

Explore one of Scotland Yard's rare cold cases, the 1945 Witchcraft Murder near Stratford, and discover the ways in which privilege and power destroyed a chance to discover a path into the paranormal.

Blood of Beelzebub

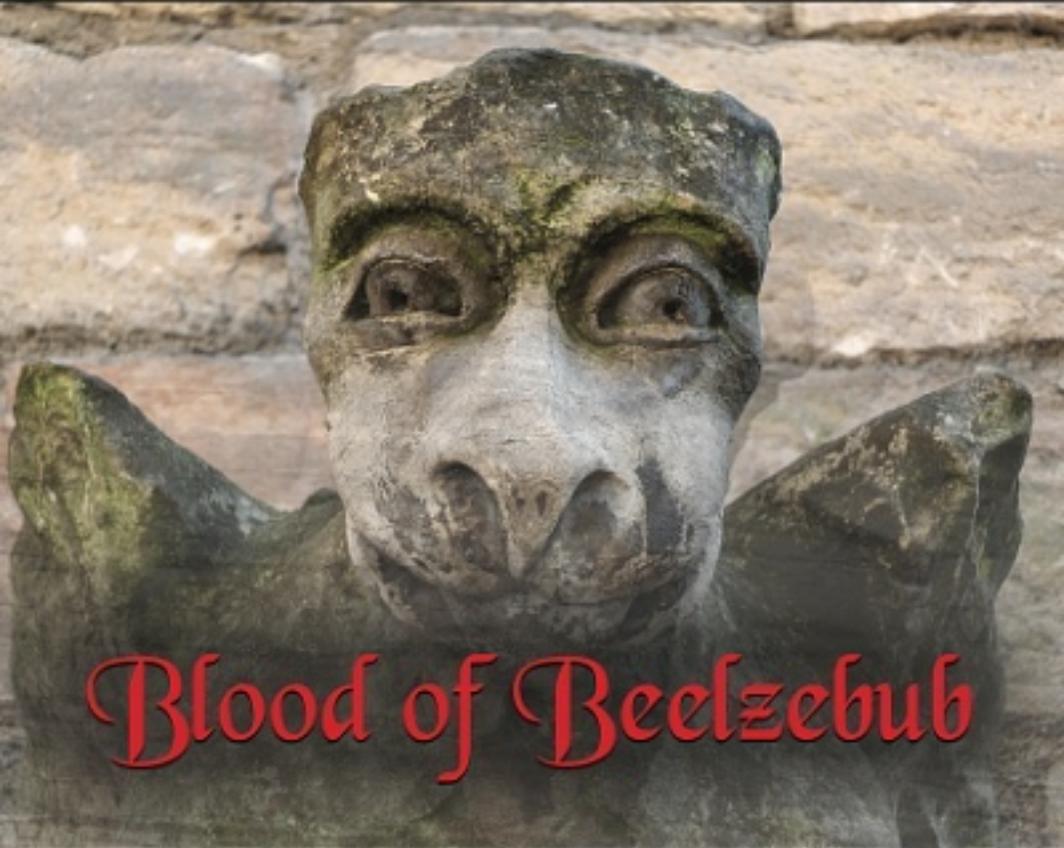
By James Seymour

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Sometimes the gods called for a bloodbath.



Blood of Beelzebub

A Novel

JAMES SEYMOUR

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Chapter One

Nuneaton

Tuesday Evening

October, 1970

No man or woman alive will deny they are privileged with certain truths, beliefs that justify their actions, even when others may disagree or have abandoned any belief that such truths exist. Such are the exigencies of all beliefs, be they mundane, religious, creative, judicial, or criminal.

I trust you may think me a philosopher or high-minded academic, flaunting my verbiage so enigmatically, but, alas, I claim no such heritage. I am nothing more than an ordinary constable, a simple believer in justice, the sort attached to the more sordid acts of individuals lacking in either moral fortitude or the emotional capacity to regard others as they would wish to be regarded. In other words, a mere copper whose life has been devoted to criminal investigation. And, while my career has not reached the epic proportions of some of my more illustrious colleagues – one of whom you shall come to know quite intimately between the jackets of this literary opus – I expect you may come to appreciate my certainty that the privilege I hold is well-justified. I shall not be discouraged in my pursuance of the truth in this matter, even while more renowned parties have decided they are not up to the task.

