

# Dipster Hoofus



Jeff Hayes

3

# Dipster Hoofus

On the importance of choosing one's  
neighbors carefully



J E F F  
H A Y E S



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Dedicated to Mona  
Her attentiveness keeps  
this author true to course.

And a special shout-out to CS  
for the inspirations.

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## CHAPTER I

### Lost

This is a true story in so far as related to the geographic location. Concerning the events, my memory remains a bit faulty with the accuracy of the telling. In regards to the peculiar goings on, I leave it among yourselves to decide.

Pulling up before the house, Samuel switched off the motor. The drive up today had been a harrowing one. Dramatics had been expected, but that was awaiting at the house. The road up through the forest was typically his favorite part of the journey. This day though had been different. The weather brought rain through the night. In the morning the rain had continued. However, once out of the city, the sun started to break through. The sky became the most outrageously vivid blue.

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“Obnoxiously arrogant of the sky,” he had commented, to the backside of the windshield.

Perhaps the outrageousness came more from Samuel’s projection than from any atmospheric condition.

Nikki had been over. She came for dinner and stayed for breakfast. The initial arrangement had been for her to come over a few days earlier, but there had been some mysterious drama of a business nature. She had been required to fly off immediately to take part in some firefighting triage. An apology had been offered. A promise followed to make it up to him; something of a tease, a most delicious exotica to set the hook. He put off the drive to the country house, awaiting Nikki’s dangling surprise. If the delay brought complications with Lenore, so be it.

When Nikki returned, the energy between them was amazing. They were both left a bit sore for it. As she had foretold, the reward proved most satisfying, well worth the cost. Or so he thought at the time.

Sitting in the car outside the country house, memory of the morning’s departure from the city flowed in his thoughts: She pulled out of the driveway. The indicator came on. Her car turned away from his direction and was gone, disappearing into the traffic.



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“Aaah,” Samuel said, reflecting back upon the tryst.

With a sigh, he forced focus back into the present. Duties awaited inside the house. He couldn’t sit out here all day avoiding her. Lenore would be waiting, pacing back and forth, annoyed he hadn’t arrived days ago.

“Time to face the music.”

The rear view mirror was adjusted for a hair check. A bit of fluffing at the locks had it back to right.

He laughed, “Some riotous fireworks out your ears would have ensued, my dear Lenore, were you two to meet. Maybe that could be arranged someday. Accidentally, of course.”

The gap between his teeth was checked. Nothing unsightly remained.

“See, Lenore. See what your kind, passionless love has driven me to? Into the arms of another. Nikki. She knows how to love a man. I mean like really love a man—real good. So good that it makes one sore in all the right places for days.

“How’s that, Nikki? You require more? Again? How long has it been since the last time? Four hours, or so? I’m still vibrating like it’s only been 4 seconds. How’s that? Shall I be over for a hot lunch rendezvous? Naturally, your loveliness. Your need is my command.

“Why can’t you make me feel that with you anymore, Lenore?...”

He left off at the speech practice in mid babble after getting out of the car to pause at the sight.

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“That isn’t right.”

There was a large roller suitcase on the porch. The suitcase was familiar. It being on the porch was also not an unusual sight. Lenore’s routine after packing the suitcases was to roll them outside. It then became his role to hump their weight over to the trunk. The car would sag in complaint, but he never would.

“Well, to be honest, maybe sometimes, on rare occasion. Such comments are expected, are they not? What was not, however, was that a suitcase had been left out on the porch, exposed—beyond the roof. Like it was purposefully left in the rain. That was odd.”

It was broached to her that the plan had changed. That he wouldn’t leave for the country house until a few more days. The explanation was flatly spoken as a matter of fact: Work had been crazy. His boss needed him to babysit the new clients who had just arrived in town. It was unavoidable.

Lenore had responded quite upset.

His words were a slight adaptation from what Nikki’s had been, as Lenore required more placating than he had. Eventually she did calm down. The anger dissipated to reveal what was actually troubling her. She was nervous to remain longer at the house alone. The dreams were back, more vivid than before.

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“Her suitcase had been left on the porch. Was she expecting me earlier? Did I get the date wrong?”

Lenore couldn't be reached this morning. He had wanted to hang up after a few rings, but dutifully waited for the answering machine to pick up. A short strained message was left, that he was leaving now, and to call the mobile if there was anything she needed him to pick up.

Nikki had been all over him during the call. Clingy, kissing at his neck, and other parts—a lot of attention directed at the other parts—unbuttoning, trying to distract him. An excellent job she did of it too.

Closing the car door brought another distraction into view.

“Damn. My poor car. This will be an expensive repair.”

A crease ran the length of the left side, starting from the front quarter panel, continuing along the door and the rear quarter panel. There were scratches as well. But for the irregularity of the scratches, it looked like the crease was part of the car's body style. In actuality, the crease was body work courtesy of a tree the car ran against when it slid off the muddy road.

He said, under his breath, “Impossibly greasy road.” A hand ran through his hair again, fluffing at it.

Approaching the house, he called out, “Lenore?! Hello?”

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The dripping suitcase was rolled across the deck to shelter under the roof.

The screen door was shut, but the inner door was not. He stepped inside and called again, “Lenore, honey? You left the door open. Hell—o?”

At that moment, the clock in the hallway rang out, startling him. The stiff cuckoo croaked three times before disappearing with a jerk behind its little door. He drew in a breath and blew it out in an attempt to calm himself.

Looking at his watch, it was well after three.

“Silly clock. Not only are you irritating, but you can’t even keep the time proper.” Reflexively, he corrected it. The weight chain was pulled back to re-power the mechanism.

The kitchen was investigated. It was spotless. She always kept it so. The refrigerator was stocked. Milk, several white paper wrapped meats. Half a bottle of her rosé. A six-pack of his favorite beer was in back.

“You always keep me in mind, don’t you dear? Thing-wise.”

Closing the door, he called out again, “Lenore? Where are you?”

Approaching the top of the stairs a naughty thought flashed. “Are you in the bedroom waiting for me? You are, aren’t you? Such the minx!” He sprang into the room. While in mid-flight he said, “Boo! Got you!”

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Empty.

He was disappointed that the antic went unobserved.

“Ah. Are you hiding in the bathroom?”

He crept quietly up. Pulling back the curtain suddenly revealed only the dry, empty stall of the steam shower behind the spotless glass wall.

“Where is she?” he asked the void.

Back in the bedroom was the perfectly made bed. He went directly to the grand window and out upon the balcony. The meadow. Wind and rain had compressed its long grass into swirls of random shapes, nonsense patterns to catch one’s attention. A smarter man, he had thought, could have made sense of it. Unfortunately, he was not such a man. That was well understood. He had rationalized to instead compensate with good looks and flash style. At least that is what he repetitiously told everybody, ‘Looks make the man, for all practical purpose.’

What pattern in the grass that did make sense today was this: there looked to be a trek made through recently. It led away from the house in the direction of the old manor house ruin.

Proud of himself for the insightful discovery, he clapped his hands and said, “A clue! Have you made a game for me, my darling Lenore?”

He clomped down the stairs two at a time and into the muck room. The loafers were flipped off. They bounced on the

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floor. Sticky mud knocked out of the soles in clumps. Dirty steps were visible into the room. “Whoops. Guilty. Sorry about that, babe. I’ll clean up my tracks later, I promise. But first, the adventure!”

Bursting out the door, he looked ready to weather the next deluge, dressed in rubber boots, oil skin duster and matching hat.

“Oh dearie, I like this. Such fun, your little hide-and-seek. Olly olly oxen free!”

Running further into the grass, “Come out, come out wherever you are! I know, I know you aren’t very far!”

The bright sunshine and steaming vegetation drying in the heat proved no distraction. He kept running, exaggerating the comicalness of the long coat flapping behind.

Approaching the ruin, optimism began to deflate. There was an oppressive feeling here, more so as each step brought him closer.

The disturbed grass led straight into the roofless center, which was where he now found himself, in the shadow of two exterior walls. They held each other up in defiance of time. The other walls were in various states of decomposing into their final state, rubble mounds. Grass grew deeply everywhere.

