

THE MOON, THE WOLF AND ME

PHIL PARKER



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I was over the moon when I turned into a werewolf.

Not immediately, it has to be said, but later, once I'd recovered from the shock. It took a little time to get used to the differences, the dangers too, though that part happened later. What I quickly realised was the difference between being human and a lycanthrope comes down to perspective. That's what this story is about, those different viewpoints. You might think you know the truth about werewolves but you don't, not really.



It makes sense to start at the beginning, I suppose. My name is William Walsh, I'm twenty-three, not long out of university: I work as an accountant in a large company crammed with others like me, people for whom numbers and money fill our pitiful lives. When people say they fell into their job, it suggests a lack of deliberation. It was true for me; I had no idea what I wanted to do with my life but I was good at maths and everyone assumed I'd go into accountancy. I suppose I didn't want to disappoint anyone, my parents especially. Dad kept banging on about how people would always need accountants and they always drove BMWs and Mercedes so they had to be doing well.

I've never been happy as an accountant. Gazing at spreadsheets, calculating incomes, expenditure and profit margins all day is dull in the extreme. As if that isn't enough, the company's culture is akin to the jungle, where alpha males primp and preen, strut around in their tailor-made suits and dominate those below them, people like me. My use of the phrase alpha male is not sexist but deliberate. The partners prefer to hire men, a secret policy prompted by the belief men are more competitive. Men compete to land new clients and bleed them dry of as much money as they can. It's not surprising most of the administrative team are young women. They are seen as the reward for those who succeed.

I hate it there. I wish I could leave but the company is paying for my accreditation so I'm trapped. I've dreamed of making my escape, packing bags and leaving everything behind me but that's all they can ever be, dreams.

A recurring part of those dreams is what I'd like to happen to Ambrose Bridgwater. He's a junior partner with family connections to the powers-that-be. He went to public school, straight onto Oxford and then into the company. If arrogance took the form of money, Ambrose Bridgwater would be a billionaire. He is also a bully. I am his favourite target. He enjoys humiliating me in front of others, especially women. I've always been shy and, to the likes of Ambrose, that demands the worst forms of punishment and he loves to inflict it.

Now I've described the perspective of William Walsh, human being, let me begin my story by telling you about the other point of view.



Doina Popescu fled the Nicolae Ceaușescu regime with her parents when she was a girl. She married an English man and, when he died some years ago, moved into one of the flats in the building where I live.

Her flat was a museum of Romanian heritage and she loved nothing more than to tell me about the stories behind the pictures, the knick-knacks and the beautifully embroidered work on her cushions and blankets. When Romania joined the EU in 2007, she used the travel arrangements to visit her relatives. Many of them lived in the area we know as Transylvania and I would joke about the dangers she faced of being bitten by a vampire.

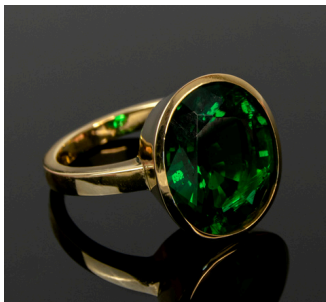
Destiny must have picked up on my foolishness.

One evening I woke to a lot of noise from my neighbour's flat, crashes and heavy thumps, it sounded like an earthquake. I knocked on Mrs Popescu's door and asked if she was all right. She called out she was fine and apologised, she had been chasing a mouse around the room – we'd had an infestation a week or so earlier.



I went back to bed and thought nothing more about the incident. Bizarrely, during the next couple of nights I heard her playing Debussy's *Au Clair de la Lune* repeatedly. It was a Saturday when I called in, to make sure everything was all right. For a flat that was normally so tidy, it looked like a storm had blown through it. She made me tea, as she always did, and we sat and chatted about her recent trip to see her cousins. There'd been some concern that a niece had gone missing but had turned up while Mrs Popescu was there, it led to a great deal of celebration and partying. She came alive while she described the happiness they all felt, along with the joy of being with her family. That was when she told me, she was going back home, as she put it - to be with her own kind.

