read,” Byron said.

“He’s being modest,” Lewis interrupted. “Byron rode with the Three Guardsman and helped hunt down the Wild Bunch. He was with Tilghman when he arrested Bill Doolin!”

“Tilghman did all the work,” Byron assessed. “Tilghman learned Doolin was using an alias and figured out he’d be travelin’ to Eureka Springs to treat a foot that got shot the year before. I was barely more than a kid and nothing more than a deputy to Marshall Tilghman.”

“You’re not telling the rest of the story,” Lewis beamed. “Doolin escaped and Byron rode with Heck Thomas out of Lawton. Byron got the shot that put Doolin down.”

There was a moment of silence before Byron said, “There were so many bullet holes in Bill Doolin—you couldn’t say who killed him.”

“Everyone says yours was the first,” Lewis said.

“It must be a difficult thing to see a man shot down,” Major Elliot noted. “I’ve seen hundreds...maybe thousands die in battle, but I was never sure my shot was one that counted.”

Byron took a drink and wiped his mouth before saying, “Killin’ a man’s a terrible thing...the kind of think you never get out of your mind. The Wild Bunch was a bad lot. A murderin’ robbin’ gang that caused terror and grief wherever they rode. They had to be hunted down and I was proud to do it, but that don’t mean it was easy.”

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“Things are more settle now,” Lewis claimed. “Although, some of these oil towns could give the old Dalton and Doolin Gangs a run for their money.”

“I particularly like the Indians at the 101 Ranch,” Major Elliot noted. “I was surprised to see them so peaceful and complacent. I’ve had experience with taming the indigenous population before, and I was quite impressed with how submissive the red-man has become.”

“The 101 Ranch is on Ponca land,” Byron explained. “I’m afraid much of the fight has been taken out of them by disease, hunger, and killin’ through the years.”

“As a lawman you must take some pride in their conquest?” Major Elliot asked. “Surly you’ve had your battle with the Indians and had to put them in their place.”

Byron Lattimore’s neck turned red and he tried to breath in enough air to keep his voice calm as he said, “I’ve never drawn a gun on any man—white, red, or black that hadn’t broken the law. There’s some can’t say that, but I can go to sleep at night knowing it.”

With his nostrils still flaring slightly, Byron said, “You’ll have to excuse me. I’ve had a long day of travel and think I’ll go to bed now. Good night.”

With a stoic tilt of his head, Byron Lattimore left us at the table as deserts were being served.

“I say,” Major Elliot sighed. “I believe I must have offended the fellow in someway.”

“He’ll be okay, Devon,” Lewis explained. “Byron’s part Indian himself.”

“I didn’t know,” Major Elliot replied. “I just thought the sun had tanned his skin.”

Lewis added, “His wife was also a Choctaw—a beautiful woman with raven hair and a kind spirit. She died two winters ago and Byron’s not gotten over it.”

“Byron’s a Choctaw Indian?” Major Elliot clarified.

“No,” Uncle Lewis said. “He was raised by a retired military man in Colorado—a white man. Byron’s not had much to do with his Indian heritage I don’t think, but he’s still sensitive to injustice and more than a few of his friends have been taken advantage of. Byron met his wife and had retired from

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law enforcement to move to a farm she had near Talihina in the Winding Stairs Mountains back home. He helped her family fight to reclaim some property that speculators had tried to get.”

“I didn’t know,” Major Elliot lamented.

“You couldn’t have,” Lewis affirmed. “He’ll be alright. Luke, why don’t you turn in for the night and check on Byron. Major Elliot and I have a few more things to discuss.”

“Good to meet you, Luke,” Major Elliot smiled beneath his thick mustache.

I nodded and left the two men to their conversation. I saw Byron standing outside the crowded dining room in the more serene lobby of the Rutland Arms Hotel. The crimson room featured a large fireplace with a beveled mirror hanging over it. Byron looked at himself in the mirror for a second and frowned. I suspected that he was fretting about the lack of composure he had shown in his conversation with Major Elliot. I could not avoid him, but had no idea what to say. Before I could decide, however, a young man burst through the entrance with a sense of great urgency.

The young man, who appeared to be a few years older than I, could not have been more than twenty. He looked around the empty lobby before awkwardly sprinting into the dining room. Byron looked at me as we listened to the crowded dining hall react to the young man’s interruption before it becoming eerily quiet. In a moment, we saw Major Elliot step forcefully through the lobby and toward the door. Uncle Lewis and the young man followed.

“What going on?” Byron asked.

Major Elliot did not respond, but Lewis replied, “There’s been another attack. You better get your pistol.”

Byron pulled back his jacket to reveal a shoulder holster.

“Come on!” Lewis pleaded.

Byron nodded subtly for me to follow as Major Elliot ordered his driver to bring the carriage. In a moment, we were rushing through the streets of Bakewell.

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“Sorry about before,” Major Elliot apologized to Byron. “I didn’t know.”

“It was my fault,” Byron assured. “It’s been a hard year. Tell me what’s going on.”

“Tell him what you know, Dwayne,” Major Elliot instructed to the boy riding with them.

The nervous boy replied, “Miss Headley was attacked this evening—by the beast—just outside of Bakewell.”

“Miss Headley?” Lewis asked.

“Katherine Headley,” Major Elliot explained with a frown. “She’s an artist of some reputation in Derbyshire—good and bad, I’m afraid.”

“Is she hurt?” Byron asked.

“According to the babbling account I’ve received so far, no,” Major Elliot answered. “Say again exactly what happened, Dwayne, and be precise.”

The young man caught his breath and said, “Miss Headley was headed to the train station about an hour after dark, sir. She was walking from her cottage in Pilsley.”

“So far in the dark?” Major Elliot questioned.

“Yes,” the young man assured. “It’s nearly half hour in the light and a little longer in the night. Miss Headley likes to walk when the weather’s warm and besides—”

The young man hesitated nervously and said, “She had a ride for the trip back.”

“Explain,” Major Elliot demanded.

“She was to meet Edward Wyman,” Dwayne timidly explained. “He was taking the midnight train from London.”

“Good Lord,” Major Elliot gasped.

“Why is that significant?” Lewis asked.

Major Elliot looked at the boy before saying, “I’ll explain later. Where is Katherine now?”

“Back in Pilsley,” Dwayne explained.

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“Is the woman harmed?” Byron asked.

The young man shook his head and said, “No, she’s fine. Miss Headley carried a pistol and shot the beast twice.”

“She killed it?” Byron clarified.

“I’m afraid not,” the young man said. “At least they haven’t found anything yet. It’s an evil beast, sir. It’s caused nothing but terror in the region since spring.”

“Take us to Pilsley!” Major Elliot shouted to the driver.

The driver of the carriage whipped the two black horses as they sped into the darkness.

“Where exactly was Miss Headley attacked?” Major Elliot asked.

“Less than a mile from Bakewell,” Dwayne answered. “Close to the links.”

“Good God!” Major Elliot exclaimed. “So close to town.”

“This makes four attacks?” Lewis asked.

“Five,” Major Elliot corrected.

“What!” Lewis exclaimed. “I had been told three before tonight and one had gotten away. When did the fifth happen?”

“In truth, the fifth was probably the first,” Major Elliot explained. “Sheepherders moving flocks up into the peaks for summer found a rope-maker that look as if he had been dead for a time...possibly before the first attack.”

“What kind of beast is it?” Byron asked.

Major Elliot shook his head and said, “Your guess is equal to mine, but the villagers say it’s a werewolf—some kind of man beast.”

“Why would they say that?” Byron questioned. “Is there wolf problem in Derbyshire.”

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“Not in three hundred years,” Major Elliot replied. “That’s the perplexing thing. It seems to be a large beast of some kind not native to our lands. Whatever it is, it’s cunning. I’ve tracked it myself and it vanishes into the night. It seems to know when to run, when to attack—it thinks like a man.”

“Nothing vanishes without cause,” Byron noted.

“I agree,” Major Elliot said, “thus the mystery.”

“Let me get the facts square,” Lewis said with a twisted look to his face. “Exactly who has been attacked and where?”

Major Elliot nodded and said, “A drunken man was killed outside Baslow last April. A highwayman was attacked and killed in June on the road outside of Chesterfield to the east. The last attack occurred near Rowley to the south killing a farmer’s daughter who had wandered out of the house at night to meet a boy. Of course, there’s the body they found near Castleton further north. They don’t know when that tragedy occurred, but only found the body last week.”

“None survived the attacks until tonight?” Byron asked.

“Well,” Major Elliot hedged. “About two weeks ago a young girl—actually a maid servant of Miss Headley was—well the young girl claimed to have seen the beast, but her account seemed unreliable.”

“Why?” Byron inquired.

“The girl was frantic and said the beast had glowing eyes and stood upright like a man,” Major Elliot replied. “She said the beast was seven feet tall and shriek at her maniacally. The girl claimed she screamed and the beast left. She’s the only one who claims to have seen the beast and survived—at least until tonight. Frankly, her story seems too exaggerated and fantastic to take seriously.”

“Where did her sighting happen?” Byron asked.

“In the moors east of Chatsworth,” Major Elliot replied.

“I have no sense of direction or distance,” Byron confessed. “Maybe you can draw me a map in the morning.”

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Major Elliot nodded and looked worriedly into the night. Over the hilltop the sparse lights from the small village of Pilsley glimmered against the dark countryside. The smaller village of Edensor was less than a half mile from Pilsley and it had even fewer lights.

“We’re almost there,” Major Elliot informed.

“So soon?” Byron asked.

Lewis smiled and said, “You’ll have to get used to everything in England being compact. The countryside looks vast and lonely, but a village or town or estate is usually close by.”

The carriage slid to a stop by a small, but neat rock home on the edge of the village. Byron looked down the lonely street and could see one store, a pub, and a school. The entire village could be seen from the step of the carriage. The place looked empty, except for a clamor of people around the small rock house.

Major Elliot bullied his way through the crowd while we followed him into the house. Dwayne stayed outside with the rest of the villagers to speculate about the events of the night.

“Miss Headley!” Major Elliot greeted. “Are you hurt?”

Before me stood the most striking woman I had ever seen. She appeared to be in her late twenties and was in the full vibrancy of life. Her thick, dark hair looked as if it were silk as it bounced on her graceful shoulders. The hair was pulled back slightly, but was trimmed in the front to frame her high cheekbones and refined features. Quizzical green eyes flashed under her delicate eyebrows. Her full, lustrous lips seemed to be in a perpetual state of skepticism, and her pleasant smile was guarded, indicating she could entertain and torment with equal ease. A small narrow nose had an air of nobility, but her demeanor was more common and approachable.

Katherine Headley paced angrily across the front room while an older woman attempted to get her to sit down. A young girl close to my age cried in the corner.

“I’m fine,” Katherine replied with a tone of determination.

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“Major Elliot,” the older woman interjected. “Can you convince Miss Headley to sit down and recuperate? I’m afraid she’ll soon faint from fright.”

Major Elliot studied the scene for a moment and replied, “She doesn’t seem in immediate danger of the fainting.”