Timidly, he asked, “You aren’t hiding in here, are you, dear?”

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Investigating the far side of the ruin found the grass not disturbed—only the swirl patterns of noise continued. Beyond was disturbing blackness where the woods began.

“I am glad you didn’t go there. They’re not the same merry forest that the road up carries through. Glad indeed. These trees have an oppressive feel to them. Not unlike the ruin itself,” he said, speaking to the walls.

After the country house was first built, curiosity had gotten the better of him. He had explored the ruin grounds, even remained there for a while. It was on a day the sun was out bright and warm. The sounds of insects buzzing about made for an orchestra performance for him, the audience within an amphitheater. The slight wind provided a rhythm through the grass and trees. The world hummed repetition in a song of peaceful relaxation. Propped upright against an inviting wall, his attention flowed outwards, sleepiness flowed inwards. A deep sleep quickly overcame him.

He remained there undisturbed, paused in a peaceful dream of inaction; eventually, something called into his dream. In the distance, quite faint, began a singular sound. After a moment, it repeated as though in echo, relaxed and soothing. The sound flowed wonderfully with the mood. And then in an instant, it became disruptive. Each call rather than fading instead became stronger, grew louder as the period decreased. Inexplicably, his

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sleep-self was not confused by the disorienting inverse echo. His body accepted the approaching sound, and was confident for it.

Awaking with a start, his eyes were wild in bewilderment. Just before in the dream, a giant's hand clap occurred directly before him. The wind from the strike blew sharply at his face as the impact from the sound faded. In waking, he had jerked backwards involuntarily, hitting his head soundly against the wall. A swoon of dizziness pressed in, joined with voices. They chanted with mumbled words in an incoherent language. The more he tried to focus upon the sounds, the more effective they were at eluding him, and the more intoxicating they were becoming. The orientation inside his head was spinning backwards. The firmness of the wall had dissolved. Assurance of its solidness was no longer, neither was the ground beneath. A fear came that he would lose himself without their contact. It required him to relax into a state of obedience. No alternative was possible.

Lenore rushed up, calling for him, "Where are you?!" Her voice was desperate.

"Ah, Samuel! I found you. Are you OK? I was so frightened. I looked all over."

He was disoriented. It took a moment for words to organize into wagon trains of thought. All he could manage was, "Lenore?"



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“You were screaming. I heard you from inside the house. I ran outside but didn’t find you. And then you screamed again. It echoed in this damn valley. I went the wrong way before I figured out it was coming from the ruin. I came as fast as I could. Are you OK? What is wrong?”

Samuel tried to stand, but collapsed against her. She caught at him, causing them both to almost fall.

“Sorry,” he said. “My legs must have fallen asleep.”

“What was that noise? Why were you screaming?”

“Huh? No. I wasn’t. I was sleeping. I got tired and had a nap.”

“You most certainly were. I heard you repeatedly. You did it again when I found you here asleep just now.”

She looked around at the ruin. “Come on. Let’s get you back to the house. I don’t like it here. There is such a creepy vibe.”

She moved to encircle his waist. “Are your legs OK now? Can you walk?”

“Stiff a bit. Can you help me?”

“Of course, Samuel, my love. Lean on me.”

His arm found her shoulder, leaning weight on her, step by stiff step.

By the middle of the field, sensation had returned for the most part. His arm had slid down to her waist. His head found her shoulder. They leaned softly into each other.

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Approaching the house, he stopped and pulled her before him. He embraced her deeply. She was stiff at first, but only slightly. As the kiss progressed, she melted into him.

Discarded clothes were left in a trail. He led the way upstairs. The remainder of the day passed without notice, intruding thoughts were far away. Coupled as one, each orbited the other. They remained nestled in bed until the demands from another hunger drove them downstairs. Together they made a light dinner, eating from each other's cutting board. A plate was made and a bottle was opened; both were taken upstairs as their playfulness continued. And continue they did until late into the night.

The sleep that followed was deep and dreamless. Morning passed into afternoon sharing tender coupling.

The memory faded to reveal the present. Before him, the foreboding woods remained.

In a strained voice, he pleaded, "Lenore, babe, where are you?"

Wisps of steam rose out of the vegetation, straight up before being caught by the wind blowing across the ridge beyond the hanging valley. Their streaming patterns did not catch his fancy during the walk back to the house. His attention was instead solely upon the boots pushing through the grass.

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Each step furthered the disappointment of the spoilt imagined game.

Coming in through the muck room door, the intention was to go directly to the refrigerator and fetch one of his special beers. The sight of muddy steps the loafers had made earlier stopped him. He pulled off the boots and the coat, and got to cleaning the floor. Lenore kept the house pristine. It was important to help maintain it so. If magic could be found in ritual, the cleaning act was an incantation to draw her back. Anything to fill the vacuum from the lack of her presence.

Samuel had been through her address book. Calls had been made. With the first few, the conversation tone was light and cordial. But as the book's alphabet progressed, the tone became more desperate. Or perhaps that was him. All responded that they had not heard from her recently. None had since the last couple of days. Some responded to his further queries disinterested. More than a few feigned concern but were actually secretly relieved, believing Lenore had finally found the courage to leave him, The Louse.

Her mother was left for last, hoping this was a call he would not have to make. It was regretted from the start. Sensing the woman's impending panic, he assured her not to worry. All was OK. Lenore was most likely on her way home to the city house right now. That she didn't answer her mobile was easily explained as carelessness. The phone's battery was

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in all likelihood dead. Forgetful. That's what happens with her—happens a lot of late. The woman replied curtly that he was describing himself, not her daughter. Not her Lenore.

The rebuke rolled off his back like water on a duck. Meanwhile, the specter of Lenore's car loomed out the window, reflecting the passing sunlight of the fading day. He asked himself aloud, "Why didn't she drive herself home?"

"What was that?"

"Oh, nothing. I said the plants needed watering."

"Then you should water them. Don't rely on Lenore to do all the work—"

She kept going. The words all translated the same: blah, blah, blah.

He was finally able to quit with the old woman, promising Lenore was alright and would call her first thing when she got home. A good evening was wished.

Hanging up, he said, "As though you would be capable of answering the call. The world will pass the night unheard by you from the soon to be induced pharmaceutical sleep. Doctor prescribed."

Dropping resigned into the stuffed chair with a beer did not bring solace. This was her chair. Her shawl was draped across the back of it. It was pulled down and fluffed over himself. He snuggled into the warmth imagining how it had shaped to her

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form in this chair. A slight perfume was in the air. Hers. The smell played around in his nose, in his thoughts.

The beer was not satisfying. He sank deeper into the chair. The clock was visible across the room. The pendulum rocked its period. To the closed door, behind which the cuckoo puppet lurked, he asked in a whisper, “Where are you, dear?”

## CHAPTER II

### Feckless

The next morning was lost in memory over wisps of coffee vapor. The words last spoken kept echoing. She told him of the fearful reoccurring dream. He dismissed her as prattling and could not be bothered to hear her out.

She had kept on anyway. The dream of children, no, it was boys.

“They were crawling out of the lake to scale the cliff. Each night, the ranks grew; what started as a few became many. They climbed the cliff. They were nearing the edge.”

She was afraid. She pleaded, “What would happen after they crossed the meadow and came to the house? Could they find a way in? Defenseless, she would be laying in bed asleep when they climbed the stairs, when they entered the bedroom.”

He hadn’t heard her. He hadn’t listened. Nikki occupied all his thoughts.

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Coldly, he had assured Lenore that nothing of the sort would happen. “Dreams are not real. You are working yourself up.”

“It keeps coming back. I’m afraid to sleep for what happens next.”

Then the tough talk began. He regretted the words and wished they could be taken back. “This indulgence needs to stop right now before it really does make you ill. Is there any of your prescription there from the last episode?”

“Yes. I think so. But those pills are so strong. They leave me groggy the next day. Please, I don’t want to take them. Can’t you come up tonight? Can’t you come up now? It’s only a few hours drive.”

“A few hours there, a few hours back, and all the in-between. No. You know I can’t, Lenore. I would if I could. The client meeting is early tomorrow. I have to get a good night’s sleep to be on my ‘A’ game. You want me to do well, don’t you, babe?”

