**Chapter 1**

Goathland nestles in a moorland valley between the market town of Pickering and the ancient fishing port of Whitby. This remote Yorkshire village has been a tourist magnet for two-hundred years, although, in recent times, the popularity stems mostly from its starring role as the fictional Aidensfield in the television drama Heartbeat. Daytrippers still descend upon the place to “ooh!” and “aah!” at the filming locations, especially the picture-postcard railway station that hasn’t changed in over a century. The platform doubled as Hogsmeade in the Harry Potter movie franchise and fantasy fans flock to see the steam locomotive that underwent a makeover as the Hogwarts Express. If only Hollywood had shot a couple of Star Wars scenes nearby, this would truly be Geek Heaven.

Despite the name, there are very few goats in Goathland, but an abundance of sheep roam the lanes and heather-clad hills munching the grass verges to billiard table perfection. This was the reason Tyson Cooper and his small group of travellers had set up camp a mile outside the village. Their caravans stood clustered on the moor, icy March rain beating a frenzied tattoo on the metal roofs. Three men sat in the largest of these – a two-bedroom, aptly-named Gypsy Wanderer – nervously listening to Tyson as he paced the carpet. Pausing to glance through the window at the pitch-black terrain, he half-filled a coffee mug with whisky, the bottle rattling against the ceramic as his hand shook.

“It was hideous.” The big man guzzled the drink, stammering in his thick Irish accent. “This thing was a feckin' monster from hell.”

Tyson was a big man in every sense of the term and his trio of cronies had never seen him scared before. An infamous bare-knuckle fighter and winner of over forty unlawful bouts, his questionable party tricks included bench-pressing stolen motorcycles and drunkenly punching horses unconscious. Three years ago, he'd memorably bitten off Billy Walton's ear in a championship boxing match at the Appleby gypsy fair. This framed and somewhat gory trophy was proudly displayed amongst the china plates and other Romany ornaments on his caravan wall. No, his companions knew it would take something pretty special to scare this man.

“A monster from Hell,” repeated Tyson, gulping more whisky as he paced. “That's the only way to describe it. We'd rounded up the sheep and were getting them in the horse box when it appeared out of the dark. Feckin' huge and black with glowing eyes.”

The gypsies glanced warily at one another, unsure of how to reply. Knowing Tyson, any impromptu comment that bordered upon scepticism and disbelief could easily be answered with a broken jaw.

A monster with glowing eyes? Up until now, the local constabulary had been their only concern, and thanks to government cutbacks and policing reductions, especially in rural areas like North Yorkshire, they weren't much of a concern. Jim Boscombe of Hatherley Farm hadn't taken kindly to his sheep vanishing. Since the appearance of the travellers twelve days ago, the police had visited their camp four times, but although they knew this shifty bunch were responsible, there was no evidence, the animals having been sold to a crooked Whitby butcher within hours of being stolen. Three lucrative thefts, so far, and no one could prove a thing, but now it seemed they had something else to worry about. Something a little more frightening than cops.

“A monster?” One of the gypsies lifted a curtain to squint through the window at the sodden winter moorland. With the darkness and raincloud cover, he may as well have been blindfolded. “Er, well, I don't know what to say. Um, where are the other guys?”

“I haven’t a clue.” Tyson laughed manically. “They vanished and I drove straight back here. This thing ripped the doors off the horse box and let the sheep out. It tore them off like they were made of paper. The lads ran away screaming and I don’t blame them.” He guzzled down his drink and refilled the mug. “I'm telling you, I don't know what that feckin' monster was, but it's out there somewhere right now and I’m…”

His frightened babbling ended abruptly as the creaking walls lurched and the floor tilted. Crockery smashed and the lighting fused as the caravan was flipped completely over onto its side, the four men falling together in a tangled heap. Animal talons tore through the roof, now effectively the wall.

“What in the name of God…” began Tyson.

The sheet metal was wrenched apart, screeching and groaning as it opened up to reveal an enormous black figure. The wolf stood on two legs like a man, glaring down at them with luminous golden eyes. Seven feet in height and three feet wide between the bulging biceps, its bushy tail snaked, reminiscent of a disgruntled cat. Freezing air wafted over the petrified travellers, an unnatural cold radiating not from the gaping fissure, but the wolf itself. Panting from the exertion of running to the camp and rolling the caravan, the muscular chest rose and fell, clouding breath mixing with the steam that billowed from its rain-soaked pelt.

“Is that your feckin’ monster?” croaked one of the gypsies.

It was a pretty stupid question; there couldn't be too many things like this roaming the moors around Goathland. Tyson didn't answer, but the unsavoury sound of his bowel emptying into his trousers suggested it probably was.

The wolf's huge muzzle cracked open to expose sharp white fangs – gigantic razor teeth that, given the choice, none of the travellers would have opted to see.

“Good evening, gentlemen,” it said, in a deep rumbling growl. “How are we tonight?”

“Hello,” whimpered a terrified Irish voice in the darkness. “Not too bad, thanks.”

The cold intensified as the creature moved inside out of the downpour. “Now I realise this may seem like a peculiar demand from a wolf, but I really must insist that you leave the sheep alone. You will remove your caravans tonight and never return. Those sheep are under my protection and, if I see any of you people again, I will devour you from the feet up. Do you understand?”

The four men nodded dementedly.

“Mister Cooper,” it snarled, the yellow eyes blazing. “You are leaving right now. Do you understand me?”

“Yes, yes,” whined Tyson. “Absolutely.”