“I’ve got my wits about me and am in no danger of fainting,” Katherine Headley confirmed. “Louise, go to bed. I’ll be fine.”

The older woman, who obviously lived in the house, nodded obediently and left the group.

“You too, Alice,” Katherine instructed to the young girl sobbing in the corner.

Alice looked as if she might protest, but also left still sniveling into a handkerchief.

“I apologize for the commotion,” Katherine Headley said in a more calm tone of voice. “I’m fine, really. Poor Louise is my cook and worries too much, and Alice the maid is prone to invent excuses to become frantic.”

“From reports I’ve heard, there’s cause for worry,” Major Elliot noted.

Katherine took a deep breath and replied, “Perhaps you’re right, but I don’t see how losing my wits will help any situation.”

I was immediately infatuated by her calm, determination, and beauty. I could hardly take my eyes off her and listened intently for her words that sounded like music.

“Katherine Headley, I would like to introduce you to Lewis Abernathy and Byron Lattimore,” Major Elliot introduced. “And this is Lewis’s nephew—Luke.”

“So good to meet you,” I stammered.

Major Elliot was briefly confused by my inept and overly zealous introduction, until he said, “They’re here for vacation and offered to join me tonight.”

“Good to meet you,” Lewis greeted.

Byron stood speechless and matched my awkwardness as he clumsily nodded.

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“Americans?” Katherine asked, although my accent was apparent.

We nodded in affirmation.

“Sorry to spoil your visit with this nonsense,” Katherine said.

“We’re glad your okay,” Lewis offered. “We were concerned for your wellbeing, Miss Headley, after young Dwayne’s report.”

“Please call me Katherine,” the woman admonished. “In fact, Kate is what my friends call me.”

“This is not nonsense,” Major Elliot redirected. “This is the sixth attack since spring we know of and never so close to town.”

Katherine Headley absorbed the Major’s scolding and took a seat looking out of the window.

“Tell us what happened,” Major Elliot coaxed. “My friends are experienced hunters and maybe they’ll have a fresh take on this mess.”

The woman sighed deeply, as if collecting her thoughts, and said, “I was walking to Bakewell to meet the train—”

“To meet Edward,” Major Elliot firmly interrupted.

“Do you want to hear what happened, or the town’s gossip,” Katherine bluntly replied.

Major Elliot was temporarily caught off guard by the question, but then replied, “Tell the story.”

“I left about an hour past dark,” she continued. “It was a pleasant evening, and I planned on riding back—with Edward.”

She hesitated to see if Major Elliot would challenge her on that fact, before saying, “As I approached the links, something seemed out of sorts.”

“What was it?” the anxious Major Elliot asked.

“I’m not sure,” Katherine answered as she seemed to be trying to recall the incident. “A sound maybe—maybe a feeling. I remember hearing a cry or a—howl, but not really an animal howl, more

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human. Or maybe it was just the rustling of the ground as the creature ran. I can't fully remember, but I recall being on alert when I saw it."

"What?" Major Elliot and Uncle Lewis asked almost in unison.

"It was an animal," Katherine determined. "A frightening animal that hunkered down when it faced me. I must have been thirty steps away when it seemed to swell its neck, and appeared close to charging. I sensed it was about to attack, so I fired a shot, and the beast did not move. I took deliberate aim and fired a second time before the animal fled. I ran to the train station, which was closer than my house. Dwayne Blackmore was there with his father. Mr. Blackmore saw I was unhurt and drove me home and sent Dwayne to get you."

"What kind of animal approached you?" Lewis asked.

"I honestly don't know," Katherine replied.

"Can you describe it?" Lewis coaxed.

Katherine thought for a moment and replied, "It was brownish and looked somewhat like a large dog, but not exactly. It had a mane."

"Like a lion?" Major Elliot interrupted.

"No," Katherine responded. "I don't think so. It was dark. It almost appeared to stand, but I'm sure it was on four legs. Almost like a bear, but again I don't know. I will never forget the teeth as long as I live, however—sharp, broad teeth that growled fiercely at me. It made an unnatural snarl at me—almost a scream. Whatever it was, it was big...much bigger than I."

"What the devil were you doing out in the countryside alone at night?" Major Elliot scolded.

"I told you," Katherine calmly replied. "I had an appointment at the train station."

"I know that," he defended. "This is not the first attack and you should know better than to be in countryside alone after dark."

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Katherine nodded in agreement, but defended, “I know, but I’ve grown up in these moors and hills. I know them and feel safe. The other attacks have come close to a full moon, and tonight is hardly more than the first quarter moon. Perhaps it wasn’t the best judgment, but I’m not exactly harmless. You should know that, Major.”

Major Elliot appeared flustered by her answer, so Byron asked, “Do you always carry a weapon?”

Katherine looked at the large pistol sitting on a table and said, “Not until recently. Edward thought it would be best if I had protection. He gave me the pistol last month.”

Miss Headley looked directly at me, as I was caught staring at her. She did not say anything, but instead turned slowly and purposefully toward Byron and asked, “You’re a quiet, Mr. Lattimore. I wonder if it’s because you are a stranger to our village, or think this talk of a murderous beast boring, or—have I done something to offend you by word or reputation.”

Byron was stunned at Katherine Headley’s directness as he mumbled, “I’m—I’m just—thinking.”

I had spent the past weeks with Byron Lattimore and although he was prone to long periods of silence, I had not observed him as tongue-tied and surly as he appeared this evening.

Lewis quickly tried to help his friend by saying, “Byron’s recovering from his first ocean voyage and is trying to get his bearings.”

Katherine responded to Lewis, but did not take her eyes off a nervous Byron as she said, “That’s quite understandable, Mr. Abernathy. I often find myself disagreeable after a long trip.”

Byron cleared his throat clumsily and said in a more composed tone, “I didn’t mean to be rude or—unpleasant. I’m trying to imagine a woman—frightened by the night—missing a shot at the close range you described.”

Katherine Headley’s neck flashed slightly pink, as she replied, “If you get to know me better, Mr. Lattimore, you’ll find I’m not a woman that is frightened by the night.”

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Major Elliot looked as if he would like to redirect the conversation, but before he could formulate a question, a harsh knock interrupted the conversation. As we stared at the closed door, another urgent knock persuaded Katherine Headley to step toward the entrance.

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CHAPTER 4

“Mr. Metcalf,” Katherine Headley greeted with a thinly veiled tone of contempt. “What on earth would bring you to Pilsley?”

A sturdy man in his early thirties entered with a clergyman following.

“I heard there was another attack,” the man replied as he carefully surveyed the other persons in the room.

“You’ll be distressed to find, I’m unhurt,” Katherine noted.

The man did not reply, but continued to look at us, as if calculating our intent.

“You’re a far piece from Newbury Estate,” Major Elliot noted.

“How are you doing, Major?” the man greeted. “I was here to meet the train in Bakewell.”

“That’s a coincidence,” Major Elliot replied. “Miss Headley—”

“Has had an eventful day,” Katherine Headley interrupted. “I can assure all of you upstanding men that this frail little woman is quite alright.”

Major Elliot studied the situation for a moment before saying, “You’re right of course, it has been a long day for you, I’m sure. Gentlemen, there’s a pub still open where we can discuss this matter without disturbing Miss Headley.”

Katherine Headley did not look frail, injured, or distraught by her experience. She did appear anxious to have the male visitors leave, and the men complied, as we began filing out the door.

Before exiting, Mr. Metcalf said in a clear tone, “I was here to meet Edward Wyman and Lady Ashford who were traveling on the night train from London. I’m sure they arrived by now and are on their way to Chatsworth.”

I trailed the others and witnessed Katherine Headley’s calm response to that information.

“Good evening, Miss Headley,” Byron said, as he left. “It was good to meet you.”

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“I wish it could have been under more civil circumstances, Mr. Lattimore,” she replied. “You have a good night.”

Katherine Headley closed the door and we followed the group down the street to the Devonshire Inn less than a block away. The place was crowded so we stopped at the entrance since the night was mild.

“I suppose I need to make introductions,” Major Elliot observed. “Colin Metcalf, Vicar Russell, I’d like to introduce you to my American friends, Lewis Abernathy and his nephew Luke—and Mr. Byron Lattimore.”

The men nodded to each other as Major Elliot continued, “Colin is a sergeant from my old regiment and works for Colonel Wyman at Newbury Estate north of here. Vicar Russell is also from the regiment and served as chaplain. He now serves the St. Peter’s in Edensor as priest.”

“Edensor is less than a half mile down the road,” the priest explained. “Pilsley has the pub and Edensor has the church.”

“Good to meet you,” Lewis greeted. “We were in Bakewell for the evening when this excitement occurred. We’re here for some hunting and sightseeing.”

Colin Metcalf ignored Lewis Abernathy’s explanation and said to Major Elliot, “We’ve got to put a party together and hunt this beast tonight.”

“Yes, yes,” Major Elliot agreed. “I suppose you’re right.”

“Of course, I’m right,” the brash man replied. “The trail is getting cold while we wait. We should not delay.”

“What do you think, boys?” Major Elliot asked as he looked at Byron Lattimore and Lewis Abernathy.

Uncle Lewis looked like he was about to agree, when Byron said, “I don’t think it’s a good idea.”

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“What!” Colin Metcalf replied, nearly shouting. “This beast has killed three and attacked two more. It would seem less than chivalrous to delay.”

Byron looked at the man for a moment and replied, “Maybe for you. I’m not familiar with this land or its terrain. I’d prefer to get some sleep, secure a good horse, and start tracking in the light of day. I don’t think tramping around in the dark will do much good. Seems to me most people are on alert after the attack on Miss Headley, and are safe till morning.”

“That’s a fine thing for you to say!” Colin Metcalf bellowed. “Miss Headley should not have been on the moors tonight, but since she has provoked an attack, I feel it’s my duty to exploit the situation and find the beast tonight.”

“That’s your choice,” Byron calmly noted.

“You won’t help?” Colin Metcalf asked.

“Not tonight,” Byron answered. “I’ll be of no use.”

“And what of you, Major?” Colin inquired.

Major Elliot gave a contemptible glare to the young Colin Metcalf and said, “I’m not equipped for a hunt at the moment. I’ll have to agree with Mr. Lattimore, the morning makes some sense.”

“That’s nonsense to me!” Colin boldly proclaimed. “I’m ready and willing. Get your rest and I’ll have the beast by the time you wake.”

Without giving the Major a chance to respond, Colin Metcalf marched into the crowded pub.

“Colin’s a strong-willed and impulsive man,” Vicar Russell explained, as he stood with Major Elliot, Lewis, and Byron in front of the pub. “But he is passionate, and it’s hard to fault that.”

“Colin’s headstrong and impulsive,” Major Elliot added. “I served with him in Africa and that’s his way. He’s an outstanding hunter—I’ve accompanied him many time on safari and he’s more than capable.”

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A roar erupted inside the pub and soon energetic young men began filling the street. In a moment, Colin Metcalf marched out, and the mob followed him into the darkness carrying lanterns and flashlights.

“He’s a natural leader, as well,” Major Elliot observed, as the group move into the countryside.

“Maybe this will be the end of it,” Vicar Russell said, as the street began to quiet down.