“Yes, Samuel, it’s just—”

“Now, shush. We won’t hear anymore about this. I’ll be up in a couple of days to fetch you back.”

A pause of silence.

He continued, “You’ll be fine. Enjoy the lovely sunshine. It’s just been fog, fog, fog down here for days. Can’t remember what the sunshine was like. And, no more worrying, you—getting yourself into a state. Alright?”

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“Yes,” she said, meekly.

“I’ll make you an appointment with the doctor for early next week. You two talk. See if he thinks you need to start sessions again. Perhaps you should if the dreams continue.”

Resigned, she said, “I took a pill.”

“That’s my good girl.” He sang the next words in two-tone, “Love you.”

“I love you too, Samuel.”

“I am sorry for the delay, babe, but the boss...”

“Needs you.”

“Unavoidable.”

At the time, the discomfort of the lying was easy reconciled. Ah, the anticipated pleasure of Nikki’s return...

Nikki, the flash thought returned to him in the image of her form and the acts she did with it. And there his thoughts remained, distracting from the morning, sipping coffee, replaying memory of her touch.

The car wheels rolled off the crunch of gravel onto the hum of pavement. The way down had been without incident. The tree was passed, the one with the fresh gouges. Thoughts became distracted. The insurance agent would have to be rung soon. Today, perhaps. Get the process started. Such a pain the



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formalities they intentionally make one suffer; the debasement of jumping through their tediously rationalized hoops.

No other cars were along the curvy road to the village. There was a construction crane. Something new was going up. The optimism of youth. In the old town, nothing had changed for a very long time. Expectations remained satisfied. People plodded on.

What had finally got him up and out of the kitchen was the sudden awareness of a different hunger—hunger of a caloric nature. A heavy meal at the Gasthaus was required; though, companionship would also be nice. The parking lot was empty. Walking up to the door brought the realization that the time had become late in the afternoon. The church tower confirmed it: nearly 14:00. Lunch, for the most part, was over in the old town.

Nobody was in the lobby. He went directly into the restaurant. The proprietress greeted him reluctantly from the back. She nodded in acknowledgment. The long table in the middle of the room was indicated. There were two old timers seated at the far end. Each were working on a flaky pastry confection, with coffee. Greetings of a local form were spoken between them and Samuel as he took a near seat. The men leaned in to each other to exchange words. They both leaned out eyeing Samuel who pretended to be studying the menu. The food was standard fare, so the ruse was obvious. There was nothing new to be gleaned and hadn't been for years.

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His order was placed. The men had gone back to their sweets. The room remained silent but for the mechanical clock on the wall. The pendulum swung its period; gears dutifully clicked forward. Coincidentally, the clock was identical in manufacture to the one in his hallway—siblings separated in time.

But the identicalness of the clocks wasn't an accident. When he and Lenore were looking for a property in the countryside, one of the first contacts was met at this restaurant. From the start, the realtor had Lenore entertained by his local knowledge, which he went on about at length.

His name was Penrod, but he insisted they call him Pen.

The man bored Samuel. In passive protest he had wolfed down his lunch. After coffee, he had begun drumming rhythmlessly on the tabletop. Lenore had placed her hand upon his. The distracting fingers were silenced; however, the hint had been received.

They left shortly after, following Pen's car out of the village and along the curvy road. After leaving the pavement, the climb up the gravel road began. The way was seemingly endless. He had remained annoyed from the restaurant and was about to tell her this property was too far out, that it wouldn't do. Then they emerged from the forest darkness into the brilliant sunshine illuminating a hanging valley. Before them

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was an open expanse of green, ending in a breathtaking view of the separating gulf and the lake below.

Pen was good at his job. Really good. The skills he had acquired had been passed down from his father, and his father before him. Such as it is in the back country, he could read people. This city couple, for instance. He knew if he could get them up the mountain, the view would sell itself. Naive, they would be stunned by avarice to possess such a wonderful sight. There would be no concern for the practicality of the location. No such thought would cross their minds. And best of all, they would have no knowledge of the property's history. Nor would they have the opportunity to hear of it. Within the village there was an agreement not to talk about such things with outsiders. Outsiders this couple would remain, even after the ink of the purchasing signature was dry.

Lenore was sold before getting out of the car. Samuel was as well. Though he played at being reluctant, the ruse was obvious. As was his role, Pen played along. He circled Samuel's stratagem all the while back upon itself. Smiles were flashed at appropriate times. He pushed at the couple: If they really wanted the property, they best move fast. Other interested parties were eager to review the property as well.

The couple proved an easy touch. Samuel proposed triumphantly that no further negotiation was necessary. The price seemed reasonable to both parties. Shortly after, a verbal agreement was made.

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Pen, playing the realtor game, had invented the other interested parties' existence. In reality, there hadn't been any calls on the property for some time. He had about given up relisting the property, and thought to take it off the market. The timing of this couple's contact had been fortuitous. Over the phone they sounded like the perfect candidate. Perhaps they might need a few pushes to close the deal. His family instilled intuition was rewarded by a signature later that same week. As great-grandfather Valdemar had taught with regard to city-folk: do not underestimate the heights their arrogant naivety can be assisted to reach from just the smallest application of reflected hot air.

To Samuel's sensibility, the local style of building was not of interest. Naturally, the services of an architect from the city would be enlisted to build a modern construction. He knew just the man. In fact, it was the man's tip that led to the property's discovery.

The architect was of a mind to build them a fabulous mountain house of glass and wood. The driving goal, Samuel echoed to Lenore, was to bring the panorama inside.

As the project planning proceeded, local workers proved difficult to find. The project was all but frozen out. This had not been unexpected. The architect had experience with the eccentricities of people who lived in remote places—the hostilities they harbored to outsiders. The cost would be

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greater to bring labor in from the city. That was OK with Samuel. Together, they enjoyed having a laugh at the locals' lost opportunity.

The gravel road was improved to support the heavy trucks and trailers brought to the site. On weekends, Samuel and Lenore would visit their small town up on the mountain. Construction carried on. Issues did occur with local material suppliers, but they were overcome by transport from the city. There was a delay and a cost, but Samuel was OK with that as well. He remained ever quick with the checkbook.

Finally, winter closed in. The season called for a pause in the endeavor.

Late spring the next year found the small private town repopulated. That second year brought completion to the project. The couple took possession of the threshold.

They began a new ritual, that of sitting on their deck in attendance to their view. The sun performed a dazzling show of colors as the light faded. Just for them. King and queen atop their mountain.

Pen was invited up for the first dinner party. He represented the local population. All others in attendance were city-folk, mostly business colleagues of Samuel. A few were friends of Lenore. All but for one were appropriately awestruck. It was Pen who seemed cool to the show. He had arrived bearing a quaint gift though. Not a common potted

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flower or plant. Not even some trendy kitsch left duteously upon the entryway table. His gift was presented in hand to the couple. It was a cuckoo clock, of local manufacture.

“Traditional in the area,” Pen said. “Diligence rewards a fortune of good luck.”

To their credit, Samuel and Lenore recognized the sincerity of Pen’s words.

The onlooking guests were beside themselves in thinly veiled bemusement. To their immediate confusion, and regardless if some thought the act a taunt, the gift was gratefully accepted in the spirit in which it was given.

The heavy lunch at the Gasthaus had been accompanied with a heavy beer of local brew.

To the waitress’s annoyance, Samuel inquired, “Might there be any of that lovely flaky pastry left? If so, would you be so kind as to bring me one, please? Oh, and a cup of coffee with that lovely aroma as well.”

The woman turned away in a huff. The two old men had been staring blankly at the interaction. After she left, one of them offered introductions.

“Hello. I am Mans. My partner here is Alfred.”

Alfred was stiff at being included in the introduction, but politeness required of him to nod in confirmation.

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“Hello, gentlemen. Pleased to become of your acquaintance. My name is Samuel. I have the house in the hanging valley above the lake.”

Mans eyes narrowed before answering. “We know who you are.”

“And your wife,” Alfred added.

Samuel, “Yes? Well, I see.”

