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Wolves of Memory

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Chapter One

'Do you know who I think of myself as occasionally, Col?' the Assistant Chief asked.

'It would be someone very worthwhile, sir,' Harpur replied. 'This opens up a range of possibilities.'

'Frankenstein, Col. I think of myself from time to time as Frankenstein.'

'That right, sir?' Harpur replied.

'You'll ask why, Col.'

'Why, sir?'

'I see myself as concerned with the manufacture of Being.'

'I'd regard that as a true task, a task worthy of you, sir, and you worthy of it.'

'Some ignoramuses speak of Frankenstein as the monster,' the ACC replied.

'That right?'

'I don't say you, necessarily, Harpur.'

'Lately, I haven't thought about him much.'

'Dr Frankenstein was the good, young, idealistic man of science who yearned to produce new life by his own methods.'

'You've always loved a challenge. This is widely acknowledged.'

'I, as Assistant Chief Constable, handling this project, have to make not one but *four* new lives, Col,' Iles replied.

'It's tough but –'

'Shall I read you my instructions? Well, *our* instructions. I don't discount you, Col.'

'Thank you, sir.'

'A memo for the Chief from the Organized and International Crime Directorate in the Home Office, with all the usual secrecy, confidentiality and top-notch security ratings. And they're warranted. Oh, yes, they're warranted. Inevitable.'

'Yes, we've had these before,' Harpur said.

'And then dumped by his Sirship, the Chief, on me. Known as chain of command. Or pass the fucking buck. I'm Assistant Chief (Operations), and this is an operation, so give it to Desmond Iles. That's the gorgeous logic.'

But Harpur saw the ACC did not really resent these orders. He would regard nobody else as big enough to cope. He might be right. The task had to be his. His. 'The Chief has terrific confidence in you already, I expect, although he's so new,' Harpur replied. 'Sir Matthew would probably say to his clerk, "This is one for Dr Frankenstein in person," and the clerk would know at once he wittily meant you.'

'Don't piss me about, Harpur.'

'One quality required in clerks – intuition.'

'Who else could handle this assignment, Col? Who?'

'Some question, sir. What I recall from school used to be termed a *rhetorical* question, I think – meaning it looks for no answer because the answer is built in.'

Iles picked up from his desk a couple of sheets of paper clipped together. He did not pass them to Harpur, as if unsure of his security rating and/or ability to understand without an intermediary. Iles said: 'It's headed "Clandestine resettlement in your area of former Covert Human Intelligence Source."'

'Ah.'

'"Covert Human Intelligence source",' Iles said.

'Meaning an ex-informant.'

'Myself, I don't mind a bit of jargon, Col. It suggests

policing is a profession, like chiropodists or window dressers. "Covert Human Intelligence Source" is a more adult, less tabloid, label than supergrass, wouldn't you say?'

'I –'

Iles proceeded: '"Clandestine resettlement in your area of former Covert Human Intelligence Source. The undermentioned and his family/dependants are to be accommodated with all standard facilities of the national Resettlement Scheme:

Ian Maitland Ballion, age 38
Eleanor Carys Veronica Ballion, wife, age 36
Rose Diana Ballion, daughter, age 10
Larry Raymond Ballion, son, age 8

'"The former CHIS and dependants will be housed in a purchased property of the B7 category (detached, four bedrooms, £300,000–£325,000 price.) All costs of this purchase will be met by the Treasury acting through the Home Office. You will provide a short list of six B7 properties from which the CHIS may select the one he and his family find most suitable. The names Ian Maitland Ballion, Eleanor Carys Veronica Ballion, Rose Diana Ballion, Larry Raymond Ballion will cease from the date of this memorandum. These names have become respectively, Robert Maurice Templedon, Jane Iris Templedon, Sian Rebecca Templedon, Harry Charles Templedon. General Register Office and other agencies have been informed. The chosen B7 property and appropriate furnishings will be purchased outright in the joint names of the above Robert Maurice Templedon and Jane Iris Templedon as if through their own funds.