“What do you make of these attacks, Vicar?” Lewis asked. “You minister to these people, what do they think?”

The Vicar shook his head and said, “I served as an army chaplain for many years and try to avoid the superstitions that I witnessed in the wilder parts of the empire. This situation is a mystery to me, however. I know my parish thinks the beast is from the devil, someway, and that there’s some method to the madness of these attacks. I too, now believe the sins of some my have brought this ungodly beast upon us.”

“What do you mean?” Lewis questioned.

“I hear the word werewolf whispered more than once,” Vicar Russell replied. “I scolded the first person I heard spreading that theory, but after five months, it’s hard to dispel.”

The men listened silently as the street was now vacant and the mob had left the village to the place where Katherine Headley had been attacked.

“Anyway, it’s late and I’m going to bed,” the Vicar stated. “Goodnight to you gentlemen and I hope the remainder of you trip is more recreational.”

“Good to meet you,” Lewis replied.

The Vicar walked down the street toward a small residential area.

“The preacher doesn’t live in his village?” Byron asked.

Major Elliot shook his head and said, “In the daylight you’ll see there’s only a few fields separating the two villages, and they are very much connected. Edensor has the church and Pilsley has

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the school and most of the houses. Are you gentlemen ready to return to Bakewell. I'm convinced we're doing no good here tonight."

The travelers nodded in agreement and boarded their carriage for the short trip to the hotel.

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CHAPTER 6

Byron, Lewis, Major Elliot and myself rode toward Bakewell at a leisurely pace. It was past midnight and the carriage was quiet. Lanterns could be seen as small groups prowled the hilly countryside. Byron looked over the dark landscape and assumed the largest group was led by Colin Metcalf.

“On the trip out, you said something peculiar,” Byron said, as his brow wrinkled in deep thought.

“What?” Major Elliot asked.

“When the boy said Miss Headley was going to see Edward, you seemed—displeased,” Byron observed.

Major Elliot cleared his throat and struggled for a response before saying, “I didn’t want to talk in front of the boy. Miss Headley has a somewhat checkered past, but has cast a spell on Edward, I’m afraid.”

“I can see why,” Lewis noted. “She’s pretty as a magazine cover—”

“Did you notice—” Byron began to ask.

Lewis interrupted him and said, “Yes.”

“What?” I asked.

“Never mind,” Lewis smirked, as Byron looked strangely at me, as if he were afraid Lewis might answer me. “She’s a beautiful woman and let’s leave it at that. Besides, you’re too young to be ogling women like you did tonight.”

“I didn’t do anything,” I tried to protest, although Katherine Headley had completely bewitched me during our brief introduction.

Byron looked strangely into the dark night, as Lewis laughed and said to me, “I can’t blame your taste.”

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“I can’t argue that,” Major Elliot replied. “I doubt there’s a more fetching young woman in Derbyshire. She’s maybe a little too outspoken for a woman, but besides that, I have nothing against Katherine. But in regards to Edward, things are more complicated.”

“Explain,” Lewis requested, sensing the Major was hesitant to speak about the relationship.

“You Americans would have a hard time understanding,” Major Elliot responded. “There’s a certain order to the British social affairs. There’s a peerage of nobility that has existed for centuries. Chatsworth House where I’m comptroller has belonged to the Cavendish family since before the first ships sailed to Jamestown in North America. These noble families control finances and in the past the empire itself. The generations are educated and prepared for nobility. I know it make no sense from your perspective, but the peerage of nobility has certain responsibilities and that fact is more or less accepted.”

“So, if you’re not of noble birth, you’re kept in your place?” Byron asked.

“Not at all,” Major Elliot defended. “You still make it on your own merits. I was born to a good family—certainly with no title, but with the opportunity to serve in his majesty’s army for a full career. Chatsworth is owned by the Duke of Devonshire and they’re involved in the high politics of the country. The recently deceased 8th Duke was three times suggested to be Prime Minister so you see these titles are not without merit. Edward’s father, Colonel Wyman is from a prominent family who has made a fortune mining lead in Derbyshire, but they are not in the peerage. Lady Ashford, however, is the niece to the 9th Duke of Derbyshire and Colonel Wyman has long maneuvered for the young lady to be matched with Edward—and I believe the young lady does indeed have a liking for Edward. It would be a very favorable marriage for the Wyman family and with the economic condition being what they are at Chatsworth, it would be a good match for Lady Ashford.”

“You’re right,” Bryon huffed. “None of this makes sense to me. If Edward’s a grown man, looks to me like he could make his own decisions.”

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“That he can,” Major Elliot assured. “That’s what the high drama has been about since it was first suggested that Edward had been spending time with Miss Headley. They became an item the first of the year when Edward took her away for a New Year’s trip to London. Miss Headley’s mother was reputed to be a mistress to one of the Duke’s relatives although it was never concluded who. At any rate the current Duke has honored her property right to the small house in Pilsley although Colonel Wyman petitioned vigorously to have her evicted—from all of Derbyshire, if he had his way.”

“What happened?” Byron inquired.

“As I said, the nobility provide a social order and the Duke has honored the agreement,” Major Elliot explained. “Miss Headley has stayed close to Chatsworth, much to the displeasure of the Colonel. I have nothing against the woman, but I do have a loyalty to the Colonel and feel somewhat caught in the middle when Edward pays her his attentions.”

“Earlier you said she was a woman of reputation—both good and bad,” Lewis remembered.

“What did you mean?”

“You’ve heard the bad,” Major Elliot explained. “Her family has no standing, she’s outspoken almost to the realm of disrespect, and she’s been a distraction to Edward the past months. She also is a gifted artist and has secured commissions throughout Derbyshire. She primarily paints landscapes of the Peaks District, but also does some portraits. I believe Miss Headley has secured a commission to paint the portraits of a well-to-do family in Chesterfield. As you’ve probably already observed, Katherine Headley is an impressive and accomplished woman—for being so common.”

Lewis Abernathy smiled broadly and said, “I can see her attraction. I may have to compete with Edward for Miss Headley’s attentions—I think I could tolerate her outspokenness.”

“You would find fine favor in Colonel Wyman’s eyes, if you could to that.” Major Elliot observed. “I’ll warn you, however, you wouldn’t be the first man crushed by the allure of Katherine Headley.”

The carriage arrived at the Rutland Arms Hotel and Major Elliot left us in the safety of its lobby.

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“Luke, go on to bed,” Lewis instructed. “I’ll be up in a few minutes.”

I nodded and walked out of sight, but stopped close enough to hear Lewis ask, “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Bryon replied.

“It was remarkable,” Lewis comforted. “She looked just like—”

“I know,” Bryon sighed, “but I’m fine.”

Although anxious to discover the subject of their conversation, I did not want to be caught spying, so I reluctantly went to my room. Our first day in England was different than I had expected, filled with mystery and promised adventure. As I fell asleep, I looked forward to seeing the countryside around Chatsworth but my thoughts were filled with Miss Katherine Headley.

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CHAPTER 7

“Are you going to sleep all morning?” Byron Lattimore asked, as I woke from a deep sleep.

“No,” I muttered.

“Get up and at ‘em then,” Byron instructed. “Lewis has gone to the telegraph office to do some business. Let’s go explore the town.

I dressed quickly, more excited that Bryon Lattimore had asked me to accompany him than I was to see the town. We walked lazily around town admiring the quaint streets, rolling hills, rock walls surrounding most houses, and the neatly groomed hedges. Byron was silent and only occasionally commented on the architecture or layout of the town. I desperately wanted to ask him about the previous night’s conversation, but did not have the nerve. When we returned to the hotel, a long, white automobile with a black roof, red spoke wheels, and red leather seats was parked in front of the hotel. The hood ornament had the silver form of a woman leaning forward with outstretched arms resembling wings, which gave the car a rich and regal appearance.

As we approached, Lewis Abernathy talked with a tall young man with wavy black hair, blue eyes, and a face with handsome features.

“They’re here,” Lewis said, as we approached. “Edward this is my friend, Byron Lattimore and my nephew Luke.”

“Mr. Lattimore needs little introduction!” Edward Wyman exclaimed. “I’ve read about your exploits many times.”

“Can’t believe everything in a book,” Bryon awkwardly replied. “It’s good to meet you.”

“A pleasure to meet you,” Edward said, as he firmly shook Byron’s hand. “I’m sorry I missed you chaps yesterday. I had something turn up in London that I had to attend to, but I’m all yours today.”

“Devon was good entertainment,” Lewis assured.

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“Good,” Edward smiled in his pleasant way. “I’ll have Baines move your luggage to the place I’ve rented for you. It’s in the hills above Chatsworth House. The scenery will be magnificent and there’ll be good hunting.”

“For wolves?” Lewis asked.

Edward looked as if he were forcing himself to maintain his smile when he said, “I understand you had a late time of it last night due our beast.”

Lewis shrugged his shoulders while Byron watched the young Englishman carefully.

“It’s been quite a business,” Edward said shaking his head. “It’s got people around here on edge to say the least.”

Lewis Abernathy looked at Byron before saying, “We could tell.”

“Why don’t we take a ride to the cottage?” Edward suggested, as he looked at the sparsely occupied street. “We can talk about it on the way. Baines will take care of your luggage.”

Edward motioned us to enter the car, and we slowly headed down the narrow streets of Bakewell across the Wry Bridge. When we passed the golf course, the narrow streets were replaced by a gravel, single-lane road that moved through rolling hills and green pastures.

“Tell us about these attacks, Edward,” Lewis prodded as we drove through the placid countryside.

“Three killed since spring,” Edward sighed. “All within walking distance of Chatsworth House.”

“Major Elliot said there had been four deaths and five attacks before last night,” Byron quizzed.

“Yes,” Edward nodded. “I forget about the poor chap they found up by Castleton.”

“How far is Castleton?” Byron asked.

“A couple of hours by horse,” the Englishman explained. “It’s closer to the Dark Peaks.”

“Dark Peaks?” Bryon responded with a raised eyebrow.

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Edward smiled before saying, “I know it sounds ominous, but this whole area is known as the Peaks District. The southern section you’re seeing now is known as the White Peaks where you’ll find our good soil and rolling hills. The Dark Peaks are covered with millstone grit—a dark peat-like soil. The White Peaks are mainly limestone. Castleton is on the edge with rugged rock formations and extensive caves. North of there, it’s mainly empty moorlands and very few people. Most of the mining is in the Dark Peaks, which is why my family’s estate is located there.”

“What do you think is causing these attacks?” Lewis asked.

Without hesitation, Edward said, “A werewolf.”

Byron and Lewis looked at each other; surprised by the quick answer.

“You think I’m crazy,” Edward smiled.

“No,” Lewis assured.

“What would make you think it’s a werewolf?” the more stoic Byron asked.

Edward swallowed hard before saying, “I’ve seen it.”

“What!” Lewis exclaimed.

“I haven’t exactly seen the beast,” Edward explained. “I have only seen its tracks.”

In a dubious tone, Byron said, “Last time I checked an encyclopedia, I didn’t see any images of a werewolf, unicorn, or man-beast. What exactly, does a werewolf look like?”

