

**RETURN TO A DARKLING POOL**  
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***TIME***

Turning to land and times end,  
Looking to that ever spiralling force for guidance,  
We reach too far and fall, walk too long and tire,  
When all the time it takes from us,  
And can never be restored.

Watching as lives walk by,  
Pure iron hope becomes tarnished,  
Weakens, and is lost,  
Time steals from the watchful and the wicked,  
From all,  
Even we immortal folk.

Fighting for unknown causes,  
Foolish is the war,  
Pride beckons glory, and it is the innocent who fall,  
But time, as we, goes on,  
Only the real and beautiful fade and are forgotten!

**PART ONE:**  
**Jason Greeves Investigates:**  
**TERROR ON THE MOOR**

# The Moor

Trepidation should never be denied. Jason Greeves started out over the moor. A dense fog shrouded everything from view making it impossible to see the creature he had been pursuing. The taint in the air reeked of decay. Greeves cursed. This one knew what it was doing. Instinct called at him to withdraw. Self-preservation screamed in his mind in warning. The stubbornness that had gotten him into so much trouble in the past would not allow him to do so. He only hoped that Jonathan and the Major had taken his advice and stayed with Stephanie. If this demon really was a vampire, he was in real danger.

Jason turned his torch off. There was no point advertising his position. Although, he was sure the creature would have little difficulty finding him without a beacon to reveal his presence. He had not been subtle in his pursuit. This time the gun in his belt gave him no comfort. In recent conflicts, such a weapon had proven all but ineffective against the forces of evil.

*How did he get himself into these situations?* At least if the Major or Jonathan were here he would have someone to watch his back. As it stood, he was taking a very big chance. If *folklore* proved invalid, the hammer and wooden stakes he had brought with him would not serve to protect him.

There was a graveyard near here, on the other side of the moor. Assuming all was as it seemed, and it seldom was, the creature would probably be heading there. Dawn was only a few hours away but such hope might as well have been days. He had no choice but to proceed with haste and hope the creature's instinct led it back to the graveyard as anticipated.

Why this infernal spawn had broken into his home and targeted Stephanie was another unknown. They had barely survived their ordeal in Ashtonby Grange when they rescued Stephanie and destroyed the demon known as Xaorn. Since that dark night, evil seemed to have a way of finding them. Without the Major, Jonathan and Stephanie by his side, Jason would have fled to some foreign land never to be heard of again. He was the Guardian. In all the intervening time he was still no closer to understanding what that meant, other than if evil found a way into the world, it had the uncanny knack of finding him and his companions – or maybe just him.

Still, Jason had no time to ponder on the reason now. Despite the cold, the sweat was thick on his body. Fear gave him an edge. He was not stupid enough to mask a healthy apprehension in pursuing such a creature. They had promised to protect this world against the manifestations of evil, as monumental as such an undertaking seemed. Jason was a man of his word even in the face of the implications of such a vocation. Well, he had to die sometime. Right now, Jason Greeves had no intention of dying. He intended to grow to a ripe old age. However, he was vulnerable. Flesh and bone had so many drawbacks. He was painfully aware of his own mortality.

Every sound on the moor made Jason shudder. He crouched low too many times awaiting an attack that never came. His caution made progress slow. The precarious nature of his environment did not allow him to proceed with any degree of confidence. Then he saw the creature, leering out of the bushes ahead. Two points of red cut through the dark. A low growl emanated from the vampire, like the snarl of a wolf. *Jason froze.* As his initial reaction gave way to necessity, he fumbled for the mallet. The creature erupted from the bushes with a speed that startled its pursuer. Jason stumbled as he tried to counter the attack. The creature was on him before he could raise a hand in defence.

Stephanie was resting peacefully. Jonathan paced the downstairs room and hall like a caged animal. She had lost an awful lot of blood but would be all right now. Jason had been gone too long. The Major had followed him out on to the moor and he too had been gone for some time. There was nothing Jonathan could do. Someone had to stay here to protect Stephanie. He feared for his friends, but leaving her alone was not an option. They had tracked that creature for many days without realising what it was they were searching for and now they had nearly lost Stephanie as a consequence. Disappearances on the moor drew them to this place. Reports had surfaced of a strange creature preying on the innocent. Now his friends were in danger.

