

Werewolf Apocalypse

I walked at my uncle's side with Dick a few steps behind.

Dick said, "Smell it?"

"Sure do." Uncle Bob kept his eyes straight ahead. "Wolves."

With a start, I put a name to what I'd sensed. Werewolves. So many of them, I couldn't pick out individual scents.

The back of my neck prickled. "We're outnumbered," I said in an undertone.

"Just keep walking." Uncle Bob glanced at me. "And don't look so tense. We're supposed to be tourists."

That made me laugh. Yeah, right. Like we were on vacation.

We walked along Blue Ridge Drive. McCaysville looked like your basic small town. There were plenty of storefronts—art, crafts, antiques—but no people in sight, no shopkeepers opening up, no *real* tourists. It was like the town was closed.

We crossed a bridge that spanned a good-sized river then turned down Casteel Street. That's where I got my first glimpse of another person—a hollow-eyed woman dragging garbage from the back of a bar. Frosty Moon Gentlemen's Club. Two motorcycles sat out front. The door was black and foreboding.

We continued walking. I saw a paper flyer tacked to a light pole—*Horseshoe Bend Park ~ Hwy 60 ~ Down Home Bluegrass Music Every Thursday During Summer*. At the bottom, someone had scrawled *Canceled* in dripping red paint.

The street dead-ended at Toccoa Avenue. To my right, I saw the tall spire of a large church. Cars dotted the parking lot. Probably services were in session. I motioned toward it, thinking we should talk to some of the people. Maybe they knew where Bodark hung out.

But Uncle Bob turned the opposite way. That ticked me off until I saw a grocery store with people bustling in and out. Skipping ahead, I approached a man loading groceries into his car.

"Excuse me, sir," I said. "I wonder if you can help me."

He glanced up with a panicked expression, then got into his car and squealed away, leaving his shopping cart in the middle of the lot.

Uncle Bob looked at me. “What were you planning to ask him? Seen any werewolves around?”

“I thought we were gathering information.”

“Not that way, we’re not.”

Sheesh. How do you find out anything if you don’t ask? I grabbed the man’s cart and wheeled it toward the building. A sign said *Park Your Buggy Here*. As I nested the cart with others, two women came out of the store. They wore dresses and hats as if they’d just come from church.

I hurried toward them. “Excuse me. My name is Cody Forester. I’m camping up the mountain a ways.”

One woman said, “It ain’t safe to be in the woods hereabouts.”

They pushed their *buggy* past me. I stepped to keep up.

“No, ma’am. And that’s the problem. You see, my friend is missing. If you could direct me to the police—”

“Police won’t help,” said the other woman. “They’s as afraid as the rest of us.”

“Afraid of what?”

“Undesirables,” she said. “The town is crawling with them.”

“Started showing up about a month ago.”

“Men?” I asked.

“Might have a woman or two thrown in the mix, but they’s men for sure. Ornerly cusses. Delight in picking fights. You should go now before they come after you.”

“But my friend...”

“Don’t mean to be uncharitable, young man, but we can’t help. The police station is down the road apiece across from the vendor’s mall.”

Her companion nodded. “At the stoplight.”

She said it like it was the only traffic light in town. Maybe it was. I gave them a little wave as they got into their car and drove away.

Uncle Bob stepped before me, eyes narrowed. “Why did you give them your name? You don’t even know who they are.”

Dick said, “Stealth might be a better option, old boy.”

I shook my head. "I want him to know I'm here. I want him to worry."

Uncle Bob scoffed. "Worry?"

"I beat him last time, had him on the ground. He won't forget that so soon." I stalked away, pretending to be mad, but inside I was unsure. Why *had* I told them my name? It just seemed like the right thing to do.

I led across the parking lot, walking along a dotted blue line painted on the pavement. A signpost showed GA on one side and TN on the other, cutting the town in half. Bodark was that close to entering Tennessee. When he moved on, would he let McCaysville go free? Somehow, I didn't think so.