Allow me to properly introduce myself: retired Superintendent Alec Spooner, Warwickshire C.I.D. As might

be inferred, some individuals – be they intimate or mere acquaintances – fall to the temptation of openly referring to me as “Spooner,” “Spoon,” or, if they are especially tactless or loathsome, “Spoonful.” I generally reply to all three, as I am quite satisfied – even honored – to be considered a public servant, though I tend not to forgive any lengthy references to dinnerware.

Following a mercifully short career as a miner in Staffordshire, I spent more than thirty years conducting mostly murder investigations in and around my beloved Stratford-upon-Avon. Though I retired in 1964, the case related in these pages has never failed to escape my ongoing attention. Its extenuating circumstances illustrate the human need to believe in the unseen; in fact, our willingness to kill in the name of that belief cannot be fully explained by examining the chaos of the criminal mind or religious zealot. It is far more generic.

Was I relocated because I would not give up my determination to find a conclusion to this heinous crime? I never publically accused that in 1959, as I have always considered myself a loyal Englishman who does not disobey his superiors. Apparently, though, my die had been cast.

That year I agreed to leave my duties in Stratford to become Divisional Superintendent in Nuneaton, far removed from the territory I had served nearly all my life. I was, of course, livid, but concurrently civilized.

Today I am no longer associated with the C.I.D. Though my finances require I freelance as a security officer for the National Coal Board, I am free to pursue those truths that certain people – including those who controlled my career –

seem convinced should never see the light. Your proper attention to the following summary of facts, I expect, may enlighten those of you interested in truth.

My acquaintance with Stratford and its environs has understandably endowed me with an appreciation for all things Shakespearean. I cannot ever recall walking Henley Street without wondering how the Bard might have treated the circumstances surrounding this particular crime. Having frequently considered the ramifications of medieval superstitions and witchcraft, Shakespeare rarely failed to illustrate the ways in which the supernatural affected his characters, revealing truths about ourselves that remain as relevant today as they were in the 16th and 17th centuries. While I never attended university, I did become a learned enthusiast of all his plays that put the paranormal under a microscope. Who says a civil servant must merely indulge in *The Mail*, *The Mirror*, or the Teds?

Since the reopening of the Shakespeare Memorial Company Theatre in 1932 – the same year I began working for the Warwickshire C.I.D. – I have been a regular attendee, though on more occasions than one, the work of policing preempted my viewing the company's latest production. And, of course, the war years prevented all of us the pleasure of their company. One of the greatest advantages of retirement – and world peace – is the uncompromised capacity to appreciate the work of England's greatest contributor to the Lively Arts, an indulgence I share with several of the characters in our story.

Perhaps, Mr. Shakespeare's greatest contribution to the world has been his appeal to all levels of social and economic

advancement, even to those of us perennially scraping by in our modest communities of South Warwickshire. I shall forever be indebted to his wisdom regarding the fantasies of the masses, information that has helped confirm my suspicions in this and other investigations.

Where to begin? Or, perhaps, more accurately, where to end? Since retiring in 1964 I have made it my responsibility to return each year to Meon Hill and the hedgerows of Lower and Upper Quinton. The murderer still walks these streets, awaiting, perhaps, an older figure like myself in pursuit.

In fact, despite the discouragement of Scotland Yard's "Famous Fabian," I have attempted to prove their literary star was badly mistaken. Having done so, I have made myself quite unpopular in this neighborhood, as I'm reminded every February 14, Valentine's Day, when I make my way back to the site of the murder.

Not for the purposes of seeking passion or companionship. My last encounter with a woman just after Valentine's Day that same year proved I could still find love if I remained open. No, I'm afraid my age and health preclude anything of that sort. I want only to hold responsible the monster who brutally, bloodily, and ritualistically hacked to death an innocent person with a thoroughly decent soul. For this I am annually ridiculed by my "friends" at The Yard, not to mention the various shopkeepers in Quinton and Stratford who would rather I fade away, truth be damned.