'"You will arrange a conference in a secure site away from police premises [Repeat – away from police premises] at which the family and representatives of all agencies concerned in the CHIS Resettlement Scheme should meet and inter-brief information relevant to the case. These

agencies are listed below and have been told that you will notify them of the date, time and place of this conference." I won't read you those, Harpur. It's the usual collection. They are the nuts and bolts of the operation, the artisans, and not to be despised. But it is *I* who has to breathe new breath into this family. It is I who must bring to an end the Ballions' era and out of it form and sustain the Templedon era. This is transformation, Col. This is rebuilding. This is responsibility, Harpur.'

'Always the terrible fear of revenge attacks, on him and/or his family. But you've succeeded with this kind of concealment and transformation before, sir.'

'True.'

'Beyond genetic engineering, sir.'

'Creation, Col.'

Chapter Two

'So, I get used to calling you Robert?' she asked.

She said it big – a lot of breath. It was a kind of accusation. He would put up with this. Weren't there worse accusations around? 'That's right,' he said. 'That's right . . . Jane.'

'And I get used to a new house, a new town in the sticks, new people around?'

They'd discussed this so often, so often. But he stayed reasonable and polite and tried to explain once more. It was a big change for her, he could see that. It was a big change for all of them – her, him, the children. He must go gently. 'I take it as a beginning, a second beginning,' he said. 'We're lucky. Not everybody gets that kind of chance. We can't stay in London. We can't stay anywhere we're known.'

'And the kids?' she replied. 'How do you tell them they've got to become someone else?'

'Yes, dodgy, but it can be done. The police are running this kind of disguise programme all the time. They have experts. Psychologists. This guy masterminding things – Iles – he's got the know-how for these identity capers. He's not a psychologist himself, no, just the police, but he's handled a lot of identity switches. No slip-ups, I'm told. That's why they like using him and his Force.'

'What – there's a whole district of ex-grasses on his ground, is there, like a ghetto?'

'They know how to help people disappear and reinvent

themselves,' he said. 'It's necessary. You can see it's necessary, can't you?'

In a while, she gave a tiny, reluctant nod, but enough for him to see. 'And aren't you sad to find a for-ever stop put on the name Ballion?'

'Yes, I'm sad. Sad some. Only some. I'd rather a for-ever stop is put on the name, not on me.' He knew that once she had accepted the changes she would adapt to them faster and more fully than himself. She liked to go through all the arguments, that's all. She had a university training.

Chapter Three

They assembled as instructed in what had to be called a 'safe house', though Harpur feared the term. It always seemed to him full of vaunting, barmy confidence, or official optimism, a sort of dare to Fate to show it was *not* safe. Harpur thought Fate should be steered clear of. Fate had a lot of form.

They used unmarked cars and parked in other streets, on neutral spots alongside waste ground or garden walls, to avoid resident rage and the attention it brought. No uniforms, of course. Very few of those attending had uniformed jobs, anyway. Most were civilian. Iles had a uniform in soft, superior, light blue cloth, but that came out for ceremonial functions mainly. Tonight did not rate as one of those. Harpur had a uniform, too. He never wore it.

People were individually briefed and given exact, different times for arrival at the house. Most had ordinary, sedate, civilian office jobs and wouldn't be into security. They needed precise instructions. All were told to walk from their vehicles singly, in twos or, at the most, threes, the intervals unequal and spread across a full hour. It was evening and dark, all curtains in the house closed. Over the years a pattern for this type of meeting had been learned, a pattern aiming to hide it *was* a pattern. Iles supervised everything personally and hosted the session. When Iles supervised personally it was very personally.

He and Harpur had visited the place earlier in the day

to make sure things were right. The house was called Meadowland. 'Thoroughness is one of my centralities, you know, Col,' Iles said as they checked. 'I don't mean simple, boring drudgery. Not *plod*, for God's sake. No, a kind of *inspired* thoroughness, becoming in itself a type of . . . well, a type of *creative impulse* . . . yes, in itself. I don't think that's claiming too much, is it? At Staff College I was sometimes known as "Whole-hog Desmond".'

'This is one of your qualities that most would recognize very swiftly, sir. Your Frankenstein aspect isn't so famed, of course, owing to the work's secrecy.'

'My mother used to say, the moment I was committed to some interest or project I would go at it "all out". The very *moment*. This was her phrase, Harpur, "all out".'