Jonathan hated being the one who had been left behind. Ever since Ashtonby, he swore he would never again leave the side of his friends. Damn this situation. He needed to know Jason and the Major were okay. He needed to be out there with them.

Jonathan lit up a cigarette. He had recently taken up the habit and still coughed when he first inhaled. A noise caught his attention. Stephanie stood in the doorway.

'I thought you were supposed to be giving them up.'

She startled Jonathan.

‘You are supposed to be resting,’ he scolded, the tension of the last few hours taxing his nerves.

‘I’m fine, just a little weak.’

Stephanie was resilient. Still, she looked so pale after her ordeal. If the Major had not arranged a transfusion the outcome might have been different – perhaps fatal. Her years as a captive of Xaorn in Ashtonby gave her strength. She alone among them seemed least affected by the horror of what had happened here. Jonathan realised this was merely a façade she presented, but to anyone else outside their small circle, her endeavour succeeded.

‘At least sit down.’

Stephanie eased herself into a nearby chair. She quickly masked any discomfort she felt.

‘They have gone after it, haven’t they?’

She didn’t need an answer. Jonathan inhaled again.

‘I’m sure they will be back soon. You know Jason.’

Stephanie did not look reassured.

Jason Greeves fought for his life. The creature was strong and had already taken some of his blood before he managed to dislodge the fiend with a slap of the metal mallet. A curious sensation having your blood sucked from you. The embrace was not as painful as he had anticipated. A slight pinch as the penetrated his flesh followed by a moment of unrivalled ecstasy.

Again the creature lunged for him. Jason could not avoid the vampire for much longer. He would tire long before this demon and could not rely on dawn to save him. It looked like the Guardian had just run out of luck.

Jason brandished a wooden stake. The creature circled him looking for an opening. He still had not seen the demon clearly, but he could sense its malevolence. *Spawn of evil. Unclean. Creature of darkness.* If he managed to survive this predicament, he would have to seriously look at his tactics.

The stake was slapped from Jason’s hand before it was put to any use. The creature was too damned fast. Again the vampire drew Jason down and sunk its fangs deep into his neck. The curious sensation returned. The vampire pinned him. He couldn’t move. *All was lost.* The embrace sapped Jason’s resistance. His life was draining away and he could do nothing but lie there and wait for death to come. His eyes rolled as the pleasure of the embrace swept over him. *How long more?*

Jason was barely conscious. He could not see a single star through the haze. Rapture curled about his nerves in a feeling that transcended his most prolific sexual encounter. He had no defence. His mind reeled and he craved the embrace.

Suddenly, the creature convulsed and fell away from him in torment. Jason raised his head to see the demon fall to the ground with a stake protruding from its back. A pale human with glistening skin, so beautiful, like a fine porcelain sculpture. Only the fangs and the leering eyes betrayed the fiend. The creature turned to dust. The Major stood over Jason with obvious concern. He gasped for air as the elation dissipated.

‘I told you to stay with Stephanie.’

The Major pulled Greeves up from the damp ground.

‘You’re welcome.’

Jason was disorientated but he could stand. The embrace was more akin to sex than he had imagined. Once the sensation had satisfied his curiosity, he lost interest and was somewhat mortified by the Major’s sudden interruption.

‘What now?’

The Major offered his injured companion a shoulder.

‘Now we get some well deserved rest and see that lady of ours is alright.’

Jason managed a smile. *His lady.*

‘Somehow I don’t think this is over,’ added the Major.

Greeves held on to the Major but gave him a puzzled look.

‘That, my dear boy, is not the vampire that attacked Stephanie,’ he said, pointing to the spot where the fiend had fallen.

Jason frowned. *How much more could he take?* Together they retreated from the moor.

Stephanie and Jonathan were relieved to see Jason and the Major. However, they were not pleased to hear this wasn't over.

'It seems we will not be leaving quite yet,' remarked Jason.

Jonathan cleaned and dressed his impulsive friend's wound and shook his head. It was never going to be easy.