Three days later, she'd gone. It was that fast. Estate agents took over the sale of the property and her things were shipped back home.



That wasn't entirely the end of things with Mrs Popescu. When she called in to say goodbye, she gave me a small tie pin that had belonged to her father. It was beautiful, its Art Deco design contained a green gem which she maintained was an emerald - it was just coloured quartz but I thanked her for the gift anyway. While pinning it onto my sweater she pricked herself with it, drawing a small bead of blood. Apparently, in Romania, it was a tradition intended to bring good luck.

I wore it to work a few days later, to impress a new client. Rosemary Vale was a rising star in the world of baking and very attractive too, I found myself quite smitten by her looks and her charm. She admired the tie pin and I told her its story, she mentioned how impressed she was that I'd been so kind and sensitive to my Romanian neighbour: I floated back to the office, delighted by her recognition. It's probably why I fumbled with the tie pin when I took it off, pricking myself in the process and drawing a bead of blood. I smiled, perhaps the Romanian tradition was bringing me luck after all.

I slept deeply that night, I had never been a good sleeper, I put it down to the good vibes of meeting Rosemary Vale. The same was true for every night after that.

At least, until two weeks later: the night of the full moon.

I'm sure you've guessed the next part but allow me to challenge your perceptions. Hollywood must carry much of the responsibility for the misrepresentation. There is no painful transformation involved, no cracking of bones or reshaping of the human form. The term werewolf comes from Saxon Old English, it means man-wolf. It's entirely accurate too. We retain our human form, the wolf is what exists within us, predominantly in our brains.



I woke to the silvery glow from the moon as it found its way through a gap in my curtains. I opened them to admire the shining disk in the sky, to stare at it with a level of excitement I'd never known before. My whole body thrummed, like a string on a violin being played by a virtuoso. I felt alive.

I hurried outside. It was a clear, warm October evening, the smell of autumn leaves filled my nose, along with a hundred other scents I couldn't discern. I strolled over to the nearby, deserted park. A church bell sounded, telling me it was two o'clock, its chimes echoed in my head, as though I was at the foot of the church tower. At the furthest end of the park, a good half mile away, traffic noises sounded like they were in front of me, I could hear the differences between the noises made by buses, lorries, vans and cars.



The adrenalin rush hadn't left. Excitement buzzed, an electrical charge which ran through every vein and artery in my body. The urge to remove my clothes overwhelmed me. I dashed behind a bush, stripped off and savoured the sensations of the air on my skin. I wanted to howl my euphoria but stopped myself. I strolled around the park for a while with a ridiculously stupid smile on my face until reason kicked in and told me it was safer to put my clothes back on and go home.

A quick search of the internet told me what I'd already discerned. I found the tie pin and stared at it, giving silent thanks for what it had bestowed on me; Mrs Popescu too.

Have you noticed there was no hunting involved, nor any consumption of raw meat? Another Hollywood concept bites the dust. While we're on the subject of biting, allow me to point out how my transition didn't include a vicious attack either. It made me wonder if Mrs Popescu knew what she was doing, infecting me with the lycanthropy virus – because that's what it is. It's no different to catching the 'flu, though the symptoms are more extreme – and pleasurable.

Wolves are a communal species and I understood why her condition drove Mrs Popescu back home. It was different for me.

The next three weeks at work brought about a change. I slowly became more assertive. I snapped at those eager to belittle me, not in a vicious or rude way but my brain had replies ready, which it had never done before. I became more like the others. I didn't like it but I wasn't going to be a doormat any longer.



In readiness for the next full moon, I booked a couple of days holiday and took myself off to a remote area with a coastline. That night, under the full moon, I raced along the shoreline naked, enjoying the feel of bare feet on the soft sand, the sea breeze cool against my skin. I found a rocky outcrop and sat on it as waves crashed around me, that was when I howled at the moon. Adrenalin coursed through me, every nerve ending was alive and I was one with my environment.