Why, you may ask, has this one crime led me to blindly pursue a perpetrator that nearly everyone – almost all the five hundred townspeople queried about their knowledge of the

crime – claims to know nothing about. They show no eagerness or willingness to assist any inquiry. This reality alone should raise enough red flags to keep the Metropolitan Police on top of this case in perpetuity. However, even though the case remains technically “unsolved,” no one will lift a finger to continue the investigation.

Why has no one, excepting yours truly, found the resolve to dedicate himself to the case’s disentangling? I believe I have addressed the first part of this question; its second part requires us to examine some very basic realities about English history, religion, culture, and legal system. Let me even suggest that a reliable, more complete understanding of the very fabric of British society may be at stake.

Consider – and forgive – the freedoms I employ in telling this story. On numerous occasions I shall take you into the private spaces of various parties pertinent to an understanding of these events. You will be allowed the privileges of a silent bystander, as if you’d paid for an orchestra seat for the drama.

How, you might ask, would I have the advantage of knowing the words of our cast? Trust me. As a veteran investigator I have taken great care to consider the contributions of all our actors, to carefully craft their language so that it represents the details of my research, as both an experienced sleuth and longtime Stratford resident assigned to this case from its beginning. Besides, since all other interested parties have chosen to abandon any search for justice, my narrative appears to be the only one available.

The trouble is, dear friends, my future seems to have dwindled. In a matter of days, I shall be entering George Eliot

Hospital in Nuneaton for what I'm told is a rather serious procedure. Hence, the words of this tale are told with a certain urgency from one who clings to the hope that some of you will take heed. And, since this book may never find the commercial success of Mr. Fabian's thread of questionable conclusions in his bestseller *Fabian of the Yard*, should circumstances determine that I have come to the end of my investigation and my life, I trust enough of you will follow my lead by bringing this disturbing affair to its proper conclusion.

Chapter Ten

Lower Quinton

Monday Morning

Christmas Day, 1944

As the morning light drifted through the small window of their kitchen, one would have noticed a bright green cloth atop their small breakfast table adorned with sprays of Norfolk Island Pine delicately arranged around a pot of Christmas Cactus with red and white blossoms. To its left, hiding the other rather smallish window in the living area, stood a tall Balsam Fir adorned with strings of cranberries and popcorn, even some mistletoe balls artistically spaced. Prior holiday decorations in the Walton household would have dimmed in comparison to this year's. Never had their tree been so large, the quantity of decorations so plentiful, or the number of gifts under the tree so numerous.

Dickens' dark views of "Christmas Past" would have been farthest from the minds of both Charles and Edie in 1944. As if he were Father Christmas himself, Eddie's presence made this year's cheer more glorious than ever before, even by the more modest standards of a wartime Christmas. In fact, the sheer audacity of the room's adornments nearly sent Charles into spasms of guilt, after so many Christmases on which he and Edith had scrimped. As neither of them was a devout churchgoer, they respectfully minimized their celebration. Their last Christmas had included little more than an extra

glass of rum toddy and an evening visit to Charles' atheist friend and neighbor Harry Beasley, never known in the village as either a banner of virtue or the life of any party. In hopes of cheering Charles' lonely friend, Edie had invited him to this year's Christmas dinner, for which Eddie had spent the previous day preparing.

"You'm spoiling us, dear boy," Charles, seated in his one upholstered chair, said to Eddie as he opened a large bottle of champagne he'd brought with him the day before. "It bein' shortly past noon and me not attendin' chapel."

"Harry will applaud you, Uncle," Edie replied with a chuckle.

"Well, sometimes, when I do gets to chapel, I feels like certain folks are takin' attendance and notin' hows I'm most often absent."

"The Lord is forgiving, Charles," added Eddie, as he stood in the kitchen area rubbing his two small ducks with garlic, adding to the delicious mix of holiday aromas pervading the household.

"Not to mention me current obsession wid all things bubbly," said Charles, unable to obscure his guilty joy anticipating more than one glass of Eddie's festive spirits.

"Merry Christmas, Charles!" offered Edie, as she walked up behind Eddie at the oven to embrace him from behind. "How delightful to finally have Father Christmas within our midst."