The Major had rented the house for another four days. He could extend that time if so desired. They had little choice. The Major and Jonathan had both seen Stephanie's attacker. The Major was adamant that the fiend they had dispatched had not been the same one, however brief it's survival after he had staked the demon through the back.

Stephanie was concerned. Jonathan was distressed. This encounter had nearly cost the lives of Jason and Stephanie. If there was more than one, how could they hope to prevail? So far myth held some truth. However, the garlic wreath had not put off the vampire who attacked Stephanie. Nor had the fiend any difficulty with holy water, and he had entered uninvited. Only the stake had proven effective as a deterrent. Their only recourse was to search the graveyard. There was nothing right now to prove or disprove the theory that vampires slept in graveyards. Again, choices were limited and they had to start somewhere. Stephanie had only begun to conduct real research into these creatures. They would need time.

While the light of day prevailed, someone would have to venture into the graveyard to look for clues as to the whereabouts of the fiends before they had any chance of continuing. Jonathan and the Major accepted this task. Jason and Stephanie were staying behind to research and recover. At least Jonathan was happy not to be left behind this time. He and the Major would spend the day in the cemetery and out on the moor, returning to where the creature that had attacked Jason had fallen. Jason's prime concern was finding ways to combat these foes. They were too fast to fight toe to toe. A gun did nothing to halt their advance. Jonathan had previously emptied his revolver into the creature who fled but to no avail. Perhaps more conventional weapons would work. The Major had brought a wide-bladed, curved dagger with him. *Razor sharp*. Jason intended to see what he could do in the time they had left to acquire or fashion other weapons. *Spears perhaps*. Stephanie did not like this idea one bit. She was still weak from her ordeal and Jason had nearly been killed by one of the creatures. There was no way of telling how many vampires were out there. However, the Major believed there could not have been many. Otherwise, more people would have disappeared and reports of such incidents recurrent. The trouble had begun only a few short months ago. Like so many times before, they had more questions than answers.

Jonathan and the Major left just after breakfast. They took stakes, mallets, food and water. Jonathan brought a torch and his revolver for false comfort. Somewhere out there on the moor, or the graveyard, there had to be a trace. Where did these creatures come from? All the attacks and disappearances were centred on or around the moor. They had no other place to start. The Major was eager to take advantage of the light.

How dark this world had become. Jason remembered a time when everything had seemed simpler. In spite of the shadows walking this world in the guise of man, he was more concerned about the malevolence of his own species, those who harboured the spawn of darkness. These creatures from beyond the grave could not stay hidden without someone to conceal their existence. Jason Greeves had nearly lost his life. His friends had also been in great peril. He needed to be more careful. The only way to do that was to be better prepared the next time he encountered these demons. There was a purpose at work here. Until he understood what that was, he doubted they could do much to seriously counteract this threat. The next time he faltered, he might not be so lucky.

Stephanie was wary. The blood-loss she had suffered and the rest she so desperately needed left her haggard and drawn. She required sleep before she collapsed with exhaustion. Now that Jason was here and the light of day made her feel safe, she could give into the needs of her body. Still, she was plagued with fear. She believed that she alone might have been responsible for the evil that surrounded her companions. She had lived amidst the terror of the dark for so long; such things were drawn to her. As much as she tried to deny the connection, her fear manifested itself in her dreams. She was the lure. She would never truly be free. Jason was not the catalyst. Stephanie had lived her life in hope of rescue, in hope of deliverance from evil and darkness, only to expose her would be rescuers to the very thing that caused her such despair. Evil sought her out no matter where she went. Jason, Jonathan and the Major would never know true peace. She was too much of a coward to

change this newfound reality. Her freedom had cost the world, and the price was more than any of them really understood. She was too afraid of the past; too afraid she would lose her chance of any future. Stephanie Reiker could not go back. She had endured too much. All she could do to ensure her salvation was to help fight the darkness for as long as she lived. Her bridge to despair, to the past, had long since turned to ashes.

‘We have opened so many coffins and broken into more mausoleums and still no sign of the blasted creatures,’ shouted Jonathan.