After a heavy sigh, Edward said, “I can appreciate your refusal to accept my observation. It is a fantastic and absurd claim, but I have seen the tracks.”

“Excuse my skepticism,” Byron replied, “but I’ve tracked man and beast. It’s always served me well to focus on the facts and not my assumptions.”

“That’s fair,” Edward said. “We tracked the beast after the last attack and felt as if we were close to confronting it. At a soft spot by the road I observed a pair of prints that looked to be from a large dog—a wolf most likely, although I’ve personally never seen one. Next I saw a matching set of

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prints only larger. Those prints transformed into a sight I will never forget. The wolf's print became elongated—nearly a foot long. Finally, we lost track of the beast's tracks and were left with a clear footprint of a man."

"Unbelievable," Lewis gasped.

"I agree," Edward replied. "But I saw it with my own eyes."

"Can you show me?" Byron asked.

"I can show you the place," Edward said, "but I'm afraid the tracks are swept away with a heavy rain that fell the next night."

"I would still like to see the place," Byron said. "In fact, I would like to see all the attack sights if that's okay?"

Edward smiled and said, "So you are intrigued, Mr. Lattimore?"

"A little," Byron confessed. "Did you take impressions of the prints?"

"I'm afraid we didn't," Edward sighed. "I can draw you a sketch, however."

Byron nodded and asked, "Who else saw these tracks?"

Edward thought for a moment and then said, "Devon was with me—and Winston Sherry, the constable over at Chesterfield. Colin Metcalf joined us and Vicar Russell as well."

"Any photographs of the scenes?" Byron quizzed.

"No," Edward lamented. "We got the hunting dogs out last time, but they lost the scent at the place I found the footprints."

"Do you think it would be possible to stop by and interview, Miss Headley?" Byron asked. "I see the village ahead and we didn't get much of an opportunity last night after Mr. Metcalf and the Vicar dropped by."

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Edward's casual smile failed him slightly at this request and he squirmed before saying, "That may be difficult. Kate is a fairly headstrong woman. If she had a run in with Colin Metcalf and the Vicar she's probably in less than a cordial mood this morning."

"Would that have anything to do with your traveling companion last night?" Lewis asked in a teasing tone.

"I gather you've deduced some of the story," Edward sighed. "I had heard that Colin let it slip that I was returning with Melanie Ashford last night."

"I didn't get the impression he let anything slip," Byron observed. "I seemed like he informed her on purpose—and with some enjoyment."

"Colin Metcalf and Kate don't see things eye-to-eye," Edward informed. "She and Vicar Russell have had less than hospitable words in the past as well."

Lewis laughed and said, "It sounds like you've been juggling your women—and given one of them a gun to boot!"

"Yes," Edward admitted. "I'm aggravated at Kate for walking alone in this country with this beast on the prowl. Thank goodness I gave her that gun. I will have some fences to mend and I think that might be easier without trying to cross-examine her about last night's events."

"The attack or the traveling companion?" Lewis asked.

"Both," Edward replied. "Look! You can see Chatsworth now."

Lewis and Byron looked out the car across the rolling, manicured hills to a palatial house set against thickly wooded hills behind it. The expansive home featured a grayish stone exterior with a peaceful river in front.

"Wow!" I exclaimed. "It's huge."

Lewis said, "I told you it was something. Major Elliot is the manager of the entire property and will give us a detailed tour."

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“What’s that green banner hanging out front?” Byron asked.

Edward glanced at the expansive house before saying, “That means Lady Ashford is in residence. Whenever a member of the Cavendish family is at the house, they appropriate insignia is in place. These great houses entertain tourist as much as they’re used for residence and the banner helps protect some of the family’s privacy.”

“I see,” Byron said.

“In fact, I’ve schedule a dinner with Lady Ashford tonight for you,” Edward smiled. “She’s the niece of the Duke and can provide an extensive array of trivia about Chatsworth.”

“We’ll look forward to that,” Lewis assured.

The car passed close to the great house of Chatsworth before veering onto a narrow road that maneuvered through the thickly wooded hills behind the stately house. Edward had to drop the car into a lower gear as we steadily climbed the steep road. About a quarter mile from the main house, the road opened into a small opening that featured a stable for horses. A few hundred yards further up the hill, a unique stone structure faced us. The building looked like a medieval castle perched on the hill above the great house below. The building looked like a one room cottage except it had four towers on each corner that stretched three levels into the sky. The rock building had rounded windows on the top floor overlooking the countryside.

“This is it,” Edward proclaimed, as he waited for a reaction.

“What is it?” Byron cautiously asked.

“Your cottage,” Edward explained.

Byron looked out from the automobile’s window and said, “It doesn’t look like a cottage to me. It looks more like a fortress.”

Edward laughed and said, “You may be right. The Hunting Tower was built in 1582 by the ancestress of the First Duke of Devonshire. It was probably where the ladies came to watch the foxhunts

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in the fields below. It was converted years ago into living quarters for guests. The ground floor has a small kitchen and dining room. A spiral staircase connects the four levels and each level host one room. The first level has a parlor, the second level a bedroom. Of course you can take the stairs to the upper level to view the country side for miles around. A second bedroom is in the basement.”

“It’s—it’s unusual,” Byron said, as he continued to study the structure.

“I’m excited,” Lewis smiled. “Devon showed me the outside of the place on my last visit, but I’ve never been inside.”

“Only the best for my American friends,” Edward assured. “The stables are in the back and you have access to the Duke’s horses. I trust you’ll find several suitable mounts. There’s not room in the tower for a maid or cook, but a woman that lives in the small house out back that will take care of those needs. The kitchen is stocked, but let her know what you need.”

“Let’s take a look around,” Lewis suggested.

Byron nodded and followed his friend into the building to see one room, with a small fireplace, dining table, and icebox.

“Here’s the stairs,” Lewis said, as he pointed to a corner door where the spiral staircase was located.

One floor up, another room furnished with a sofa, chair, and fireplace greeted them. The stairs led up one more floor to a bedroom and above the bedroom there was a small observation room overlooking the countryside.

“That’s a view,” Bryon said, as he looked out the window. “That must be Pilsley.”

Lewis looked over Byron’s shoulder and said, “That’s Edensor. I can see the church steeple. Pilsley’s over there.”

Byron looked where Lewis was pointing and nodded.

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“You can see most of Chatsworth estate from here,” Lewis said, as he pointed at the vast expanse of gardens, buildings, and trails. “Of course, most of the forest and hills are behind us.”

“You want the upper bedroom or the basement?” Byron asked.

“I don’t really care,” Lewis shrugged.

“If it’s all the same to you, I’d like to have the view,” Byron said.

“Sounds good to me,” Lewis smiled. “Now, what to do with Luke. I’m only seeing two rooms, so I guess it’s the stables or the couch.”

Byron sighed heavily and said, “He can bunk with me—if he doesn’t snore.”

Before I could answer, Lewis said, “I’ll take the lower room and there’s twin beds down there. Luke can stay with me.”

“I don’t snore,” I assured.

Lewis looked out the window of the third floor bedroom and said, “Look—that must be Baines coming with our luggage.”

We looked out the window to see a carriage passing Chatsworth House and heading toward the narrow road leading up the hill to the Hunting Tower.

“Let’s see what Edward’s up to,” Lewis said, as he headed down the spiral stairs.

By the time they made it back to the ground floor, Baines had arrived in the carriage with the luggage. The stoic butler whispered urgently to his employer, but stopped when he saw us at the door of the Hunting Tower.

“What do you think?” Edward asked.

“Impressive,” Lewis answered.

“Great view,” Byron answered.

“I’ve got some business to attend to,” Edward explained. “Baines will get you situated. The ice box has food. I talked to Mrs. Daltrey—she’s the housekeeper—she’ll bring sandwiches in a bit and we’ll

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dine at Chatsworth House tonight a seven. Horses are ready in the stable if you want to take a ride and there's a carriage at your disposal as well. I'll see you tonight."

"That'll be fine," Byron answered.

Lewis nodded with a wry smile and asked, "You have woman business?"

Edward sheepishly replied, "A gentleman would never tell. I'll see you at seven."

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CHAPTER 8

Edward's butler, Baines, proficiently delivered the luggage and made sure we were settled before leaving in his carriage. Mrs. Daltrey, a round plump woman in her fifties, brought sandwiches at noon. The stern-looking housekeeper studied us suspiciously before leaving.

"She's pleasant," Lewis quipped when the sturdy woman exited the Hunting Tower.

"She's efficient with her words," Byron noted. "Like Baines."

"These English servants know their place, I suppose," Lewis reasoned. "Anyway, it's nice to be settled in for a few days and you can't complain about the accommodations. What's your plan for your first day at Chatsworth?"

"I thought I might go for a ride," Byron answered while munching on his roast beef sandwich.

Lewis grinned and said, "Getting a little antsy to have a horse underneath you."

Byron, who had spent much of his life on horseback, had been a week on the train getting to New York and then another week and half on the ocean liner.

"Maybe," Byron shrugged. "How 'bout you—want to join me?"

"I've got work to do," Lewis replied. "I picked up telegrams this morning in Bakewell. I'll catch up on my correspondence then take a nap before supper this evening. You mind?"

Byron shook his head and said, "All see you before supper then."

"Can I come?" I asked.

Byron's chest heaved as he seemed to be clearing the air from his body and he said unenthusiastically, "Okay."

We stepped out of the musky-scented Hunting Tower into a brilliant, sunny afternoon. The stables were located down the hill a couple of hundred yards. Byron headed toward the stables before noticing a small stone house. He looked at me and nonverbally motioned me to follow. Byron knocked on the door belonging to Mrs. Daltrey while I tagged behind.

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“What’s wrong?” the stout woman asked with a worried look as she opened the door.

“Nothing,” Byron assured. “I wanted to thank you for the sandwiches. They hit the spot.”

“What?” the confused woman asked, confused by his comment.

Byron smiled and said, “That were very tasty—tasted very good.”

“Oh,” Mrs. Daltrey said while carefully watching the tall man. “You’re welcome. If you need anything knock.”

“That’d be great,” Byron said. “Is anyone at the stables?”

Mrs. Daltrey stretched her neck to look down the road at the rock stables before saying, “Mr. Daltrey should be there—if he’s awake, that is.”

Byron laughed at the woman’s candor and said, “We’re going for a ride and I’ll rouse him. You lived in this area long?”

“Only all my life,” the woman claimed in a slightly more cordial tone.

“It’s beautiful country,” Byron observed.

Mrs. Daltrey looked around the yard in front of her house and replied, “I suppose—I don’t really have much comparison, but it suits me fine. Where are you from, Mr. Lattimore?”

“Oklahoma,” Byron explained.

“Me too,” I added, as Byron looked sternly at me.

“America?” Mrs. Daltrey asked.

Byron nodded and replied, “It’s out west.”

Mrs. Daltrey looked Byron over and said, “You—you don’t seem quite the type.”

“What type is that,” Byron asked.

“Well,” Mrs. Daltrey hesitated. “Most of our guest are—more like—more like your friend, Mr. Abernathy.”