I stayed out all night, only returning to my hotel as the sun rose, utterly invigorated.

Work took on a new meaning. I no longer felt weak and vulnerable. I strode around the office with purpose, looking others in the eye, making demands and accepting no excuses. I met with Rosemary Vale again and our meeting was successful but even more enjoyable. We chatted over lunch, a conversation which lasted longer than the specified time in our diaries, neither of us cared.

Ambrose Bridgwater wanted to know why I was late back to the office. We met on a staircase; he took great joy in accusing me of wasting my time and being lazy. He paused in mid-insult as our eyes met. I smiled; he accused me of not taking his threat to report me seriously. I moved closer until I was well within his personal space. He stepped backward and stumbled, lost his balance and had to hold onto the stair rail to stop himself from falling. I followed him down the staircase, waiting until he'd regained his balance then yanked his arm hard, drawing him toward me.

'I'm lazy, am I?' It was a snarl, the sound of an angry wolf. My blood pounded, I wanted to hurt the man, to draw blood. I wouldn't, I knew that was wrong and the human part of me wouldn't let that happen. That said, the urge strengthened my resolve.

He bumbled an apology, turned and hurried up the staircase and out of sight.

From that moment, he avoided me. He'd walk in the opposite direction if we met in a corridor, I made a point of smiling and waving at him every time. The greatest moment of satisfaction came when I, as the junior member of the team, had to join him in a meeting with a profitable, high-status client. I'd crunched the numbers, had my recommendations ready and refused to share them with Ambrose. It angered him but he said nothing.



By the end of the meeting it was my scenario the client wanted, dismissing Ambrose's clumsy efforts and praising mine. They even took me out for dinner afterwards. Their satisfaction in my performance was passed on to the senior partners. The next morning, I strolled into Ambrose's office: he jumped up from of his chair to keep the desk between us. I leapt it. I actually leapt over his desk with such ease, it surprised me. I hadn't intended the gesture but it felt right. He let out a little squeal of panic which made me laugh. I patted him on the back, asked him if he held any grudges: he assured me I'd done a brilliant job, almost genuflecting in his efforts not to upset me. I grinned to myself as I left his office, buoyed by the emasculation of my bully.

It was on the back of that success that I got cocky.

At the next full moon I revisited the park, stripped off and raced around the grounds until my heart pounded in my ears. Exhilarated beyond belief, I howled, loud and hard.

That was when I heard it: another, equally loud and distinctive, howl.

I was not alone.

My thoughtless action provoked trouble. Unaware of any organisation responsible for monitoring the behaviour of people like me, I didn't expect to be investigated. Much later, too late, I discovered they were called the British Bureau for the Arcane. They operate in secret, understandably, given their remit. My neighbours received visits from mysterious detectives, investigating the release of dangerous dogs in the area. If anyone saw – or heard– any signs of these creatures they were given a phone number to ring.



Old Mrs Hiddlestein, who lived opposite my flat, told me the very nice young man who'd visited her, knew all about Mrs Popescu's visit to Romania. The old biddy had suggested asking me about her activities, I'd been her closest friend.

The officer obliged and was like a dog with a bone, if you'll forgive the pun. He left messages, obtained my phone number and knew my place of work. He met me there. It was only by agreeing to talk to him at the flat that I was able to get rid of him, before anyone started asking questions.

He introduced himself as Sam Dunlop, a young man with eyes like a hawk. I didn't fear him, the wolf in me had halted such reactions but it did place me on high alert. I could smell his deodorant and the Indian meal he'd recently eaten that escaped his pores. We chatted about my Romanian neighbour but his interest zeroed in on me. It turned out when I thought I'd got rid of him at work, I hadn't. He hung around on the pretext of working for the Financial Ombudsman. He expressed his interest in my recent transformation; it appeared everyone was talking about it. The shy wallflower was no more; I'd turned into an apex predator.

His words.