And so, the day began, an uncharacteristically joyful occasion for three individuals heretofore immune to any glimpse of happiness, but now, buoyed by the belief that their

futures, enabled by the good fortune of having found one another, will be brighter than any of them could have imagined. The war was surely on the verge of coming to its end, they were all gainfully employed, and, though each of them had accepted a life mostly devoid of deep friendship or love, they had discovered love and acceptance were attainable after all.

For several hours, until their guest was scheduled to arrive, the three of them sat around the tree sipping their toddies, attending to preparations for the holiday meal, and listening to Eddie's current thoughts regarding Shakespeare's near-silence about Christmas, or, in fact, anything about being a Christian. For four hundred years scholars and "Bardologists" had been trying to decide exactly what were Shakespeare's religious sentiments.

"But you say there was no Christmas?" asked an outraged Edie.

"Well, no, not the way we think of it today, no," Eddie replied.

"But I thought..."

"Well, of course, they celebrated the birth of Christ, for a full twelve days, in fact, but it would not have looked or felt the way it does today. Easter was their main holiday."

"Seems they was more liked to death than to birth."

"That's actually true, Charles. We mustn't forget how much death there was in them days. Children dyin' at birth, the plague, it was more a part of life than it is today, 'cept of course recently." The Angel of Silence descended upon the room.

Eddie was careful not to lead his new family down a rabbit hole of regret and misanthropy. He was as enthusiastic about

Christmas as the next person. “But there was certainly no reason to think Shakespeare didn’t love mirth and celebrations of love! He practically invented them.”

“It is about joy, and don’t we all need joy at this time of the year, especially in years like this?” exclaimed Edie.

“Of course, love. The reason he avoided Christmas was because their celebrations were all parts of grand, spectacular events for the queen, which he hated. Not that he didn’t love the queen, at least as far as her payroll was concerned. It was the spectacle he disliked. The Bard was more interested in character, civic rather than religious spirit. But I expect the way their Christmas was portrayed as an orgy of theatrical indulgence, with numerous sprites and countless courtiers served up in a pageant for a queen Mr. Shakespeare did not necessarily accept as a direct line to the Holy Father or the Lord himself...”

“I love it when Eddie talks about Shakespeare, don’t you, Uncle?”

“I’m not sure I’s always know the gist of his matter, but I sure do like the sound of his sayin’ it.”

“Well, you know me of late. Always prepared to offer some of my latest new finds of Mr. Shakespeare.” Reaching for his notes, Eddie continued. “He only mentions Christmas three times. In *Taming of the Shrew* he refers to a ‘Christmas gambold or tumbling trick.’ Doesn’t sound like he was a big fan of the queen’s version of the Christmas story.”

“Tell me if I’m wrong, Eddie,” said Edie, “but if I remember right from school, didn’t *Midsummer Night’s Dream* have lots of fairies and what you call ‘sprites’ in it?”

“Oh, yes, certainly, but there he was interested in marriage, not Christmas.”

“There bein’ more interest in marriage than in religious celebration by Mr. Shakespeare is the ways you see it?” asked Charles.

“Well, from what we know not likely a huge admirer of marriage either.”

“What did he believe in then?” Edie asked bluntly.

“It’s truly hard to know, love, about much of anything he personally believed. Which is why so many keep reading, thinking they can find out.”

Always the practical one, Edie declared, “Why not just come out and say it?”

“Life’s not like that. No one – certainly not God, if there is one – ever tells us the truth, so why should Shakespeare? At least that’s the way I see it.”

“I’s gotta agree with Eddie on that one,” said Charles.

“He does give another hint, though,” reading from his notes. “In *Love’s Labour’s Lost* he writes, ‘At Christmas I no more desire a rose, Than wish a snow in May’s new-fangled mirth.’ That would suggest he has a rather serious notion of what Christmas should be.”

“Guess we’ll never know, right Eddie?” asked Edie.

“Fact is, we know a lot more of what he thinks about devils and murder.” At which point the Angel of Silence again settles in the room.

As if it were his Christmas duty to defy that angel, Harry Beasley knocked on their door. To everyone’s surprise, standing at the entrance stood two gentlemen: Harry, and

beside him a total stranger to Eddie and Edie. Charles, due to his rheumatism, was seated facing in the other direction, unaware of the other guest's presence.