“How’s that?” Byron asked.

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“He looks like a gentleman who’s spent more time inside than out,” Mrs. Daltrey explained. “We get a lot of fancy men from the cities that come here for some outdoor air. They spend their days making money and telling the world what to do and come here for the fresh air and some sport. You look like you’ve had plenty of outdoor adventure without having to invent some.”

Byron smiled and said, “I guess so, but Lewis is a good guy—just a little stuffy. What do you know about these attacks around here? It must seem dangerous living away from things like this?”

“I don’t believe in no werewolves,” Mrs. Daltrey answered defiantly. “But—I don’t go out on full moon nights either.”

“Miss Headley was attacked last night and there was no moon out,” Byron noted.

“I heard,” Mrs. Daltrey replied in a softer tone of voice. “I’ll be staying in after dark now, I suppose.”

“You’ve lived here a long time,” Byron said. “What kind of animals could be responsible for these attacks?”

“I’ve been it The Peaks for nearly sixty years and there is no animal—outside a man that could kill like this,” Mrs. Daltrey explained.

“People have seen the beast,” Bryon said with a raised eyebrow.

“You asked what kind of animal is in this area,” Mrs. Daltrey said with a sly smile. “Not what’s been doing these killings.”

“You think the witnesses are—mistaken?” Bryon asked.

“I don’t know what to think,” Mrs. Daltrey replied. “I know I’ll be staying indoors when the sun goes down, that’s for sure.”

“I noticed the grass around the big house is cut short and somewhat manicured,” Byron noted. “How do they do it?”

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“The place is nothing like it was in the old days,” Mrs. Daltrey frowned. “When the 8th Duke died and the farming depressed, some of the gardens have gone native. We keep the grass short with sheep for the most part. The gardeners do the rest.”

“Have you lost many sheep, since the spring?” Byron asked.

“No,” Mrs. Daltrey answered. “Not a one.”

“Isn’t that strange?” Byron questioned.

Mrs. Daltrey thought for a second and replied, “I wouldn’t think so. We’ve never lost sheep.”

Byron looked up at the sky in thought before asking, “I’ve seen fine herds of cattle in the countryside. Have any livestock been attacked?”

“No,” Mrs. Daltrey assured.

“So,” Byron clarified. “This beast has killed four people and attacked two others, while an ample supply of cattle and sheep are grazing unmolested?”

“I suppose so,” Mrs. Daltrey replied. “What do you think, Mr. Lattimore?”

“I’ve had some experience with large animals of prey,” Byron said. “Bears, mainly—some wolves. I’ve heard of man-eaters, but any animal I’ve heard of would take an easy meal like a sheep before attacking a man—unless.”

“Unless what?” an anxious Mrs. Daltrey asked.

“I’ve seen bears attack to protect their young or when surprised in the woods, but this doesn’t seem consistent with the stories I’ve heard about these attacks.”

“You’ll have to ask the Vicar,” Mrs. Daltrey suggested.

“Vicar Russell?” Byron clarified.

Mrs. Daltrey nodded and said, “He’s seen all the victims and hunted big game in Africa before settling here. He’s a fiery orator and says the beast must be some kind of devil.”

“Really,” Byron replied. “I’ll have to visit the Vicar about his observations.”

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“He’ll have an opinion, that’s for sure,” Mrs. Daltrey claimed.

“Luke, we better find some horses, if we’re going to see some of the country before supper,”

Byron said to me.

I nodded and said, “Good to meet you, Mrs. Daltrey.”

Byron took a step toward the stables before stopping to ask, “Mrs. Daltry, what do you know about Miss Headley.”

I stopped in my steps at the mention of Kate Headley’s name. Mrs. Daltry had stepped toward her small house when she stopped with a strange grin.

“Katherine Headley, you say?” Mrs. Headley replied.

Byron nodded while I listened for any insights to the enchanting woman we had met the night before.

“She’s bewitched you, too?” Mrs. Daltrey asserted with a smirk that showed some of her back teeth were missing.

“No,” Byron quickly defended. “I met Miss Headley last evening after she had seen the beast and I was just curious about her.”

Mrs. Daltrey laughed and said, “If you say so. I’ve known Katherine since she was a wee girl. Her mother was—she was a friend of the nephew of the 8th Duke. There were always rumors, but I never had problems with the older Miss Headley.”

“Her mother wasn’t married?” Byron asked.

Mrs. Daltrey shook her head. She looked at me and quickly said, “It weren’t no business of mine, but that was the story. She was put into the house in Pilsley—the one Katherine lives in today.”

“Her mother’s deceased?” Byron asked.

Mrs. Headley said, “Yes, since Katherine was barely older than this boy. She received some kind of support to go to school, and paints—other than that, I don’t know the particulars of her finances.”

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“And Edward?” Byron asked.

Mrs. Daltrey sighed heavily and replied, “Katherine has a way with men. There’s not many a man under forty in these parts that haven’t looked her way.”

“She’s—” Byron began to ask.

Mrs. Daltrey interrupted him and said, “Katherine’s not encouraged any of them, but Edward. That doesn’t keep the men from trying to win her favor.”

“I see,” Bryon replied. “Tell me what else you know of Miss Headley.”

“You are interested,” Mrs. Daltrey stated.

“Only in how it related to these attacks,” Byron assured.

“Well,” Mrs. Daltrey responded, seemingly disappointed in Byron’s lack of amorous interest. “Katherine’s always been an intelligent girl—pretty, as you’ve seen. Headstrong to a fault and too modern of my taste, but other than, that I don’t have anything against her. I know her friendship with Edward has caused a stir in the village and at Chatsworth.”

“Why is that?” Byron asked.

Mrs. Daltrey seemed confused by Bryon’s lack of understanding before explaining, “Katherine’s a common girl without proper parentage. Edward’s family is important in this region and aspires for more for him. Lady Ashford has been the match his family has desired and the Ashfords would be equally pleased with the match. The Ashfords have title and position, but Chatsworth has been in relative financial straights since the 8th Duke’s death. Colonel Wyman’s made taken his family’s small fortune and multiplied it greatly by mining and manufacturing.”

“What does Edward want?” Byron inquired.

“Edward’s a sweet, but impetuous young man,” Mrs. Daltry replied. “He’s known Melanie Ashford since they were children and they’ve always been compatible. Edward, I suspect will have his infatuation with Katherine Headley, but will come to his senses and not defy his father’s will.”

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Byron seemed to be tiring from the old woman's gossip as he said, "We had better get to our horse. Again, it was nice to meet you and thanks so much for sharing your insights."

"You're welcome," Mrs. Daltrey replied. "Have a good ride and let me know if you need anything for the house."

Byron nodded and we walked away toward the stables. He did not say anything, but appeared to be digesting afternoon's conversation. I was in good spirits to think that Katherine Headley might be unattached and that the smug Edward could be out of the life.

Walking quickly to keep up, I asked, "Where are we going?"

With a sly smile, Byron said, "To see Katherine Headley."

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Byron took his tall, black horse across the rolling hills at a fast trot, as I had to nudge my smaller mount to a brief gallop to catch him. We rode side by side in silence for a few minutes, as I tried to think of some conversation.

“What’s on your mind?” Byron finally asked in his factual tone of voice.

I shifted nervously before saying, “You didn’t seem to like Miss Headley much last night.”

Byron did not respond for a moment before replying, “I don’t have anything against her—heck, I never met her before last night.”

I listened without a response until he said, “She reminds me of someone—someone from back home.”

“Who?” I asked.

Byron nudged his horse to trot a little fast as I tried to match his pace.

“Are you going to tell me?” I asked, curious as to his strange behavior the night before.

“She looks a lot like a girl I used to know,” he shared.

Byron suddenly pulled the reins of his horse and stopped. Rising up in his saddle, he surveyed the countryside. Byron looked to be carefully studying the landscape, but I suspected that he just did not want to talk about Katherine Headley.

“What are you looking at now?” I asked.

Byron swiveled his head around from side to side before saying, “This terrain reminds me of the Osage hills back home. An animal could be a few hundred yards away and still out of sight—even the wide open spaces outside the woods.”

I looked around to confirm Byron’s observation. The countryside seemed open but the gently rolling hills restricted the view somewhat. Byron gently encouraged his horse to continue up a slight hill where we could see the small village of Pilsley less than a mile away. Pilsley looked peaceful in the bright afternoon sun, compared with the foreboding chaos of the previous night. The village had a small cluster

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of four or five shops in the center with cottages lined neatly on gravel streets surrounding the square. The great Chatsworth house could be seen contrasting with the thickly wooded hills behind it. The Hunting Tower where we would be staying could be seen perched on the hill behind Chatsworth.

Byron silently studied the streetscape. Like a gunfighter entering a new town, his eyes shifted continuously to assess any potential hazards. I believed Byron was simply trying to ignore my earlier questioning, since the quaint village looked far from perilous. He stopped in front of Katherine Headley's house and hesitated for almost a minute, before dismounting.

"Come on," Byron finally said in a tone of resignation.

Byron knocked timidly on the door, as I quickly tried to groom my wavy hair in anticipation of seeing the alluring Katherine Headley. We heard shuffling sounds coming from inside the house, as Byron shifted nervously. The door finally opened and the girl named Alice stood in the doorway to greet us. Alice was a thin girl with frizzled brown hair and a pale, freckled complexion.

"Mr. Lattimore?" Alice greeted "And you're Luke?"

I nodded and Byron asked, "Is Miss Headley in?"

"No," Alice answered. "She's in Chesterfield today."

Byron's normal surliness transformed into a more pleasant tone than I had experienced on the trip as he replied, "You're Alice—right?"

The girl nodded.

"I'm so sorry, but I didn't catch your full name last night," Byron smiled.

"Alice Cooper," the girl replied.

"Are you a relative of Miss Headley?" Byron asked.

"Oh no," Alice answered. "I'm just the housemaid."

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As Byron looked around the cluttered front room that was filled with sketches and paintings in various stages of completion, he said, "It must be quite a job—I mean with all the pictures Miss Headley has."

"It is," Alice admitted. "Kate is in demand as an artist and always seems to have more projects than she can complete."

"Is this where Miss Headley works?" Byron quizzed.

"Mostly," Alice thoughtfully answered, "but she travels all over the area. She's in Chesterfield today. She has a patron there and she's working in his studio."

"Does Miss Headley usually make these trips alone?" Byron asked.

"Mainly," the girl replied.

"How far is it to Chesterfield?" Byron inquired.

"Not more than ten miles," Alice answered.

"Surely she didn't walk," Byron said.

Alice giggled and said, "Kate does like to walk, but she has a carriage."

"Why didn't she use the carriage last night?" Byron asked. "Looks like it would have been safer."

"Like I said," Alice began. "Kate likes to walk—she's walked the ten miles to Chesterfield more than once. It was late when she decided to go to the station and she didn't want to get the horses out, I suppose. It's barely two miles to the station and there was good light from the moon last night."

"But not a full moon," Byron added.

"No," the girl meekly replied. "I guess that's why Kate thought it would be safe."

"You're the girl that first saw the beast, right?" Byron quizzed.