As he reached the door of my flat, he reached out a hand for me to shake; I obliged. There was something about his smile that made me suspicious, he glanced at his hand and instantly plunged it into a jacket pocket. His increased heart rate, rapid breathing and sweat forming on his forehead, betrayed his anxiety. Whatever he'd just done left him worried about my reaction. I stayed calm, even smiled as he left.

He was easy to follow, despite his efforts to keep a lookout. For a wolf, scent is everything. It is a hundred times greater than a human's; they use it to track their prey from a distance as great as two miles. I'd inhaled Sam Dunlop's scent as we shook hands, I didn't need to keep him in my sight, his smell was enough.

I kept close enough to hear what he said over the phone to a colleague: one he met five minutes later in a café. He peeled off whatever he had stuck on his hand and handed it over to the other man. He placed it carefully into a small plastic bag which he put inside his briefcase. They left the café; I followed the colleague. As he rounded a corner, to a small car park, I raced past him, snatched the briefcase and kept running.

I doubled back, picking up Dunlop's scent easily. He entered a dark and dowdy tailor's shop and didn't come out again. I waited for an hour. I'd found the offices of the British Bureau for the Arcane.

I hurried back to my flat, broke open the briefcase, its lock posed no challenge for someone with the power of a wolf. I'd seen enough thrillers on TV to recognise the latex used to acquire fingerprints. I burned it then set about reading the documents I'd acquired. Most of them were irrelevant, I'd stolen from an underling. One file stood out.



The Bureau was preoccupied by an increase in werewolf transformations. Not in my town particularly but nationally it was a trend. My howls had alerted them to the existence of at least two in the town, me and my howling companion.

The underling would report the theft; the perpetrator would be obvious. I ran the risk of being identified.

Work posed a threat. They would come looking for me there. The same was true for my flat, I couldn't stay there. I packed lightly, visited an ATM and drew out the maximum amount of money so I had cash, they'd track my credit cards. I sat on a bench close to a canal, with plenty of exit routes in case I was being observed by drones and considered my options. I took out my phone, it could give away my location, I had to get rid of it too.

Just as I went to throw it into the canal, it rang.

It was Rosemary Vale.

'I need to see you, Will. I'm in a café by the train station, The Buffet Car.'

'I'm sorry, Rosemary, I'm a little busy...'

'I know. I'll wait for you there; I'll be wolfing down a croissant.'

The line went dead.

I ran at a speed which had passers-by looking aghast. I didn't care. My brain matched the speed of my feet. The last time we'd met I'd picked up different scents from the woman but my lack of experience had me at a disadvantage. Could it be? Was she a werewolf too?

She grinned as I entered the café. She had bags at her feet, wore warm clothes, a heavy coat, a cap and sunglasses. 'Do you want to come with me? It's not safe for us here.'

I nodded instantly and smiled. Exhilaration exploded inside me, my senses came alive, my body thrummed just as it had on that first night. We marched purposefully outside, to her car, a non-descript Ford, she'd hired it under a false name. It would take them some time to realise what she'd done, by which time, we'd be gone.

She meant the British Bureau for the Arcane, of course.

Rosemary had transformed more than a year earlier. It led to her competitive edge in the baking business where she'd become so successful. She'd picked up my werewolf scent when we first met, as I showed her the tie pin. It had been hardly discernible then, even to another wolf. Not so at our next meeting. She'd known for certain then. That was why she'd replied to my howl, that's what wolves did.



I won't tell you what happened next or where we went. I've used false names in this story, though the Bureau know them of course. I told you at the start that I wanted to change your perspective about werewolves, though we prefer the term lycanthropes. I hope I've succeeded. We are not the murderous monsters Hollywood would have you believe us to be. We are like you, in many ways. Our only difference? Some of those ways have been enhanced by the lycanthrope virus. It doesn't make us a threat; just different.

I left behind a life I despised; one lived amidst humans whose behaviour was as vicious as any apex predator. They are the monsters, not us. My pack live quietly in a remote area, untroubled by humans. Money and fast cars are unimportant to us; my dad was wrong. Happiness comes from the warmth of kindred spirits; a life spent amidst an environment we cherish and protect.