“Excellent.” Glancing down at its dripping black fur and the rainwater puddle forming around its feet, the werewolf tutted. “Terrible weather, don’t you think?”

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Goathland stands on England's largest expanse of open moorland. A desolate, yet eerily beautiful wilderness of heather and rock, the North York Moors National Park lies within a triangle formed by the Yorkshire Wolds, the Cleveland Hills and the North Sea. Bernard Quist drove across this dark terrain towards the village, his headlights cutting through the sheeting rain and picking out a trio of scampering rabbits on the lane ahead. Slowing down, so as not to harm them, he drew on his cigarette and opened the window slightly to draw out the smoke tendrils.

After leaving the gypsy camp and returning to his car, Quist had changed before setting off. In normal form, his complexion was conspicuously smoother, his presence didn’t lower the temperature and his appearance was far less terrifying. Slim and attractive, with dark wavy hair, he looked to be mid-forties, but he was older – a good deal older. The werewolf attack, that changed his life forever, had taken place in 1790 and Quist hadn't aged a day since. On first meeting him, most people noticed his prominent nose, but although it was a little on the large side, it was nothing in comparison to the gruesome jutting muzzle of his other self.

Hatherley Farm stood on the village outskirts and, parking his Ford saloon on the driveway by the house, he climbed out and took a deep breath of night air, tilting his head and smiling to feel the refreshing rain on his face.

Quist was shorter than his lupine alter ego and an average trim figure replaced the supernatural wolf's muscular bulk. Despite this, he was much stronger than most men and his augmented senses were immeasurably keener. He picked up the sound of cats in a nearby barn, their low mewing to one another easily discernible above the hissing patter of rain on vegetation. The scents of the wet moorland filled his nostrils, along with various farmyard odours, some pleasant, some stimulating, and some emanating from dubious sources he wouldn’t wish to step in.

Killing his cigarette underfoot and pulling on a black leather overcoat, Quist paused to peer at the sky as the moon appeared to his right. A distant break in the rainclouds had exposed the bright sphere and it glowed with yellowy light above the sodden heather, almost full and quite hypnotic. He tore his eyes away and shook himself before heading for the farmhouse. Many lycanthropy legends were incorrect, especially those concerning the moon. Bernard Quist and his kind could shapeshift on any night between sunset and sunrise, but the violent bestial urges, that he managed to keep in check, were more powerful during the full phase and he preferred not to transform at this time of the month. Tonight, however, there had been no other way to accomplish his unusual mission.

The farmer's sheepdog came running from its kennel at the rear of the house to greet the approaching man. The collie froze halfway down the drive, took one look at the figure in the long coat, and bolted away yelping into the darkness. This impolite display didn't surprise Quist; animals could always sense the supernatural wolf and tended to instantly vanish. He'd jokingly toyed with the notion of working in pest control – just entering a building and sitting down with a coffee and cigarette would be more than enough to clear out any rats and mice.

Jim Boscombe answered the doorbell. “Ah, you're back?” The farmer waved Quist into the hallway. “I’m guessing it was a waste of time and they told you to piss off, but I can't believe they didn’t hurt you. I thought going to speak with those bastards would be a big mistake.”

“Yes, you did warn me,” admitted his visitor. “But as you can doubtless see, I'm fine.”

“So what happened?”

“I can’t say as they were overly pleased to see me.” Quist looked around, breathing in the scents of wood smoke and an unlucky farmyard chicken sizzling in a nearby kitchen range. “But we had a somewhat frank discussion and they agreed to never trouble you again. They're vacating the area as we speak.”

“What?” Boscombe frowned. “Is that some sort of joke?”

“Of course not. I can assure you, you'll have no further thefts of livestock.”

The farmer shook his head, finding it difficult to accept that such a nondescript and well-spoken man could intimidate a group of hardened criminals. His eloquence and vocabulary belonged in a theatre Shakespeare recital. “They're actually leaving?” he said. “I’m sorry, but I can’t believe you did it.”

“I'm not at liberty to divulge my methods. My approach to this was somewhat unusual, to say the least, but it achieved the desired results.” Quist pulled a bulky envelope from his overcoat. “Mister Cooper, their ringleader, apologised profusely and asked me to give you this – the proceeds from the sale of your stolen sheep, minus the fee for my services.”

“Seriously?” Boscombe gazed open-mouthed at the thick wad of twenty pound notes. “My God! The police couldn't prove anything, but I knew they were the ones responsible and…”

“Your suspicions were well-founded.” Quist nodded. “I caught them in the act, rounding up your sheep into their horse box.”

“You're telling me you just strolled into their camp and sorted everything out? This is incredible.” Laughing, Boscombe slapped the man’s shoulder. “As you know, you were recommended by a mate of mine. You did a job for him last year and he said you were a brilliant private investigator, but this is…”

“Consultant detective,” corrected Quist, with a quirky, lopsided smile. “Not a private investigator. I’m pleased I was able to assist you with this problem.”

Bernard Quist operated as a consultant detective from a small agency on Baker Avenue in the nearby city of York. Originally a discreet one-man operation, for several months now he'd been ably assisted by a local youth named Watson, one of the very few people he’d trusted with his dark supernatural secret.

“So my worries are over.” Boscombe excitedly counted the money. “I’d say this deserves a drink. I have a decent bottle of malt and we could…”

“That’s very kind, but I need to get back to York. Perhaps another time?” Opening the door, Quist peered out at the downpour and tutted. “Terrible weather, don’t you think?”

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