"Yes sir," Alice confirmed. "Scared me to death, it did. I won't go out at night, full moon or not."

"It must have been terrifying," Byron consoled.

Alice nodded.

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“What can you tell me about that night,” Byron coaxed.

“It was in the summer,” Alice began. “The days were long and peaceful. Miss Headley was to meet—”

Alice stopped mid-sentence, as if she had said too much.

“Edward Wyman,” Bryon deduced.

Alice breathed a sigh of relief. She had not wanted to indicate that Katherine Headley was meeting Edward, but now seemed eager to share her secrets.

“Yes,” Alice confirmed. “They’ve been an item for months. I’ve become their confidant. Kate has sent me with messages several times.”

Byron did not seem interested in Alice’s matchmaking abilities and redirected her conversation by asking, “Miss Headley was with you that night?”

“No,” Alice replied. “Like I said, Miss Headley was to meet Edward, but she was not feeling well that evening. She had eaten something that did not agree with her. That’s why she sent me.”

“Did you see Edward then?” Byron asked.

“No,” Alice replied. “The beast appeared and I had to run for home.”

“Tell me about the beast,” Byron said.

“It was a gruesome sight,” Alice claimed. “I still see it in my nightmares. Unnatural it was.”

“Not an animal you recognize?” Byron clarified.

Alice in a lower tone of voice that was nearly a whisper said, “I don’t think it was any animal. It has short hind legs that it stood on and powerful shoulders and great paw in the front with sharp, jagged teeth and hair all over its body. It didn’t speak, but it made insidious, intimidating noises to frighten me. It wasn’t a growl or a howl, but a low throaty sound followed by an almost maniacal screeching sound.”

“A screeching sound,” Byron repeated.

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Alice thought before saying, "A strange sound almost like an evil laugh that evolved into—it sounded almost like a man crying. Do you think that a man might be possessed or crazy, Mr. Lattimore?"

"I don't know," Bryon confessed. "But I do believe we will find the beast if it exist and that there will be a logical explanation."

"The beast exists," Alice confirmed. "It's killed three times and I've seen it."

"How close were you?" Byron asked, in a comforting tone.

Alice thought for a second before saying, "I hadn't really thought about it. I was going toward Hassop. It's a little over a mile if you cut through the Birchill Bank Woods."

"Woods?" Bryon clarified.

"Yes sir," Alice nodded. To get to Hassop from here by the road is nearly five miles around the Birchill Bank Woods. There's a hill and then a creek that is thickly wooded, but there's a good walking trail that goes straight through."

"And you were walking this trail in the dark?" Bryon asked.

"I had my torch and I know the trail well," Alice explained. "Besides I didn't make it into the woods. I was in the open field coming to the woods when I heard that crying sound coming from the woods. I froze in my tracks and then seen the beast snarling at me. I suppose it was fifty yards more or less. I turned to run knowing the thing would run me down and kill me like it had the others."

"But you made it all the way back," Byron concluded.

Alice nodded, but added, "The Vicar was there to meet me."

"Vicar Russell?" Bryon asked.

"Yes sir," Alice replied. "He took a shot at the beast and frightened it away before taking me back."

"The beast that Miss Headley confronted last night, do you think it is the same animal?" Byron said, as he looked around at the front room.

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“I suppose so,” Alice replied. “She told me it had the long teeth and that strange human sounding yelp.”

“It must have been a scare for the both of you,” Byron consoled. “We won’t take anymore of your time, but perhaps we can return and visit Miss Headley afternoon.”

Byron headed toward the door with me following behind when Alice asked, “Are you having a good trip?”

Byron stopped, but did not reply. I looked at him a moment before turning around.

“Are you having a good trip, Luke?” Alice repeated.

“I—yes, it’s been a good trip,” I stammered.

“I would like to hear about America sometime,” she smiled.

As I was at a loss for words, Byron said, “We’ll be here for several days and I’m sure Luke will have time to entertain you with some of his American stories.”

I nodded in affirmation before clumsily stumbling out the door behind Byron. I looked back to see Alice look at me from the doorway. Byron smirked mischievously as we mounted the horse, but he did not say anything until we galloped outside the small village.

“That was smooth,” he finally said, as he slowed his horse to a walk.

“Huh?” I responded, although I knew what he meant.

“That girl’s interested in you,” Byron grinned.

“Ah, you’re going to tease me about this the rest of the trip,” I complained.

“You could have bigger problems than having a cute girl sweet on you,” Byron surmised.

“She’s not that cute,” I protested.

“Prettier than you,” Byron joked.

“She’s too young for me,” I replied.

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“She couldn’t be more than a year or two younger,” Byron observed. “She was interested in you.”

Anxious to change the subject, I asked, “Where we goin’ now?”

Byron looked at me suspiciously and I thought he would tease me more about the girl when he said, “I thought we’d take a look at the place where Miss Headley was attacked last night.”

“Oh.”

“It’s just a mile or so toward Bakewell and they said it was close to the golf course,” Bryon explained. “I’d kinda like to get the lay of the land.”

We rode at a leisurely pace through green fields that provided a more direct route than the road we had taken when in the carriage. Beside the green fields, a section of thick woods bordered a small creek. Sheep filled several of the fields and there was even a small herd of cattle. Byron nudged his horse gently and rode to a wood rail fence next to a mowed area with several red flags blowing in the light breeze.

“This must be it,” Byron said, as he got off the horse and surveyed a trampled area of the green grass. “There’s the golf course.”

I looked around at the peaceful surroundings and tried to imagine the terror Katherine Headley must have experienced the night before.

In an agitated tone Byron said, “I was afraid of this.”

“What?” I asked.

“Metcalf led that mob down here last night and trampled any possible evidence about what really happened,” Byron fumed.

“Alice told us what happen,” I noted. “And Miss Headley said the animal came from the woods, which must have been over there.”

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Byron smiled, as he explained, “Eyewitnesses are not always reliable. Their emotions distort the facts, sometimes and as time goes by their accounts reflect more of what they think happened than what actually happened. I was hoping to find something more objective.”

“Oh.”

Byron looked over at the wooded area and said, “You are right, though. Miss Headley said the beast was by the woods. Let’s go see what we can find.”

We tied our horses to the fence bordering the golf course and walked about thirty yards to the edge of the woods. The ground was less disturbed and Byron began searching the earth for signs of an animal. I did not know what to look for, but followed Byron’s lead and walked around the area with my head bowed.

After a few minutes, I saw Byron stop and kneel down. He touched the ground with his hand and looked around the area. Byron then walked a few steps into the woods and stopped again.

“What is it?” I asked, as I sprinted to his spot.

“Tracks,” Byron replied.

Byron knelt in an area several yards inside the wooded area close to a small creek. The area had grass underneath the trees, but Byron’s eyes were fixed on a small area on dirt close to the edge of the creek. Byron gently touched an imprint of a paw he had found and then moved to a second print a couple of feet away.

“Too bad, this creek is dry,” Byron lamented. “There are a couple of prints, though.”

“What are they?” I asked, as I stared at a large animal print in the soft ground.

The print looked to have a flat heel and four toes. Claw marks could be seen, but they were not the savage long claws that Alice’s description had caused me to imagine.

“I don’t know,” Byron said. “There not wolf tracks—at least not any wolf I’ve ever tracked. The prints are too deep and—the shape’s not right. A wolf track has more space between the toes. Besides,

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this one set is too big. This animal is at least 120 pounds, maybe more—maybe a lot more. It’s hard to tell in this soil. The second set of prints is smaller, but it’s still not a wolf.”

“Two animals?” I asked.

“At least two sets of the prints,” Byron surmised. “Could be that one animal stayed here and Miss Headley only shot at the other.”

“You think she hit it?” I asked.

“No,” Byron said. “I haven’t seen any blood. The tracks look like they moved toward here than back to the west. That must be where the animal retreated too. Once they got into the grass you can’t see any tracks, but I can tell where they headed.”

“How?” I asked.

Byron stood up and pointed to a wide section of matted down grass where the group of hunters had obviously picked up the trail.

“They must have tracked the animal that way,” Bryon assumed. “The crowd has trampled everything down. We won’t find anything there, but let’s follow the path anyway.

After retrieving our horses, we followed the flattened and trodden grass to the west. I was no tracker, but even I could tell that the large group from the night before had traveled close together, probably following the tracks. The trail ended at the edge of the road between Bakewell and Chatsworth that we had traveled earlier that day. At the side of the road a large area of crushed grass was visible on one side of the road and streaks to foot prints branched out on the other side.

“They tracked it to here and then lost the trail,” Bryon said. “You can see where they tried to pick it up, but they must not have found anything. Or maybe they just got tired. A good dog and a man with a rifle could have come a lot closer to tracking this animal.”

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Byron looked across the empty countryside before looking on the other side of the road for any sign of prints. He seemed to be thinking more than looking and I spent my time studied him rather than trying vainly to find the elusive trail.

“What wrong?” I finally asked, as Byron seemed to have slipped into his own world.

“Huh?” Byron replied before saying, “I was just thinking. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“A werewolf wouldn’t,” I observed.

“Don’t worry about werewolves,” Byron said. “There’s a logical explanation for this, but I’m not seeing it yet. Look around and tell me what you see?”

I took a moment to survey the fields and said, “A road, lots of grass, some trees in the distance, sheep—”

“Sheep!” Byron exclaimed. “Doesn’t that seem odd to you?”

“There’s sheep all over this country,” I replied. “Mrs. Daltrey told us that there’s more sheep than cattle here.”

Byron looked at me like a teacher about to give a lesson and said, “I’ve tracked all kinds of animals—wolf, bear, mountain lions. All of them kill for food, but they all have one thing in common—they prey on the weak. If you were an animal in search of a meal, would you attack a human being, which has the capability to fight back, or a lamb?”

Before I could respond, Byron answered, “You’d kill the lamb, but as best I can tell, not livestock has been molested during this whole time.”

“Don’t animals kill when threatened?” I asked.

“Sometimes, but rarely,” Byron replied. “I have seen a momma bear attack a man when her cubs were threatened, but to protect a cub, but I’ve never seen an animal stalk a person except—for another person.”

“A werewolf,” I muttered.

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“There’s no such thing,” Byron scolded.

“Do you think the thing lives in the woods?” I asked. “Alice said the beast was near the woods when she saw it and Miss Headley’s attack was close to the woods, as well.”

“I don’t see how,” Byron said, shaking his head. “These wooded patches are small and I don’t see how any large animal could go undetected—I don’t see how any predator could stay concealed in this area unless it is coming from the mountains.”

Byron looked to the mountainous region to the north and east as he continued, “I haven’t explored their peaks yet, but I still find it hard to believe that any large animal could travel from that habitat to here without being seen.”

“Unless it could change forms,” I suggested, “like a—werewolf.”

Byron did not respond to my suggested this time, but seemed to be calculating in his mind different solutions.

“I want to talk to Miss Headley,” Byron finally said. “I want to know exactly what she saw.”

“Are we going to stop on the way back?” I asked.

Byron looked at the afternoon sun and said, “Naw, it’s getting late. We need to head back and get cleaned up for supper tonight. I’ll go see Miss Headley tomorrow.”