Tell me which of us is the monster now.

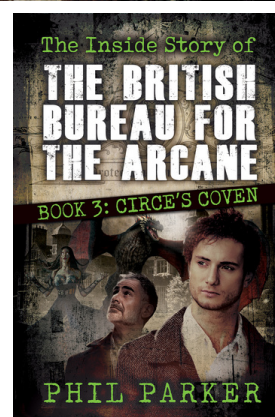
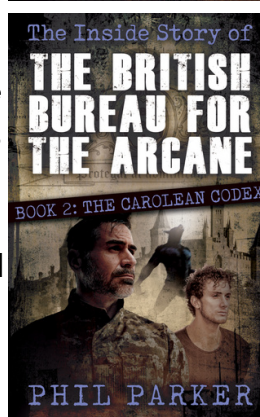
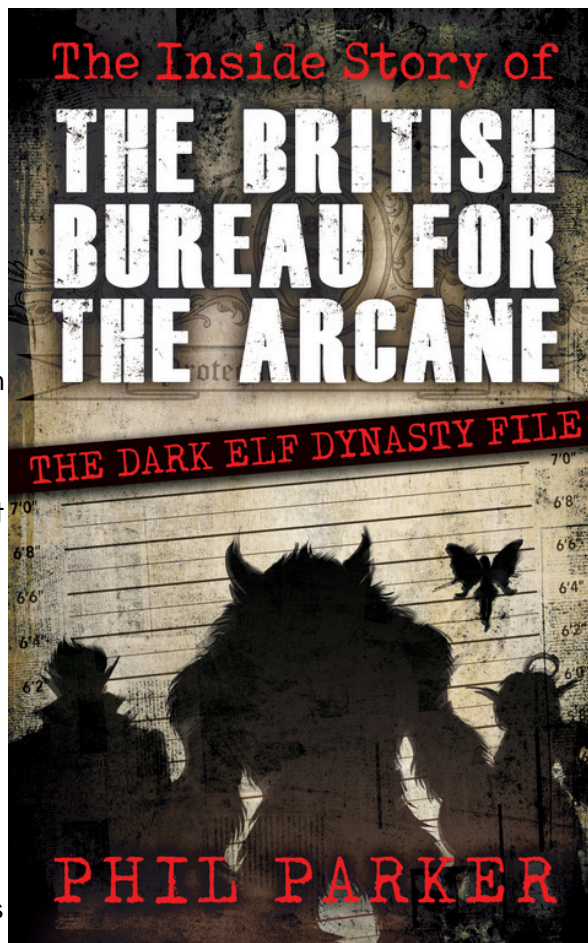


THE BRITISH BUREAU FOR THE ARCANE SERIES

The British Bureau for the Arcane has kept people safe for centuries from the arcane species that seek to harm human beings. Their range extends to Commonwealth nations that were part of the British Empire. A once-proud part of the British Secret Service, their success in controlling the arcane races has been their downfall.

These beings now live on the edge of survival in remote parts of Britain. Or, at least they did. For Arlo Austin, a loyal but troubled agent for the Bureau, something is wrong. When he's sent to protect the citizens of the Shetland Isles from rampaging Norwegian trolls, it soon becomes apparent it was an attempt on his life. When another agent dies in mysterious circumstances, and Arlo is warned of an impending war with arcane species, his instincts are proved right.

But who is behind this rebellion? Could it be linked to Arlo's own bloodline as a Dark Elf? His traumatic childhood holds secrets, ones that are going to test his loyalty to the Bureau. In their cells another Dark Elf is held prisoner, one who is so despised by its staff, their hatred has extended to Arlo. This species is violent and vengeful, can they recruit one of their own to bring about the destruction of the Bureau? And in so doing, enable the arcane races to wage war against the human race.



Described by one reader as the “fantasy version of Men in Black”.



More details: https://linktr.ee/phil_parker