‘Keep your voice down,’ rebuked the Major.

Jonathan raised his hands and looked around, casting a glance in all directions and his eyes to heaven.

‘Why? The dead don’t seem to mind,’ he scoffed.

The Major looked cross, biting his lip to lessen the reprimand he imparted on Jonathan.

‘What we are doing here is less than legal. If we should be discovered, I will give you the opportunity of explaining why we are here. Yes, Constable, we are breaking into graves, but don’t worry, we are only searching for vampires.’

Jonathan sighed. The Major was right. He hated when the Major was right.

‘Keep searching, and keep your voice down.’

Jonathan nodded. He knew his careless attitude might get them killed if they did discover anything, but he was bored. He could not shake off the belief that vampires did not come out during the day. They had searched only a fraction of this graveyard but Jonathan realised it would take many more days to complete the investigation, and he was fed up.

The Major could hardly believe the complacency of the young man. After all they had been through, finding nothing was a relief. Jonathan was eager to make up for past failings, but wishing for the evil to come was not something the Major considered wise. There would be time enough to fight. Now they needed information, clues to help them combat this threat. The light of day would not last much longer. At least they were eliminating a segment of the graveyard. The Major was aware as much as Jonathan how long this task required, but without some inkling they had little choice but to conduct a painstaking search. If Jonathan could not get his head around this simple task, and focus, the Major would leave him with Stephanie. He lacked discipline. If they were to discover a lurking vampire with the young man’s guard down, they would not fare well.

Jonathan lit up another cigarette. This was his third since arriving in the cemetery. He sat down on a headstone watching the Major go to work on another stone door to yet another tomb that looked like it hadn’t been disturbed in centuries. Even in the day, tendrils of mist clung to the graveyard, weaving through the headstones on a gentle breeze. *Had it gotten colder?*

Jonathan shuddered. There was a definite chill. The sky was dark and brooding, full of the promise of rain. The light was being consumed with each passing moment, choked by dark and ominous clouds. Already drops of rain were beginning to fall. Still, the wisps of mist remained, navigating the cemetery with an almost curious intent. Jonathan’s imagination was over-active. The Major finished in the tomb. *Nothing.*

‘I believe we are in for some rain, Major,’ remarked the young man as he watched the tendrils of mist with growing apprehension. He drew in a long draught from his cigarette and exhaled.

‘Major, I don’t want to alarm you but with the direction of the wind, shouldn’t these banks of mist be heading away from us and not towards us.’

The Major saw what Jonathan saw, and as he watched, yet more tendrils gathered. They seemed to defy the laws of nature, opposing the breeze that had picked up. More droplets of rain fell in warning. The Major opened his umbrella, startling Jonathan. The young man cast him a frown.

‘Perhaps we should leave, my dear boy.’

Jonathan nodded. If this were not a figment of an over-active imagination, they were seriously out-numbered. If the tendrils of mist proved to be anything other than they appeared, to stay would be insane. So why then did Jonathan not move? The Major was calling to him.

‘Damn it, boy, snap out of it. We have to go.’

The rain was falling. The light was gone, consumed by a thick blanket of cloud. Jonathan remained transfixed. He could see the mist gather, and the different hues portrayed were both frightening and mesmerising. They were coming for him. He was not afraid. In fact, he noticed his arms were out-stretched in greeting. The cigarette had burned low. If he didn’t let the thing go he would be burned.

The Major stepped in front of him. He slapped Jonathan but the young man stood there with a silly grin on his face. The cigarette had fallen. The Major searched Jonathan's pockets for his lighter. Quickly, he lit the thing, shielding the flame from the rain and the stiff breeze. He proffered the flame under the exposed flesh of Jonathan's hand. The mists were so inviting. There were secrets contained within. Jonathan screamed.

'Damn it, Major, what are you doing?' he shouted.

'Saving your life. We must go. Now!'

Jonathan was soaked from the rain. He followed the Major out of the cemetery. Major Denis J Selby held on tight and would not let go until they were comfortably clear. Jonathan was oblivious to what had happened, though he would have his hand to remind him soon enough. The Major had no doubt.

They had just escaped with their lives.