With sly grin, he added, “You can come too—to see Alice.”

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CHAPTER

By the time we returned to the Hunting Tower, Uncle Lewis paced anxiously in front of the door.

“Where have you been?” Lewis asked, as we walked up from the stables.

“Seeing the country,” Byron smiled.

“You know we have supper in an hour,” Lewis subtly scolded.

“That’s why we’re back now,” Byron explained.

I was not as brave as Byron and did not dare challenge Uncle Lewis with any smart replies. I hurried to the Hunting Tower and quickly scrubbed at the wash sink in the bedroom. Byron was more patient in his preparation for supper and I left him in the room, as I headed down to meet Lewis.

“What did you do this afternoon?” Lewis asked, in a pleasant tone.

“We went for a ride,” I replied. “We went to Pilsley to see Miss Headley.”

“Really?”

“Yeah.”

“How was she?” Lewis asked.

“She wasn’t around,” I informed. “We talked to that girl, Alice.”

I hesitated for a moment before asking the question that had bothered me since last night.

“Why was Byron so—strange last night in front of Miss Headley,” I inquired. “I couldn’t help but notice and when I asked him about it, he changed the subject.”

Lewis stepped closer and said in a low tone of voice, “She looks like—his fiancé.”

“The one that was killed?” I replied.

I had heard parts of the story about Byron’s girl, but had not been privy to all the details. Byron planned to marry her this summer, but she had been killed in some kind of accident. Part of the reason for Lewis inviting Byron on this trip was to take his mind off the loss.

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Lewis talked even softer, almost in a whisper and said, "If Katherine Headley had her hair pulled back just the right way they would be near identical. In fact, if I hadn't known about the tragic death of Byron's Mellissa she could have fooled me...although I think Katherine is a bit shorter than Mellissa. That's why Byron's reaction was so strange. It was a shock even to me."

"What are you two whispering about?" Byron asked, as he stood in the doorway.

Lewis glanced at me before saying, "Young Luke was just telling me about your adventures this afternoon."

I was temporarily relieved that Byron did not seem to hear what we were talking about, but my relief quickly vanished when Byron said, "Did he tell you about the girl?"

"Girl?" Lewis replied, as he stood up straight. "No, I must have missed that."

"It was nothing," I protested. "Byron's been teasing me all day."

"I'm intrigued," Lewis grinned.

"We stopped by to see Miss Headley," Byron explained. "I wanted to hear her account of her encounter with the beast last night. She was out, but we had a pleasant conversation with her maid, Alice. Alice was so informative and when we left, she asked young Luke to come back some time to tell her about America."

"Will any girl in England be safe?" Lewis taunted.

"You guys never give me a break," I protested.

"I wish that were the case, but we've got to get going," Lewis determined.

Byron nodded and Mr. Daltrey had a carriage waiting for our short trip to Chatsworth House. The banter between Byron and Lewis continued on the short ride—all at my expense. The chatter was silenced, however, as we approached the great house. A clear reflecting pool in front of the house mirrored the stately image of the house's weathered stone façade and grey slate roof. The large stones were impressive and the place looked much like a fortress. We were greeted by Major Elliot when we

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entered through the Porte Cochere. Inside the house, we admired vaulted ceilings that were finely painted and polished marble floors. Major Elliot served as the comptroller of the estate and apologized for the condition of some of the house due to the economic times. The eighth Duke of Devonshire had died a few years earlier, and the ninth Duke had not yet gotten around to making the improvements or maintenance that Major Elliot wanted.

The house looked like a museum to me and I never seen a structure like it. Large paintings and impressive sculptures adorned the hallways and large rooms. Like me, Byron and Lewis also seemed impressed by the surroundings as our conversation quieted to occasional whispers about the architecture or the art work surrounding us.

“I think we are ready,” Major Elliot announce, as he led us into a large dining room, with an arched plaster ceiling, red papered walls, and a woven Persian rug.

A large mahogany table was set for dinner as I whispered to Lewis, “Are we eating here?”

“Try to act like you’re not overly impressed,” Lewis whispered back.

I swallowed hard and tried to relax, not wanting to embarrass my uncle. Several men surrounded the edge of the room and looked to be some kind of waiter. I recognized Edward Wyman from our drive that morning. Colin Metcalf and Vicar Russell were also at the dinner. Major Elliot introduced Lewis and Byron to the small gathering while I took the opportunity to look around the opulent room. I wander too close to the serving kitchen and one of the waiters politely nudged my back to the dining room. The men were making their introductions and trading stories, when the room suddenly went silent.

A man that looked to be a butler announced in a formal tone, “May I present her Ladyship Ashford, niece of the ninth Duke of Devonshire.

A woman in her mid to early twenties gracefully entered the dining room to hushed silence. She had dark hair and pale, porcelain like skin with only a hint of rosiness in her well shaped cheeks. She

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wore an elegant green gown and her head did not seem to move as she glided toward the dining room table. She was a well-shaped woman and almost looked too pretty to be real.

She stopped at the table and said, "Gentlemen, it will be very dull if you just stare at me all night. Please, take a seat, I won't be uncomfortable being the only woman present this evening."

The men complied as a gentle rumble of conversation seeped into the room. Major Elliot scurried to get everyone seated, making sure Edward accompanied Lady Ashford. He seated Byron and Lewis at that end of the table, while seating me next to Lewis. Colin Metcalf and Vicar Russell were seated at the other end of the table with Major Elliot between.

"Major Elliot, could you introduce me to our guest?" Lady Ashford asked in an amiable tone of voice.

Major Elliot dutifully went around the room and concluded the introductions by saying, "And we have some special guest this evening from America. Lewis Abernathy is an oilman and his nephew is traveling with him. On the other side of him is Byron Lattimore. Mr. Lattimore is a peace officer from the old Indian Territories—"

"I've heard about Mr. Lattimore," Lady Ashford interrupted. "Edward has told me all about his adventures in the American west."

"It is an honor to meet you, Lady Ashford," Lewis smiled.

"Please," Lady Ashford replied. "Call me Melanie. I feel like my mother or one of my aunts when people address me with formal titles. Besides, I doubt our gentry has any sense of importance to Americans anyway."

"I can assure you, we're quite impressed with Chatsworth," Lewis stated. "Melanie."

Melanie Ashford smile warmly at Lewis's greeting and nodded slightly. Melanie was well spoken but seemed content to listen to the men talk as we ate our meal. As I struggled with determining which silverware to use, Edward and Lewis drove most of the conversation at our end of the table. Colin

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Metcalf and Vicar Russell seemed to be involved in their own conversation, but I could not hear their topics. Colin Metcalf was still an imposing figure, but he seemed more relaxed than he had the previous evening.

Byron seemed content to listen to Lewis and Edward swap over exaggerated stories when Melanie Ashford said, “Mr. Lattimore, could you tell us a little about the American west?”

Byron looked uncomfortable, but said in a steady tone, “I’d be glad to, but I’m not sure how much there is to tell.”

“You might be surprised how exotic your tales may be,” Melanie replied. “Your normal might be a grand adventure to us.”

Byron smiled and said, “My father was a mountain man and I spent most of my time in New Mexico and southern Colorado growing up. He taught me how to hunt, fish, and how to use a gun, but didn’t prepare me for much else. I think my father preferred being away from civilization. He did teach me to respect the law so I gravitated to law enforcement. No place had more outlaws than the Indian Territory and I went to work. I was lucky enough to fall in with Bill Tilghman and any fame I’ve received from the embellished stories told about run ins with outlaws come from serving with the finest lawman that every took a step on God’s green earth—Bill Tilghman.”

“You’re pathetic,” Lewis good-naturedly complained. “I don’t know how anyone could make a story any less interesting and leave out all the good parts.”

“I thought Mr. Lattimore’s account was more than adequate,” Melanie replied.

“Oh, but there’s much more,” Lewis smiled.

Melanie Ashford glanced at a blushing Byron before nodding to Lewis to continue.

“Byron forgot to tell you that he was a Cheyenne Dog Soldier,” Lewis began.

“I am not,” Byron protested.

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Lewis did not acknowledge his friend's objection, and continued, "It's true. Byron's mother was a white captive of the southern Cheyenne wintering near the Washita River. His father was a Dog Soldier on a hunting expedition when Custer attacked."

"Dog Soldier?" Major Elliot interrupted.

By this time, all the diners at the table were focused on Lewis telling his story.

Lewis nodded and explained, "The Cheyenne warriors were called Dog Soldiers by the U.S. Calvary. They were fearless and ferocious fighters who had taken an oath to never retreat. They were the last line of the defense for the Cheyenne. They wore a sash of tanned skin about eight feet long that looked like a mane of an animal—sometimes they fashioned helmets out of wolf hides that gave them their name. They painted their skin to camouflage themselves and attacked mainly at night or the early morning. They were the elite fighters for the tribe and were greatly esteemed."

"Lewis speaks some truth," Byron confessed, "but I'm no Dog Soldier."

"But your father was," Lewis replied.

"My real father, yes," Byron conceded.

"What do you mean?" Major Elliot asked.

Lewis answered, "Byron was raised by former soldier."

Lewis looked at his friend, as if looking for permission to tell the story. Byron sighed slightly and gave Lewis a subtle nod.

"Byron's mother was a captive of the Cheyenne," Lewis continued. "She was taken in by them when she was a young girl. She probably had no memory of her real family and grew up a part of the tribe. The Cheyenne had been driven from their hunting grounds to the south the Arkansas River onto a reservation close to Fort Cobb. The Dog Soldiers went on a raid to the north and most of the rest of the men were hunting. It was mid-November when Custer's Seventh Calvary rode into Black Kettle's

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encampment as part of General Sheridan's winter offensive against the Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho tribes that had been raiding north of the Arkansas River into Kansas."

"Custer went into the village to take the elders, women, and children hostage to force the warriors to surrender," Byron interjected. "My father, the man who raised me, was a captain in Custer's cavalry. My real father and mother were killed. Captain Lattimore was so disgusted with the affair that he resigned the next day. I was an orphaned child, barely weaned when he adopted me. He left the army and moved me to the mountains. There he taught me to hunt. I wasn't aware of my real parents until years later. Captain Lattimore was a fine man and I was proud to be his son."

"Fascinating!" Major Elliot exclaimed. "You were raised by a soldier."

"My father would always say a former soldier," Byron clarified. "He preferred to be known as a rancher and hunter."

"I think it's very sad," Melanie Ashford lamented. "You lost your family...your heritage."

"You can't really lose what you never knew," Byron assured. "Captain Lattimore and my mother loved me more than any parent could."

"You're half Indian?" Major Elliot asked.

"A lot of people from back home are part Indian," Byron explained.

"I would have never known," Major Elliot added.

"I'm the same person, I can assure you," Byron replied.

"And what a person," Lewis smiled. "Knowing Byron's background is only part of the story."

"Here comes the exaggerations," Byron teased.

"Let me tell the story," Lewis replied. "You had your chance."

Byron leaned back in resignation to listen to Lewis share his stories.