'Insights – mothers are famed for them. I certainly don't have anything against mothers.' Harpur knew the ACC also distrusted 'safe houses', but, as the orders said, this kind of conference could not be set up in headquarters. There must be no police connection – no traceable police connection with the Templedons, once Ballions. That requirement Iles would term a 'centrality', meaning that if the Templedons, once Ballions, were traced, Robert, once Ian, would certainly be targeted, and possibly his family.

On their morning call, he and Harpur had found everything ready. Or not quite everything. For the sake of naturalness, the curtains stayed open now, to be pulled over later. They tried to keep clear of the windows. Also, there would be armed support in the garden and on the drive once darkness came and brought concealment. Harpur selected positions for them, pencilled a basic ground plan and marked their spots. 'But one day we'll get a tragedy,' he said.

'Do you know, Col, occasionally, I wonder what they'd call *you* at Staff College, if you were ever going to get there, which you're fucking not,' Iles said, while Harpur finished the sketch. 'These nicknames are almost always good-natured and positive, so wouldn't be to do with your

clothes. Tell me the attribute you feel might be highlighted in this fashion, suppose you reached Staff College, as if you ever fucking would.'

'In which direction at Staff College did they think your whole-hoggery revealed itself most strongly, sir?' Harpur replied. 'Though if it's *whole* hoggery I suppose this suggests an all-round quality, or it would be only hoggery.'

'Nicknames – interesting, Col. It's as if people feel short-changed by one's, as it were, *given* identity and wish to impose another selected by them. They insist on defining who, what, one is.'

'Identities. So inconstant, so shifty. Well, our game here, now, isn't it? We're going to transform a family. Try.'

'Tragedy, you say?' Iles replied. 'Oh, yes, possible. Appallingly possible.' Iles's voice turned grave and troubled after the insults, one of those rapid switches of tone and topic he could fall into. They confused many people, and used to confuse Harpur. As to identities, which exactly was the Assistant Chief's? Iles's mother might be able to explain him, or a psychiatrist, given seven or eight years, if the ACC would let one near. 'Schizo' – why hadn't anyone at Staff College given him that as nickname? Not 'amiable' enough? Harpur's method with Iles, worked out over years, was frantic mobility of response – a faltering attempt to match his variations. It could be managed, as long as you never shackled yourself with common sense or politeness. Iles did not prize politeness, neither giving nor receiving. He saw politeness as evasion. He had said on that preparatory, early visit to Meadowland: 'This lad we're hiding, Col – I think of the kids, their safety.'

'Difficult. They're damn vulnerable.'

'We look after them, Col.'

'Certainly, but –'

'We look after them, Harpur. We look after the parents as well, obviously. Wasn't daddy Mr Metropolitan Police Supergrass of 2004, and, as such, the country owes him?'

'As such, as ever. We're good at these makeovers.'

'So far.'

'Never lost a former grass or anyone close yet,' Harpur said.

'Have you seen his wife? Dossier pics. Worth a gaze. Eleanor, was. Now, Jane. I don't think I've ever got close to a woman called Eleanor. Definitely not close to a woman called Eleanor who turned into Jane. But in all this, Col, one especially takes care of the children. I mean we, of course. What one is here for. I mean we, of course.'

'Yes.'

'We both have families, you and I, Harpur.'

'Certainly, sir.'

'We know – *know* – the anxieties.'

'Certainly.'

'Know from experience, not from some damn Dr Spock handbook, Col.'

'A very different kettle of fish, sir.'

'What?'

'Experience.'

'Col, don't tell me that a man who's never had children knows – I mean *knows* – actually *knows*, Harpur, knows in his arteries, ligaments, flesh, the concerns about him/her/them felt by a father.'

'Fatherhood's quite a job. That's been proved over many a century. Think of Saul and Jonathan.' During his career, Harpur had heard Iles do the caring, shepherd-of-my-flock stance more than once. Oh, unquestionably more than once. And it was fairly real. Iles believed in duty. He never skimped on his responsibilities. Resettlement operations would often bring on the ACC's caring aspect. Harpur sometimes wished more people could witness Iles in these roles. At such periods, almost anybody unprejudiced and with normal eyesight could spot true humanity and kindness in him. There had been times, and there were still times, when Harpur felt it a duty to mention this warm side of the ACC to doubters. And doubters did exist. Many

decided from their experience of him that he was all brilliant, destructive, selfish savagery.