“Do you now? I wonder.”

Alfred reached across to his partner, who pulled away.

Mans went on, “Do you have the feeling that people in the village are cold to you? Perhaps you have wondered why?”

“Ah...”

“—It’s the history of the land. That accursed land where you had your house built.”

“Now come on. Accursed land? Do you truly believe such things?”

“It matters not if one chooses to believe, nor does it matter one’s whims.

“Samuel, you should know the history of that land, the pain that has been wrought there, the shame brought upon the village. I am going to tell you the story.”

Alfred sat back. “I really do not care to hear this spoken aloud.”

“Leave then. I’ll see you later at home.”

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They grasped hands. Alfred turned to Samuel. “Mind Mans’ words. He isn’t much for speaking. When he does, people listen. At least those with any sense do.”

With that, Alfred departed before Samuel could prattle out a quip to lighten the mood.

He instead came up with one for Mans, “Well, it’s just us then, old boy. What words would you like to enlighten me with, sir?”

Mans ignored the bromide, continuing, “There used to be a manor house on the land. It was known, even before the village was established. Possibly it existed before the first mill house by the river. It was said the manor was built upon a foundation laid down by the Romans.”

“I know there was a house. It burned down. The ruins are still there.”

“Yes. Of course you think you know, but actually you have no idea. None at all.”

“I suppose you are about to enlighten me on what it is I am naive about?”

“I shall, or try at least. But first, a drink. We will need the spirit’s brace.”

As though on cue, the waitress placed an ornate mug before each of them. The old man nodded, “Thanks, daughter.”

“Father.” She ran a hand across his bent shoulders. A concerned smile was upon her face. For Samuel, she only had a cold look.



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“The manor burned, yes. My grandfather was but a boy then. It is the words learned from his father that I pass to you.”

He said, raising the mug, “To your long health.” He took a pull, Samuel did as well.

“Sweet nectar,” he said, taking a second pull.

“See Samuel, at that time there were but two people that lived at the manor, a couple. The man, he was the lord of this valley and the surrounding lands. The woman was his wife. They were odd. Eccentric, I mean. Private. They kept to themselves, neglecting their dominion. This was a fine relationship for the villagers. Left to themselves without the aristocratic meddling, the village and the surrounding area thrived. Prosperity remained in the people’s purse, not pick-pocketed by a noble.”

“What happened to the house? How did it burn?”

Mans eyed him up before continuing, “Some who were not distracted by labors, idlers, had thought the couple cruel. But to hear the acts spoken aloud, that was too limited of a judgment. For the price of a pint in this Gasthaus, words would be spoken against the nobles. That the couple were evil in thought and in deed.”

“Such as?”

“Much nonsense, light on fact. Their known actions are what I will relate to you. Traveling abroad to remote locales in the eastern countries would they. These were not holiday leisure, but had a specific purpose: the kidnap of children,

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boys. Always they would return with two. Their passage through the village was discrete; however, nothing passes unobserved. Brought the young ones back did they. And did away with them most foul.”

“How were the murders known if they were private up there in the valley?”

“It was my great-grandfather, Valdemar, who learned their secret, of which murder played but a part. He did occasional work for the couple, he and other men from the village. The way up to the valley in those times wasn’t as nice as it is now.”

“I well know that. It was horrible. We spent a lot of money on improvements.”

“I bet you did. You weren’t the first. The village spent a small fortune getting the road into the shape you thought was horrible. In the time of the manor, the road required constant upkeep. That was Valdemar’s concern, earthworks engineering. Your improvements build upon much of his construction. Modern heavy equipment continues the strong-back work of yesterday.

“There were occasions where Valdemar would be required at the house. He had discretely noticed there were boys about. Frequently they would be in the extensive garden the couple maintained. On the first sighting, he thought they were laborers; however, as their clothes were not shabby and with access to the house private, it was obvious they resided there.

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“At a later time, the couple had departed for another of their travels. During their absence he and several others came to the house. They found no one there. They expected to find the boys acting as caretakers. The men had wanted to talk with them concerning their situation. Not finding them about was odd. The departing carriage had been seen in the village with the couple alone but for the coachman. The men searched the surroundings thoroughly. There had been a bonfire upon the field near the house. Light from this fire had been seen a few nights before the couple’s departure. Another fire of a strange color had occurred further away. The men searched by the bonfire remnants where were found many tracks. They had been made by a barefoot woman or boy repeatedly circling the fire’s perimeter.

“The mystery peaked their curiosity. They followed the tracks to find they were joined by another set. This was a slighter track as though made from house shoes. The direction led into the forest below the slight ridge which defined the valley edge. Perhaps you are familiar? That forest is still there.”

“Yes. I know where you mean.”

“But you haven’t explored it, have you? Not the pass into the adjoining land?”

“No. I tell you, Mans. That forest gives me the willies.”

“Trust your instinct.”

He took another pull. Samuel matched him.

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“The men followed the tracks. There was a slight way through the forest, almost unrecognizable; however, the direction was obvious. The pass. That was the only way over the ridge. On the other side was a tight draw which led down. The men had lost the footprints in the loose rocks, but now in the soft earth they were found again. More sets had appeared. The prints were confusing, such that they could not sort them out. Two sets of barefoot prints. One as before, small. The other larger, of a man. Both had come and gone at least twice. There were other small prints, the small house shoes, and a new set that were of small boots. These prints went down the draw, but they did not return. It was Valdemar, my great-grandfather, who deciphered the patterns.

“The men continued down the draw. The way ended in a most curious construction. A short wall of perfectly laid mortarless stonework. The rocks abutted without any gap; they were so tight that even a knife blade could not be inserted into the joint. The wall formed the perimeter of a glade with a floor of stone. A single stone, flat in length and in width. The wall formed a circle, but for a gap.

“Valdemar was bold. He stepped over the wall and strode across the glade. The others would not. He continued until the gap in the wall. The view was expected. He was a man of the mountains. Precipices were known to him. When he came before the edge, however, he was stunned and could not help but stumble backwards. It wasn't the drop, he explained later,

it was the magnitude, the sheer energy of the mountain. It seemed to be focused at that point. Immensities pulled at each other. The gap called, spanning onto the far ridge.

“The men saw Valdemar stumble. They called to him from behind the short wall. He waved. All was OK. It was then he saw the pillar. It wasn’t much. Taller than the wall, it stood away from the drop, nearer the glade edge. He was surprised at himself not to have noticed it before. Though Valdemar waved at them to attend him, the men still refused to enter the glade.

“The pillar was insignificant, though an oddity in itself. It was a sculpted protrusion of the same rock the entire glade was formed from. There was a blacked residue atop the pillar. Streaks of it ran down the side in layers, new upon old.”

Mans stopped the recounting. He eyed Samuel, observing him while taking a pull.

Samuel was completely involved with the story. They were alone in the big room, which had remained silent but for the man’s voice and the incessant ticktock of the cuckoo clock.

“There’s more, isn’t there?”

“Oh yes.”

“Valdemar found the boys dead?”

“Oh no. He didn’t. Nobody did. A caution before I go on. The next part of the story will be implausible to those with city-sensibilities. Dismissed as lunatic ravings. But be assured there are strange goings on that lesser folk do not have the depth to perceive. That can include many mountain-folk as

well. They remain all well and good with suffering their self-important goings on that the day burdens them with. To such, the implausible is rendered invisible.”

“Present company excepted?” Samuel asked.

“Remains to be seen...”

Another pull drained the mug. Mans looked around. Seeing his daughter was not present, he returned to Samuel. “Remains to be seen. Next I will tell you what Valdemar’s companions saw before I continue his words.”

He looked around again. “She is ignoring me. Jarvinia!”

“What did they see?”

“Just a moment. Daughter!”

Jarvinia came in through the lobby door. “Yes?! What is it?”

Mans held up the mug, wagging it back and forth.

“Argh,” she said, exasperated. “Just a moment.”

She went in the back and returned with two mugs. They were placed down before the men. She cleared off her father’s. Lifting at Samuel’s mug, which had not been drained, she put it back down and asked of him, “Everything to your satisfaction then, is it?”