"Byron came to the old Indian Territory and hooked up with Bill Tilghman, Chris Madsen, and Heck Thomas," Lewis gleamed.

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“The Three Guardsmen,” Major Elliot interjected.

Lewis nodded and said, “Byron worked for the marshals as a tracker. Most thought it was because he was part Indian, but Byron had hunted everything from buffalo to grizzly bear with his father.”

“So you went from hunting animals to men,” Colin Metcalf said from the end of the table.

“I suppose so,” Byron replied.

“That must have been thrilling,” Colin Metcalf asserted.

“It was just a job,” Byron said, as he studied the gruff man at the end of the table. “Bill Doolin’s Wild Bunch were a bad lot. The marshals had to clean things up and I was proud to help.”

“He’s being modest again,” Lewis noted. “Byron got Bill Doolin.”

“Tilghman captured Doolin,” Byron corrected.

“But he escaped,” Lewis replied.

“Then Heck Thomas shot him with shotgun,” Byron added.

“But you tracked him,” Lewis said. “Besides, you were the best shot in the territory, you’d have got him if old Heck had missed.”

“So, you fancy yourself as a good shot,” Colin Metcalf said.

“I didn’t say that,” Byron said.

“He wouldn’t, but he is,” Lewis boasted.

“Colin is a crack shot himself,” Major Elliot stated. “He was the best in our regiment in the Sudan. Maybe we should get these two together sometime.”

“I’m game,” Colin Metcalf confidently replied.

“I’m no contest shooter,” Byron humbly said.

“Do you have a shooting range, Major Elliot?” Lewis asked.

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“Of course,” Major Elliott said with a gleam. “We have a clay pigeon area down the hill from your Hunting Tower.”

“I think tomorrow morning a match is in order,” Lewis said.

“A splendid idea,” Major Elliot echoed. “How about it Colin?”

“I can stay over,” Colin Metcalf calmly stated.

“You Mr. Lattimore?” Major Elliot inquired.

“I could use a little shooting, I guess,” Byron said.

“Fantastic!” Edward Wyman added. “We’re set to have what must be two of the best shooters in the world tomorrow morning.”

“I’m afraid all this talk of guns and shooting has tired me,” Melanie Ashford said.

“I guess it is getting late,” Edward replied.

“It is and we have a big evening planned for tomorrow,” Melanie smiled.

“I heard we were having some type of reception tomorrow,” Major Elliot said. “I got word this morning from your uncle and have had the staff making arrangement all day.”

“My uncle is excited,” Melanie smiled.

“Will he be here?” Major Elliot asked.

“I’m afraid not, but much of the rest of my family will be here,” she said.

“Is there a special occasion?” Major Elliot inquired.

Melanie Ashford looked at Edward for a moment before saying, “Yes, Major Elliot. I suppose it would be unfair for me to keep you gentlemen in suspense any longer. Edward, why don’t you tell your friends?”

All the guests turned to look at Edward as he said, “Melanie and I are having this get together to formally announce our engagement.”

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Looking around the room, I could tell Major Elliot was surprised while Colin Metcalf and Vicar Russell seemed almost joyous. Uncle Lewis tried to read Edward's reaction, while Byron focused on Lady Ashford's response.

"Now I will retire for the evening," Melanie pleasantly informed us. "I am tired and it will be a big day tomorrow. Mr. Abernathy, Mr. Lattimore, and of course you Luke, are invited to the ball as well."

"We'll look forward to it," Lewis replied with a slight nod.

"Very well," Melanie cordially responded. "Edward you don't have to see me out. I'll leave you gentlemen to your gossips and see you in the morning."

"I will escort you," Edward replied while quickly moving to Lady Ashford's side to escort her toward the large foyer and the private rooms upstairs.

"Good night, gentleman," Melanie smiled, as she left us alone in the large dining room.

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CHAPTER

“That’s a relief,” Major Elliot sighed when Edward and Melanie were out of the room.

“You’re bloody right,” Colin Metcalf affirmed as he and Vicar Russell moved toward our end of the table as the other guests moved out of the room.

“Thank God, Edward has come to his senses,” Vicar Russell added.

Lewis glanced at Byron of a second before asking, “Was this not expected?”

The three men looked at each other before Major Elliot said, “It’s been expected for some time, but the past year has—left us all a little uneasy.”

“It’s that Headley woman,” Vicar Russell complained. “She has cast a spell on poor Edward that I feared would not be broken.”

With a wry grin, Lewis said, “Having met the woman and can see the danger, but surly you could not have blamed Edward for falling under the spell of Miss Headley’s charm. Let’s face it; she’s quite an attractive woman.”

“She’s the devil!” Colin Metcalf bellowed in a voice almost too loud to be contained in the dining room. “She’s conspired to distract Edward and ruin everything.”

“I don’t understand,” Lewis replied.

“She’s a—” Colin Metcalf began before Vicar Russell cleared his throat loudly to interrupt.

“Let’s be careful with bring the Prince of Darkness into the discussion,” Vicar Russell suggested. “I’ve got my issues with Katherine Headley, but the thing is over now.”

“Don’t underestimate her,” Colin Metcalf warned. “She’s ruined more than one good man.”

“Ruin?” Lewis interjected.

“She’s the illegitimate daughter of a woman that would have been tried as a witch in a stricter time,” Colin Metcalf claimed. “She’s nearly spoiled poor Edward’s chances for sure.”

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Major Elliot interrupted the red-faced man and said, “What Colin’s trying to say is that Miss Headley would not have been a good match for Edward.”

“Don’t speak for me!” Colin Metcalf insisted. “Trust me, this woman is still a threat and if I had my way I’d have already run her out of Derbyshire.”

“We know how that went,” Major Elliot replied.

“If you’d have let me be, she would have never been an issue,” Colin claimed.

“Your conversation has lost me,” Lewis smiled.

Major Elliot took a deep breath to regain his composure and said, “Colin’s right. This marriage to Lady Ashford will be very good for the Wymans—and for the Ashfords. Colonel Wyman has property and wealth to spare, but that won’t buy you a title. Edward’s marriage to the Ashford’s will provide him a rank in the gentry. Edward and Lady Ashford’s child would have the opportunity for a title.”

“And that’s important?” Lewis asked.

“To Colonel Wyman, it would fulfill and lifetime’s ambition, to have a grandson with a title of nobility,” Major Elliot explained. “To Edward, it means a probable seat in Parliament and a chance to leverage the Wyman fortune into real influence.”

Before Major Elliot could explain more, a beaming Edward returned.

“Congratulations!” Major Elliot beamed.

“Thank you,” Edward sheepishly grinned. “I’m riding up to tell father tomorrow.”

“Your father will be pleased,” Major Elliott assured.

“She’s a wonderful girl,” Lewis smiled, as he slapped Edward’s back.

Edward smirked and replied, “We don’t usually call a niece of the Duke a girl, but I couldn’t agree more.”

“When’s the big day?” Lewis asked.

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“She’ll have to work out the details in her own way, but it will be sometime in the spring,”

Edward explained.

“The colonel will be relieved at your sensible proposal,” Colin Metcalf shared.

“Yes,” Edward agreed. “This is enough talk about romance tonight. What were you fellows talking about while I was away?”

The men looked at each other, not anxious to admit they had been talking about Edward’s relationship to Kate Headley in absence.

“I want to get Mr. Lattimore’s take on these attacks,” Major Elliot claimed, trying to change the previous conversation.

“Oh yes,” Edward said, as he took a seat. “I’ve been curious myself.”

All eyes turned to Byron, who seemed momentarily caught off guard by the attention.

“We found some tracks,” Byron muttered, as he took a sip of his tea.

“What?” Colin Metcalf asked. “We searched the whole area and saw nothing.”

Byron stared at the boisterous man for a moment and said, “No, I don’t expect that you did. The whole trail was trampled down.”

“We tracked the beast to the Pilsley Road,” Colin claimed.

“I saw,” Byron replied. “I found these prints close to the woods near the golf course—probably close to where Miss Headley took her shot.”

“You said ‘prints’ didn’t you?” Edward asked.

Byron nodded and said, “At least two sets, one very large and the other smaller.”

Colin Metcalf and Vicar Russell looked at each other, but did not speak.

“Go ahead and tell them,” Major Elliot coaxed.

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“We’ve seen prints, too,” Colin claimed. “We’ve seen the small prints turn to larger prints and sometime to human form, but no one has ever seen more than one beast. Wolves almost always hunt in packs, but not this one.”

“I don’t know what we’re dealing with,” Byron stated. “But the tracks I saw were no wolf tracks.”

“What?” Edward exclaimed. “I’ve seen them myself and—”

“Trust me,” Byron assured. “I’ve tracked all kinds of wolf and these were different. The shape wasn’t right and these imprints were from a much heavier animal than a typical wolf.”

“This is no typical animal,” Colin Metcalf asserted. “This is a fiendish beast. I’ve hunted every kind of beast found in Africa and this is different. It’s cunning as a man and stealthy like the fog. It’s—not natural.”

Vicar Russell looked strangely at Colin Metcalf and Byron looked as if he would refute the man’s claim of a supernatural explanation when Lewis said, “Let’s not get side tracks with myth and legends. What exactly do we know?”

“The thing kills,” Colin stated flatly. “Kill quite effectively.”

“How exactly?” Byron asked.

Colin Metcalf seemed perturbed by the question until Byron clarified, “What I mean is, what are the nature of the wounds. I’ve hear that three or four have been killed and that the young girl Alice seems to have seen some kind of animal, but beyond that, I don’t have many details.”

Vicar Russell cleared his throat and said, “The constable in Chesterfield has investigated all of the deaths except the one towards Castleton, but I’ve given last rites to all the victims.”

“Try to tell me exactly what you’ve seen,” Byron requested.

EDWARD’S CONVERSATION ABOUT FUTURE

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MORE DETAILS OF THE ATTACKS

HYPOTHESIS ABOUT THE CAUSE

KATE HEADLEY COMES TO THE CHATSWORTH AND HAS WORDS WITH EDWARD

[Type text]

STOP TO SEE KATE BUT SHE'S NOT THERE. LUKE WILL ASK ABOUT BYRON'S STRANGE
ENCOUNTER. THEY GO TO SEE THE VICAR, ON THE WAY BACK KATHERINE WALKS ACROSS THE FIELD
LIKE A DREAM. THINK AUGUSTA

KATE WILL DRAW THE PRINT
OBSERVES THE LIFESTOCK NOT MOLESTED.
BYRON STARTS INVESTIGATION
POSSIBLE FUTURE PLOT LINES

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CHAPTER

I had never been out of the state and Byron had never been east of the Mississippi until our trip. where he had often gone to track down desperados in hiding.

FUTURE IDEAS

Luke will travel to London and spend a day in the library to develop his theories about werewolves.

There will be a hairy boy in the gypsy camp that will be accused of being the beast. Byron will defend the boy with the help of a doctor who will become part of the investigation.

Vicar will be murdered by the beast after being suspected as the murder.

CUTS

Although he was not familiar with the countryside around him, he was somewhat relieved to have his friend stay behind. He had enjoyed the trip, but was not accustomed to manufacturing hours of conversation a day.