We got back to Blue Ridge Drive and crossed the river. Way down at the end of the street, I saw the traffic light the ladies had mentioned. We walked slowly, as any tourist would, headed toward the garish purple awnings of Lynette's candle shop. A police cruiser pulled up behind Uncle Bob's truck. We quickened our pace.

"Good morning, Officer." My uncle smiled as we approached.

The cop scowled behind reflective sunglasses. He gave us the once over, then looked twice at Dick. I suddenly realized how Dick's bright shirt might draw attention in a small town.

"This your vehicle?" the cop asked.

"Yes sir," said my uncle.

He held out his hand. "License and registration."

"Is there a problem, Officer?" Uncle Bob opened the door and got the registration from the glove box.

"I'm giving you a ticket for illegal parking."

I glanced up and down the street. White lines marked parking places all along the curb.

Uncle Bob said, "I'm sorry. I was under the impression that it was okay to park here."

"It is. But you are over three inches away from the curb. Hence, illegal."

"That's ridiculous," I cried.

Uncle Bob shot me a warning look, and I shut my mouth.

The cop handed him the ticket, then walked around the truck as if appraising it. He got to the back. "Florida, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

“What’s in the boxes?”

“Oh, you know. Camping supplies. Stuff.”

“Open them.”

“What?” I shouted. “Don’t you need a warrant for that?”

“Maybe we should discuss it at the station.”

“Hold on.” Uncle Bob held up his hands as if in surrender. “Let’s take a look.” He lowered the tailgate and jumped into the truck bed.

I moved to follow, but the cop stepped before me, one hand on his holster.

The wolf in me bristled. I could take this guy. Rip out his throat before he could pull that gun. But he was a cop. I took a step back, trying to look non-threatening.

Uncle Bob slid two boxes forward. The first held beach towels, two bars of soap, and a bottle of shampoo. The second held bras and panties. I glared at the cop as he rifled through it. I was sure Rita wouldn’t like him touching her things.

“What’s in that one?”

Uncle Bob sighed. He picked up a large cardboard carton and carried it toward the cop. But the bottom dropped out. Two jugs of water and twelve cans of SpaghettiOs careened off the tailgate into the street.

I groaned. “Oh, man.”

Just then, a second police officer pulled up. He got out of his cruiser and snagged one of the runaway cans. “Problem here, Rufus?”

He glanced away. “Belligerent Floridiots.”

“I’ll take it from here. Why don’t you continue patrolling for more illegal aliens?”

Rufus grunted. I thought he might argue, but he got in his car and pulled away.

“Sorry about that,” said the new cop. “The townsfolk aren’t at their best these days, least of all some of the officers.”

I blurted, “Maybe he thought we were one of those *undesirables* who have taken over the town.”

His eyes widened. “What do you know about that?”

Uncle Bob looked like he wanted to slap some sense into me.

“You aren’t tourists,” said the cop.

“No sir.” Uncle Bob sighed. “We’re here because one of our friends has been taken. All we want is to find her.”

“What friend?”

“Myra.”

A wave of trepidation washed over me. We didn’t even know her last name.

But the cop didn’t ask for it. “From the candle shop.” He looked thoughtful for a moment then straightened his shoulders as if coming to a decision. “I’m Officer Duke. I’m sorry to hear about your friend. We have several other missing people. In fact, we are having a town meeting tomorrow evening at six. Perhaps you’d like to attend.”

“Where?” asked Uncle Bob.

“City Hall, just past the stoplight.” He motioned down the street. “We’ll be discussing ways to combat this influx of undesirables, as you call them, and we’ll meet with an expert from the government.”

I frowned. “Expert?”

“Yes. A woman, I believe.” He took the ticket from Uncle Bob. “I’ll take care of this. You’ll have to pick up these cans, though.”

“Thank you, sir.” Uncle Bob held out his hand.

They shook. Then he tipped his hat, got into his cruiser, and drove off.