“Oh, yes.” He took up the mug with a long pull draining it. There remained foam on his upper lip. “Oh, yes. Thank you very much,” and proceeded to belch loudly.

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Her stern look melted. She chuckled friendly before pointing to her lip and moving off, empty mugs in hand. Her swagger was attended by Samuel's attention.

Mans set his fresh mug down and wiped at his face as well.

“The men watched Valdemar from afar. Inexplicably, he wiped a finger at the pillar top and stuck that same finger into his mouth. He then took a few steps away from the pillar. He staggered a few more steps, then directly collapsed in a swoon—as though he had been struck dead. The men rushed over, their fear forgotten. Valdemar's eyes were wide open, staring blankly into the dark blue sky. A foam spilled slightly from his mouth which was lolled open. It was said his tongue was black. They were relieved to find him breathing.

“The men carried him between them over the pass, not stopping until their wagons. Then they made their way down the mountain. But before they met the valley road, Valdemar was back among them, sitting up alert as though nothing had been amiss. He asked for water. Then he asked how he found himself there. They were greatly relieved.

“‘What had happened?’ they asked.

“‘After licking at the black tar the world spun around. All faded to black. Next I was aware was just now, in the wagon and thirsty.’

“They brought him home to lay at rest.

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“The next day found him spry, ready to carry on the road work to completion.

“That is how the companions, his men, saw Valdemar. That is how he wanted to be seen. In actuality, a tempest had been blowing inside the man. Saying all had become black unconsciousness was not truthful. What had really gone on inside his head was a bizarre scene he could not make sense of. Nor did he know what to do.

“With time, he puzzled some of it out with his wife’s help. Heloise. She was a strong woman. A matriarch, practical in her thoughts and all matters pertaining to her family. Valdemar described the images that had appeared during the swoon. They had been as real as if a play had been performed for him, an audience of one. The noble couple were the actors, but it wasn’t them as now. They were much younger. Not children, but young adults.

“He did not tell Heloise that both the man and woman were nude. And that the sight of the nude young woman’s form was painfully attractive. The arousal that followed the image of her bothered him until he could again relieve himself.

“What made the further images so horrible was what she and the man had done to the boy, murdering him upon the pillar. He was wrapped in a shroud which burned as it contracted. The life was crushed out of him. A dizzying light passed into each. The woman became even more beautiful as light entered her, overpoweringly so.



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“In a waking dream occurring on more than one occasion, the face returned to him. Her body caressed him when he laid with Heloise. The movements were no longer his wife’s; they had become those of a wild animal thrashing, tearing. The animal demanded his essence, all of his precious bodily fluids. He tried to talk with Heloise in the passion aftermath. She had no awareness that anything strange was going on with her; however, she thought he had been rather enthusiastic. She enjoyed this passion. From her admission, guilt was brought onto him.

“He could not maintain this secret any longer. Words describing the dream image on the mountain flowed out in their entirety while she listened silently. The beautiful nude man and woman killed the boy. After the ceremony, they took the body to the edge. Another wrapped body was already there. Each lifted one. The bundles were presented as an offering to the sky before releasing them to tumble the distance to the lake surface below. The lake was used as the boys’ sepulcher.

“It was never clear to Valdemar which enraged Heloise more: the murder of the boys, or the young woman’s specter she had been sharing her husband with in their bed. But regardless, there was no clear action for them to follow. Those times weren’t as now. There were no police to involve. Justice was metered out by the lord of the manor. Also, the children were not local. But even if they were, the villagers would not suffer the retribution that would fall upon the village, were

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they to act against the couple. It would not end well. Valdemar and Heloise resolved to keep the knowledge among themselves.”

“In due time, the couple returned. Passing through the village, their carriage again carried two boys; they were not the same ones as had been seen before. Once upon the mountain, both remained secluded.

“Seasons passed. The master was in the village occasionally on matters of business. The wife was seen as well; however, both not at the same time. Valdemar happened upon her once in passing. She nodded curtly at him. He kept his eyes down, averting the draw of hers. Upon returning home he told Heloise of the encounter. That night as they laid together, she was worried to ask of him. Worried the specter of the beautiful young woman had again appeared. He answered truthfully that she had not. Her presence had since waned. The enthusiasm of Valdemar for his wife Heloise had not, however, to their pleasure.”

“The dilemma resolved itself. Here we get to the subject of the manor’s demise. It was one night, there was a frantic knocking at the door. It was a neighbor of Valdemar. He said there was a fire of a strange color upon the mountain. It had grown in size similar to the bonfire already burning by the house. They all went outside to see. My grandfather was a

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young boy then. He remembered the fires vividly. And what happened after.

“The strange fire was brief until it faded. After it had gone, Valdemar said to Heloise, ‘Who weeps for the dead but we?’

“Shortly after, the intensity of the bonfire grew. It spread. Seemingly, the entire hanging valley was aflame. More of the villagers had joined their group on the hill. They all continued to watch in silence. On the night went. On the fire burned. It wasn’t until early morning, with the waning of the fire, did the people return to their homes.

“The next morning a group from the village, Valdemar and Heloise, my grandfather as well, walked the distance to the hanging valley. There they found the manor house a smoldering ruin, burned. The intensity of the fire had scorched the valley for the most part. The garden was but blackened earth. Amazingly, the forest remained unscathed. The couple were searched for. They were not found. Grandfather remained with his brothers and sisters while Valdemar led Heloise over the pass to the glade. She was a fearless woman. They found footprints, barefoot and not, big and small, as had been found years before. They came upon and stepped over the short wall without a pause. Valdemar pointed at the pillar alter, but Heloise wanted to see the gap in the wall, the edge before the abyss. Together they stood, wind in their hair, fearless of the twin mountain’s pull. The lake surface was far below. The village, off a distance beyond.

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“I’ve seen enough. Let’s go home. Are you hungry, husband?”

“I am, wife. Hunger for your fixings and for yourself.”

“Then you shall have them, dear man. In that order.”

Mans pushed back in his chair. A long pull was taken of the mug.

Samuel had become hypnotized by the man’s story. The vividness of the telling had played as a movie in his head. The clank of the mug on the table woke him from a stupor.

“That’s a sad story, Mans. History is but a collection of atrocities. We would drown in the depths, were they dwelled upon at length.”

Mans was silent, staring. He broke the contact to take another pull at the mug.

“My wife is missing.”

“I have heard.”

“Eh?”

“You called the police this morning.”

“Ah.”

“It’s a small village.”

“Yes. I guess so.”

“If it was truly spoken that your wife went missing from the property—”

“It was.”

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“Then, she will not be found. The lake never gives up its dead.”

“How is that?”

“There are creatures in the lake that covet the dead.”

Samuel’s mouth was open, not knowing how to respond to such an explanation.

Mans took a final long pull of the mug before returning it to the table properly. “I hope you are mistaken, Samuel. That your wife has just given you the slip for a tryst, or perhaps some other indulgence. That would be the happier ending.”

He stood and leaned briefly against the table. Samuel stood quickly, raising a hand to steady him.

He brushed it away, “No, no. Thank you, but I’m OK. I bid you a good day,” and made his way out the door. Shortly after, a policeman entered, making his way over to Samuel.

“Sir?” he said.

The report had been dutifully taken. The officer’s attitude all the while had remained disinterested.

The vivid story of Mans accompanied Samuel during the drive back to the city. The strangeness was hard to digest. To distract from the man’s departing morbid thoughts, he had called Nikki. The passion in the energy of her words was contagious, cheering him up.

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When he arrived she was there, waiting outside. She followed him into the garage, then into the house. She remained his silent shadow until they sat on the couch.

“I heard your mood when you called. I didn’t want to distract you from the drive, so I was babbling on and on with fun talk. Did I succeed?”

“Yeah. Knowing you would be here got me the rest of the way.”

“You have arrived. Now, unload. Tell me details,” she said. “Lenore is missing?”

“The last days have been horrid. Simply horrid.”

“Oh, my poor man.” She pulled his face into her open cleavage.

Though he had been resistant, the warmth of the woman’s contact melted his resolve to do right by the missing spouse. He wanted to remain in this moment forever. Embracing the oblivion of her comfort.