And, on the whole, people would listen while Harpur tried to convince them. Naturally, they did. They longed for reassurance about Iles. It shook them that he held high police rank. Perhaps they'd even read and learned from that famous thinker somewhere in history who said law and order should be 'in good hands'. Iles himself would often quote this to Harpur – from someone called George Savile? – quote it while showing his own hands symbolically, as if there could not be any better for the task. Well, perhaps.

Now, at their big, evening meeting the ACC gazed around the wide front room where they'd gathered, perhaps thinking this safe house would turn out . . . safe . . . or as safe as any safe house could be. Things might go all right, again. Meadowland had a comfortable *feel* to it, as if it was lived in and enjoyed until the day before yesterday, not simply set up as a venue. Rented? In which case, from whom? Secure?

To Harpur, the pictures around the walls looked reasonable, and originals, not prints. There was a cello propped against the wall in one corner of the room, and full, do-it-yourself bookshelves across an alcove. These held paperbacks as well as proper volumes, suggesting the works might be for reading rather than show. Although Harpur did not read much himself he was not against it, and until his wife's death there'd been a lot of books at home – all sorts, including one called *Edwin Drood*. He got rid of most of them a while ago.

For this evening's meeting, Iles wore one of his great suits, a double-breasted grey, no waistcoat, inevitably custom-made, the trousers cut close to proclaim leg slimness. Iles was fond of his legs. Iles liked most of his physique but not his Adam's apple, which Harpur knew he loathed his father for. That had always seemed unjust to

Harpur, because women didn't have Adam's apples and, obviously, couldn't pass them on.

And then what about those good hands he'd show people as a sign? They were long, slender, well looked after. Yes, you could call them 'good' hands. Just the same, some who came into contact with Iles did not think he possessed the kind of reliability and scrupulousness they hoped for in an Assistant Chief. To them, Iles represented either actual or approaching chaos, and they were terrified. They yearned to believe nobody so roaringly and imaginatively berserk could reach and hold his high post in a British police force, even given the new millennium.

Yes, the unconvinced listened to Harpur's praise for Iles, but then most likely thought back to what they, personally, had noted and quailed from in him. Harpur knew many of them stuck with their own impressions of the Assistant Chief regardless. Such impressions would be deep, difficult to forget.

Chapter Four

Perhaps a reason people married or got long-term shacked-up was to have somebody who *would* ask the important questions, get underneath the show. When she said: 'And aren't you sad to find a for-ever stop put on the name Ballion?' he'd been ready with the true, sharp, unbeatable answer, of course. But, just the same, did that say everything? 'I'd rather a for-ever stop is put on the name, not on me.'

Yes, right, true, sharp, unbeatable. It was why he had a seat alongside her now in this big, crowded room with its cello and chaise longue and books and pictures and cops and quiet men and women from the Ministries. He didn't mind the cello and chaise longue and books and pictures. He was used to middle class culture gear. He'd had the same or similar at home in London, when he was Ballion. His daughter learned the cello and Eleanor – no, no, Jane, now – Jane played the viola. Hadn't he dropped out of college and gone into that rough-house, take-it-and-run career to finance such a fine, nicely equipped life?

They all waited obediently for the fashion-slick performer, Iles, to start his sermon. But Jane's question had troubled Robert Templedon, and still troubled him because it suggested he might be ashamed of Ian Ballion and now wanted to escape at a gallop into someone else, someone with no past and no guilt. That was a brilliant, happy, impossible aim. He had helped put three lads, mates, in jail for terms of between fourteen and ten years. She'd hinted

several times that Ian Ballion could not tolerate the thought of this betrayal and so welcomed conversion to Robert Templedon. The charge lingered, half poleaxed him now in this sedate room.

God, oh, God, none of it should have happened – the ambush the arrests, the sentences. He had never meant that. They had promised him, and promised him, and lied. And so, now here he was, sitting mildly among the law and order boys and girls ready for the top law and order boy to preach hope, respectability and eternal craftiness.