“Samuel. Are you crying? You are making my tits wet.”

He sat up revealing a wet face to her.

“Not that I mind you making them wet, or those other things you enjoy.”

Her lips fell upon his wet saltiness.

Two weeks had passed with nothing of Lenore, not a hint of her continued presence in the world. Samuel distracted himself with his work. The diligent automaton traveled back

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and forth, recharging at home before beginning another repetition. Nikki had been with him in the evenings, distracting from his concerns. A key had been provided to her. There had been a gap of days when she had been gone on travel and the entertainment of foreign customers. In her absence, the housework had been neglected. Plates piled up in the sink and empty fast food containers accumulated on the counter. The refrigerator was on the path to becoming a horror show. He had apologized for the state after her return. The next day she took off from work. The house was scrubbed to perfection, the refrigerator restocked. She toured him through the results of her labors.

“This was a special gift of my dedication to you, Samuel; however, for the future, you should contract a cleaning service.”

A business card was presented as her recommendation.

“They do good work. I’ve recommended them to clients in the city. They come regularly by my place. I’ve found them most reliable. The premium service works out best. Their girls do and excellent job.”

“For you to reference them, I am sure.”

“And they will do extras for the right tip.”

“Oh?”

“If you catch my meaning.”

“Ah. I see.”

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“I am not possessive of you, my dear love, Samuel. I don’t mind you exploring with a little extracurricular activity. In fact, I encourage it. There are some thoughts I have had; perhaps we can follow up on a few of them. However,”—she grasped him firmly by a sensitive body part—“you will always keep in mind we remain primaries.”

Lips followed to relieve the pressure her contact induced.

“And Lenore.”

She stopped and came up for air, staring at him. Her face was neutral.

He looked at her with puppy dog eyes. “Lenore. She’s a primary as well.”

“Of course she is a primary. That goes without saying.” With that cleared up, she got back at it with enthusiasm.



### CHAPTER III

#### Found

The month had gone by without Lenore. From Samuel's insistence, Mans and his friend had reluctantly gotten involved. They hadn't found anything interesting pertaining to Lenore within the village or on their alpine wanderings.

The police had been at the mountain house and at the city house. A return meeting had been arranged the following day. Nikki's recommended service had paid a call beforehand. They had provided a thorough job, finishing well into the evening. All had been polished and dusted and attended to, including the residents. The next day the officials were greeted relaxed.

Nikki was of course absent from the meeting. Samuel had been alone with the police, a man and a woman. The past history of Lenore's emotional instability had turned up. They were seeking confirmation and the observed effect of his reaction.

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The woman asked, “Is it correct that your wife was not currently seeing a doctor, nor on prior prescribed medication?”

Samuel nodded in confirmation, saying, “Yes.”

“We’ve run out of leads. And to be frank, our resources are exhausted. At this time we must propose a conclusion we have all been reluctant to hypothesize: Could it have been she went to the cliff edge to enjoy the view? And perhaps, she happened upon misadventure? Whatever befell her, we believe she met her death in the lake below.”

The man added, “The lake does not give up its dead.”

Samuel’s response was honest and frantic: he broke into a hyperventilating panic.

The policeman had sympathy for Samuel’s state. He tried to calm down an obviously bereaved man. Matters of practicality were brought up.

The policewoman’s role had been to observe while remaining detached. At first, she suspected Samuel was playing up an exaggerated state. But as he did not calm down, she changed her mind, concluding his state was genuine.

That evening, after the police had left, Nikki let herself in. Samuel was still on the couch. Bleary eyed. He had worked himself up into a state much as when Lenore went first missing.

She said, “The mountain house has remained exclusive to my personal attention, it being too far for the service girls to

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travel just for the day. Perhaps we might make some special arrangements. I could organize it. Would that make you happy?"

He didn't respond.

"Come," she said pulling him to his feet. She led to the bathroom. The steam shower was started, set to blisteringly hot. Nikki took off her clothes, giving the G-string a wiggle show before it too joined the pile in the tiled corner. Samuel remained dressed standing before her, as though a doll. He was stripped of his clothes. She played at being disappointed, but smiled a grin before kissing at his flaccidness. Meanwhile, the steam was doing its thing building thick clouds.

"Come along big boy," she said. Pulling him into the shower and into her embrace. "Let me take care of you tonight. You deserve some deep attention. Your Nikki knows what you need."

As he began to respond to her attention, she whispered, "Now there you go. Your body knows. You just need to listen to it. Problem solved."

The morning was late when they managed to depart for the country house. It was Nikki's insistence that got them on the road. There had been eagerness in her movements pushing at him.

After they arrived, she flew about the house raising shutters, opening windows.

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“The air is so crisp fresh outside. Let it push all the staleness out of this house.”

She came back to Samuel who was still in the hallway, before the clock. The weight chain had been pulled back up, the mechanism re-powered. The clock time was correct, as he had reset it.

“Did you hear the clock call out the time when we arrived?” he asked.

She was still animate jumpy. “Huh?”

“The clock. Did you hear the time?”

She looked at the clock face and the closed door before the cuckoo puppet.

“No. I didn’t, Samuel.”

“It was three. The cuckoo croaked three times.”

She looked again quickly at the clock face, then back at him.

“I reset the time correct.”

“Ah. I was going to say that we haven’t been here that long. Not unless we’ve fallen into a time-warp.”

“I don’t understand why this clock keeps time so poorly.”

“Well, why don’t you get rid of it? It doesn’t go with the rest of the house. It is really so local kitsch.”

“It was a gift from Pen.”

She looked at him blankly.

“The realtor. It is sentimental.”

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“Fine. Then take it to a clocksmith.” She grabbed at his hand, pulling him. “Come on! I want to be naughty outside in the brisk sunshine. And you, sir, are just the man to help me achieve that stated goal.”

Pulling him towards the french doors, she sang, “Let’s do the time-warp again!”

A trail of clothes was left behind as they ran out of the house and onto the grass.

“Risk it!” she taunted, “and you can have me!”

She ran fearlessly across the grass. He was concerned for bees. There would be an instant sting from any they might tread upon.

Her movements were much too fast. “Come on. I want proof of your manhood. Don’t you want to explore my womanhood again? That really drives you insane.”

He reached out, touching her briefly as she glided by.

“Oh baby. Now I know the words to speed you up. It’s just a jump to the left.”

Again, another touch in passing. And another, spinning around. “And then a step to the right.”

They were moving further from the house, nearing the far corner of the maintained yard. Further on, the grass grew naturally wild. The tallness provided an arena boundary for their antics. The ruin was visible in the distance.

She stopped in the corner and turned back to face him panting. “Whoo–hoo! This altitude has me out of breath.

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Feeling a bit faint. Put your hands on your hips. You wouldn't take advantage while I was in such a state, would you?"

He moved a step closer.

"Maybe if I asked you nicely? Oh would you, pretty please?"

He took another step.

She burst by him on his off-balance side. A little shove was given in passing. He fell in a crumple.

Spinning back to see him, she said, "Ah, too slow. Are you nesting? Look at me! Not out of breath actually!"

She came over offering a hand up. The collapse had been fake. She let herself be pulled down upon him, laughing. The wrestling commenced with a twisting of legs and arms intertwined. Moving atop with little resistance from him, she pinned his shoulders. The energy was animal wild that she drew out.

"Come, I require you here," she said, directing him behind. Flowing with the command he grasped her hips.

"Pull my hair."

He complied.

"Put you hand against my ass."

Again, he complied.

"Harder. Convince me you mean it."

More force responded to the rhythmic pulling thrusts.

"Yes. That's it," she cooed. "Now I believe you. I really do."

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The movement continued. Her flesh filled all his sight. She laughed between panting breaths. The outline of the ruin walls became traced in by imagination. The gaps were filled. Curtains hung in the windows, moving to the rhythm of the mountain's breath.

She whispered, "And nothing can ever be the same."

The afterwards bliss found them twined in the grass, the sun heat deeply penetrating their nude forms.

She broke the balance of silence, the first to recover the power of speech. "Mmm, lover. That was wonderful. A satisfactory start, I'll give you that."

Words weren't ready to operate for him as yet. In understanding, a kiss was offered.

"Being here brings me into a high state," she said, stretching her length in enjoyment. "The sun has made for us a warm bath beneath the chill air."

The demonstration affected him. "What is this?" he finally managed, drawing a thumb down her chest to tummy. "I tasted sweet flavor mixed with your saltiness."

She squeezed at herself. "You like it? The cream, I mean. I can see you like these very much. Astounding recovery, if I may be so bold as to comment, sir."

A quick caress in instruction commenced upon herself while she said, "The cream is something. It's reputed to keep the skin young. Maybe preserve what's underneath as well."

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“I am just slowing down from my head spinning.”

Her movement broke off. “Slowing down? I don’t think so. Let’s spin that top of yours back up. I require more turns from it presently, Samuel.”

Rolling him above her, she commanded, “Do me, lover. You will give me your all.” She sat upon his lap, pushing at her cleavage and pulling his head down into it.

“Lick me, baby. I need the texture of your tongue.”

He complied. Her sweet saltiness melted into his flesh.

They had remained in the grass, observing the sunset and the fading colors. All the while she had remained internally alert, vibrantly so. But externally, she had maintained stillness. Sounds and smells flowed over the senses. Movement of the day’s passion remained deep within tissue memory.

When the last color had passed to black, she shook him awake from a twilight slumber. “Come,” she said simply.

His eyes opened startled and disoriented.

“Easy. Softly,” she said. Her enveloping hug tightened. The pressure calmed him.

A moment was given before they rose together and walked hand in hand through the darkness. Entering, house lights came on, proceeding their progress through the rooms; they remained aglow after their passing.



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Nikki had remained in a state similar as the day had found her. Rather than wilderness surroundings, her senses now observed the man laying beside her in bed. Samuel was still, lost to the timelessness of sleep. From a focus of will, he twitched. A leg jerked, and then the other. Lips moved with unspoken words. Satisfied with the progress, she moved to calm him, “Shush. Sleep.”

Samuel had been so tired. The sunset. He had wanted to share the enjoyment with Nikki, but could not manage to remain awake. The world had become so dark. Walking back to the house had flowed into the dream, joined with the invigorating shower. Nikki scrubbed them both with the luffa she had brought. It left the skin aglow in song. From several soft leather bags objects were pulled out like a stage magician performance. A jar was produced. A clear glass jar with twine wrapped around it, tied in an intricate knot. She rubbed a slight amount of greenish yellow unguent onto him, paying extra attention to certain parts. Those certain parts responded eagerly to the attention. She continued until the balance of relief was found. The cream was shared back with her.

In the kitchen he could barely keep his eyes open. The dinner that night was light. They nibbled on olives and cheese, with thinly sliced smoked meats before she allowed him to bed. All his skin tingled. After his head hit the pillow, that was it. The time passed.

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Sometime later that night came a dream. Lenore. It began with her emerging from the lake. She climbed the cliff. Shortly after, the edge was scaled. Her night dress billowed in the wind as the grass was crossed. Next, she was in the room. Samuel saw himself asleep. Nikki wasn't there. Lenore stood at the foot of the bed motionless. Now nude, she was dripping wet. The covers were pulled back. With animal movement, she crawled atop. There was no controlling himself. He was aroused, painfully so. Lenore took him inside. From the start her eyes were manic. The sex was violent. It did not stop. He could not release himself. And he could not wake up. Finally, relief: his climax was allowed to arrive. The spasms burned flowing into her as though she was drawing it forcefully out of him. Lenore stopped grinding the moment his ejaculation subsided. Dismounting him, she walked out of the room. Samuel followed her outside. She continued across the lawn and into the wild grass. It was wet and compressed with swirls. Lenore turned.

She stopped him, saying only the words, "You cannot follow me. I am not in the lake."

Samuel woke instantly. Looking around, he found himself alone on the bed—the soaking wet bed. He began to scream.

Nikki had been in the bathroom. "What is it?! What's the matter?"

"It was Lenore. She was here."

"Where? What do you mean?"

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“Right here in this bed. She rose from the lake and came to our bed. She was wet. The bed is completely soaked.”

“This bed?”

“Yes!”

She touched the sheets. “But it is dry. Feel it.”

He did. It was dry. “But she was here. She made me have sex with her. Wild, crazy sex. It hurt.”

“Sex with her?”—a laugh—“No, darling. That was me.”

“You?”

“Yes. And it was you that initiated it by the way. I was sound asleep until you woke me. Oh, such a ravenous one is my big boy.”

“I did?”

“Not that I’m complaining. You were wonderful, as always. Hugely so. I’m feeling a bit sore though, but in a good way.”

“She wasn’t? Lenore wasn’t here?”

“No.”

He sat before her perplexed.

She pushed at his shoulder. “Back to sleep, my man. Unless you have other, ahem, ideas in mind? Look at you!”

The last of breakfast had been cleaned up. Toilet had been attended to. Samuel stood outside the open french doors, nude. Though the morning was chilly, he was not. In fact, over breakfast he had been sweating. Nikki had been as well. Both

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had felt it: a strong stimulation, calm, relaxed energy. The dew covered lawn sparkled. Its shiny movement beckoned for attention. Nikki came up. She stared at his glistening chest as if calculating the moisture content. Satisfied, she looked outward to what he beheld.

“In the old Manor house foundation there is something I want to show you,” she said. “Something of interest. We’ll need a lantern. Get one.”

He turned away to comply, moving through the house automatically.

His progress was reviewed with approval, leaving her alone at the door in contemplation. A slight breeze blew by. The cooling effect was welcomed into her hot flesh.

They walked together along the grass path to the ruin. She stopped before a section of the ruin that was unfamiliar.

Samuel said, “That’s curious. I haven’t seen this planking before.” Looking to her, his attention became distracted. Light reflected through the slight steam raising in the chill air from her wet flesh.

She noticed his distraction. “Later, lover. Toss these boards aside.”

Under them were revealed stone stairs leading into a foundation. They started down.

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The sun shone against a wall reflecting light into the depths. After passing into the shadow, she stopped. “Look at this stone work. Isn’t it amazing? This is Roman.”

He touched at the rocks. Their solidness was warm. Fingering a joint, he looked at her.

“I know. Exact fit. No mortar. Maybe this predates the Romans.” She continued down the spiral while he lingered. “Come. I’ll need your help with the door.”

The daydream transitioned into the next, following her down, lantern swinging.

At the bottom landing was a door of old wood. It was solid. A stout key was produced from a bag she carried.

Smiling mischievously, she said, “Never mind where I got it. Perhaps I found it?”

The door unlocked and swung open smoothly. Before them was total blackness. The air had a musty smell, like rotting vegetation.

“Light the lantern,” she said.

A catacomb became illuminated as they entered. The walls and the floor were dry. Stepping quickly, she was already several paces ahead. Her shadow was thrown long.

“Come on. It’s not far.”

As they walked, hallways were passed on the left and right. The space was too vast for the light to illuminate. Overhead, the vaulted arches spanned one to the next.

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“It’s really big down here. Best not to get lost. Multiple levels too. Whoever the builders were, great effort was expended constructing all this.”

They came to a squat fat pillar. “Over here.”

Past the pillar, set in the wall, was a door. It was also of stout wood. After throwing the bolt, she turned and gripped at him. “You’re gonna like this. Perhaps you’ll recognize it as familiar.”

The door was flung open with hinges grinding in protest.

Light spilled into a long room. The lantern slightly illuminated the far wall.

“Go in,” she commanded.

He walked forward automatically. She followed behind. The door swung shut behind and the latch thumped back into place. Orienting into the space, the room was large, vaulted in several arches. There were murals that ran the length of the walls.

“Look at them. Tell me if you understand.”

He walked up, holding the lantern higher.

“They are old, aren’t they?” he asked.

“Quite so. The original on the end wall was painted not long after the grotto was constructed. Not sure about how long ago though. The time period predates me. The others were done later.”

He looked at her.

“Go on,” she urged. “Tell me.”

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“The lake is there. So is the hanging valley. The ridge is above it. I don’t think the ridge is right though. This has it depicted bigger and more ominously jagged.”

“Yes. Time eats at all things. Look at the other wall.”

He turned and took a few steps. The light shined across the length of it.

“It’s the other ridge, the other hanging valley.”

“Good. Now look up.”

“Is that the sun? Is it portrayed to be moving across the sky?”

“No. The event is hard to represent in picture form, I think. Never mind about that. Tell me about the far wall. What do you see there?”

“Wow. A massive mountain. I don’t think I’ve seen it before.”

“I’m just speculating here, but this is what I think. This was the mountain as it was before the glaciers, before they gouged out the long valley separating the two ridges.”

“How is it you came to think that?”

“I trusted words somebody spoke to me here, long ago. They had worked it out.”

While tracing the outline of the peaks with his eyes, he asked, “Who?”

“A dear lover. We spent much time in this grotto together. Explored it to exhaustion, playing in most all the rooms and

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nooks and crannies. At least that's how I recollect. This room in particular."

He was staring at her, mouth agape.

"It was you, silly. Gosh. You really don't have the slightest remembrance, do you?"

She reviewed his strained attention before saying, "Your body remembers even though this flesh has never known this place. It's your thoughts that are lost. I know, but"—glancing down—"this has to wait. Focus energy upon my words. Let yourself travel with them."

She took his hand and walked over to stand again before the mural of the hanging valley.

"We are here. This fresco was begun with a focus upon the valley. The rest of the work flowed outward."

Taking a long breath her breasts heaved up. "When you brought me here into the grotto the valley above was different. The surrounding mountain's heart had long been carved twain by the mountain of ice gouging the deep valley. Massive as that glacier was, it had already begun to wane leaving smaller glaciers upon the ridge remnants. On this ridge the glacier was slight. A fissure had formed. Within it there was an ice cave. We had traversed the depths, retracing your prior wanderings. This grotto had been found, well, rediscovered by you. As we traversed the steps together, you explained of the warmth within the mountain and of the construction below. Heat passing out and up the stairs had formed the ice cave. The



builders had directed water into the sump below the stairwell. Had they anticipated the glacier to come, preparing for the eons?”

She stopped to kiss him briefly, relaxed. “On the first visit you led me directly to this room. The mountain fresco was there; however, the other walls were without the twin ridges. The surfaces were plain. As though prepared but not elaborated upon, awaiting a future hand. This insight inspired you, and here we made our plan. Well, your plan really. I was ecstatic to be included. We were already bonded accepting each other, but from that day we became sealed.

“The hanging valley section of the fresco was started first. You showed me how to be your assistant. With patience, I accelerated, proving to be a master of technique. You declared me your peer. The other wall was in want of starting. It was to be the other ridge of the mountain split twain. We required assistance. Two others were brought here, a woman and a man. Joining, they soon became bonded to us—”

“I don’t remember any of this.”

“Still? Nothing is familiar? Really?”

“Sorry. No.”

“Have I been overeager? Is it still too soon?” she sighed. “Come. Follow me.”

“Ah. What’s this here? An alcove?”

“A side room. Go in.”

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It was a small circular room. Opposite, there was a shelf. He walked up to it.

She came to stand beside him.

There was an object upon the shelf. They both looked long at it. The lantern hissed, consuming a mist of fuel in the glowing white hot socks of ash.

“What do you think? How do you read this, Samuel?”

He looked behind them. Their steps were visible on the stone floor. Wet prints from naked feet. One set small, the other larger. He looked back at the object in front of them, and then to her.

“Well?” she asked.

“By reflex I should be upset. No. Cultural temperament says I should be out of my head with grief. But as I look at this...”

“Yes?”

“I don’t feel anything.”

“Nothing? Nothing at all?”

“Relief, perhaps. And this picture—the mural on the oval wall—it is surrounding. This was her dream. From the water of the lake, the boys climbing up the cliff, crossing the meadow. They are here, focused here.”

“Yes.”

He touched at the object. It rocked slightly. “These aren’t cobwebs?”

“No.”

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“How did she come to be here?”

“Well, that was me, Samuel. The covering claimed her sleeping body, freeing her energy. What was left was brought here. She is here for you.”

Silence.

Letting him have his time to catch up, that was the direction necessary.

Finally, insight. “We shared her energy yesterday.”

“Yes. Some. You felt her, didn’t you? She joined us in play during what you thought was a dream.” With a hand on his shoulder, she said, “Look. Your girth has grown. You realize that, don’t you. It will grow more from the cream before the balance is refound.”

He looked down. “It hurts. Aches.”

“I understand. In time, it will become less tender. We’ll see to that.”

She reached out. “Give me the lantern. You take her. She must be interned in the lake. It is required.”

He lifted Lenore’s form from the shelf. She rolled forward, cradled in his arms. “There is almost no weight.”

“That is from the wrap. It leaves but a hollow shell of ash within.”

He took a step back. She said, “We will go now. I will talk as we walk.”

“I will listen to your words.”

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“I know you will. You hear me. Karl saw potential in your iteration. He brought you to my attention. Here,” she said, reaching out, “I’ll get the door.”

“Karl?”

“You remember. The architect? He built the house for you.”

“Ah.”

“He arranged for Pen, for the property to be available.”

“Pen? The realtor?”

“Exactly him. It’s funny. Mans looks nothing like Valdemar. But Pen. He’s the splitting image. Time has limited resources recycling the past into the future. Anyway, Karl pointed you out. I introduced the Nikki.”

“The Nikki? You?”

“Persona, yes.” She turned before the stairwell door. Leaning forward over Lenore’s form, she kissed him strongly. “Pleased to meet you, Samuel. I am Jessica. Privately, between us, I am Iscah. Charles is Karl. Would you be Samu, or Sampo? Perhaps Sami?”

“Ale.”

“Ale! That’s an old name returned—a remembrance. Ale and Iscah created these frescoes. They were bonded, thus we return: each to the other.”

Her eyes had become wildly intense. “Your Iscah has got the door, Ale.”

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It was well after sunset, and the moon had risen. The mountainscape was brilliantly illuminated. Iscah and Ale stood together, coupled by the short pillar in the glade. They had given themselves to the vista of the far ridge. The distance span was surreal brief in the night glow.

Time and events had passed since Lenore had found the final journey, traversing to rest within the lake abyss. The cocoon had been visited. A fine fuzz of fungi had formed and been harvested as was the pattern. Tonight, a new cocoon had begun the descent. Several denizens were approaching, anticipating the offering's arrival within the depths.

Ale had finished applying a greenish yellow unguent to Iscah, touching with special attention. As truthfully spoken, she had soothed his transition. Karl emerged from the black shadows of the trees, stepping over the short wall to join them. He was not alone. A female form followed, similarly attired in nudity. Attending to the sharing, their movements joined the rhythm of night. The pillar provided a moondial for time's brief passage.

THE END.

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## **ABOUT JEFF HAYES**

Jeff Hayes has been working for many years as a Software Engineering Consultant- not to be confused with his evil-twin, of no relation. Now located in Switzerland as an employee with a financial firm, he has found several hours free in his daily commute. Daydreaming out the carriage window on the green Swiss countryside, the idea came to him to consider the train commute as renting a public space office. Balancing the distraction of the fellow passengers with life within office space cube walls, thus began Jeff's side work realizing his thoughts into words.

Though many pets and a few horses have graced Jeff's life, he presently finds himself pet free, for the short term.

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### CONNECT WITH JEFF HAYES

Jeff enjoys talking with his readers for reflections words can bring. Their impressions can be fascinating and unexpected.

He can be reached at his website, [deppli.com](http://deppli.com)



## Summary

[Dipster Hoofus](#), a short story. Part, the third, in [Rabbitry, a pentalogy](#).

End of the line comes into view. Two women's unremitting trust finds reward in a familiar Alpine world. A world where one's goal long prepared is brought to fruition assisted by the other's destruction. For some, time slips away, recycled into the future's iteration.

Explore the depth shoveled by [Dipster Hoofus](#) that began in [A Fine Day](#) and carried on with [A Couple's Hunger](#). Herein lies realization of actions hidden in plain sight.