“Good day, Edie. I'll refrain from all the amenities of the day to say I'm grateful for your generous invitation,” said Harry, who seemed to have forgotten he was not alone.

“Harry, Harry, we're so glad you decided to accept!” Edie replied. At which point the four of them – all but Charles – stood looking at each other confounded by the presence of the odd-man-out, unIntroduced and smiling broadly in their direction.

Eddie finally rejoined, “Who's your friend, Harry?”

“Say what?” exclaimed their neighbor. “Don't get up, Charles, I knows how hard it is to get out of that chair.”

“How are you, sir, and welcome. Merry Christmas,” said Edie, graciously acknowledging the stranger dressed in a fine suit and carrying a wrapped gift.

Nodding enthusiastically, the gentleman replied, “Buon natale!”

Charles heard that voice and struggled to get up to greet his friend. “Bless the day, I can't but believe it. Roberto! I never thought to lay eyes upon you ever again.”

The Italian pressed on with his smile and nodding head, sure only that he'd been recognized and that it was Christmas. All else was a mystery, his English having barely improved since the beginning of his stay at the prison camp.

“Harry, ye old coot, you never told me you'm knows me friend Roberto.”

“I don’t know him! Never laid eyes on him till just this afternoon, you old crazy man. On me way here, there he was, standing at the corner he was.”

Determined he couldn’t explain to any of his group that he and Roberto could communicate without words, as Edie and Harry would think him certifiably insane, Charles continued his queries to Harry. “Well, how, if neither of yous can understand a word of the other, did you know where he was going?”

“He was just standin’ there, chantin’ your name. ‘Charles? Charles?’ Well, I assumed you knew him, and I guess I was right, weren’t I, as usual, I might add.”

For the rest of the day Charles was in seventh heaven, surrounded as he was by his new nuclear family, his oldest friend, and his newest friend, to whom he remained nearly attached during the remainder of their festivities. Though the existing crowd never allowed them to reconnect via their private wavelength and Harry, having found an audience after months of solitude, dominated the discussions, Charles and Roberto remained as content as peas in a pod. Had Roberto – most likely a devout Italian Catholic – understood the language, he might not have smiled so broadly through the day.

By late afternoon, following their forays into duck, fresh squash, and Christmas pudding, along with several bottles of Eddie’s fine champagne, they found themselves sprawled on the floor beside the tree. All the gifts – a new pen for Eddie, a bright red apron for Edie, and for Charles, a warm sweater for the upcoming winter mornings working on the farm, reflected their modest means after years of war. Charles, wanting to

make sure the Italian felt fully comfortable with all these foreigners, was overly gracious in his acceptance of Roberto's gift, a pair of suspenders in the colors of the Italian flag, probably purchased in one of Stratford's tourist gift shops.

Harry, always the contrarian, became fascinated with Eddie's return to the topic of Shakespeare's lack of interest in Christmas.

"You say he was an expert on devils and demons, do ye?" asked Harry.

"Exactly," answered Eddie.

"What do ye think he'd say about the witches in our midst today?" asked Harry again. "Do you think they disappear at Christmas?" Eddie chuckled and looked to Edie, confirming their expectations that Harry was always a risk for expressing outrageous views, especially during religious holidays.

"Now Harry, don't go spreadin' your crazy notions," Charles interjected.

"Not my crazy notions, the notions of those who still believe in Shakespeare's witches as appeared in some of his plays."

"Yes, especially in *Macbeth*," Eddie concurred. "But this don't mean the playwright believed in them, just that he knew others believed in them."

"Yes, alright, I knows where yous goin'. And what did he believe that others believed, and do yous believe it today?" Harry insisted.

"Alright," Eddie murmured, remembering what Charles had said to him about others thinking he was a witch. He was afraid Charles might think he was pointing a finger at him, the

farthest thing from his mind. He also remembered Charles complaining about Harry's growing allegiance to Bolshevism, that he'd favored the new Russian regime since the First War, and that once you got him started, it was never easy taming the tiger, or in this case, the Russian Bear.

"If you takes a look at Christmas today," Harry continued, "it's as if you'd thought Christmas was about anti-consumerism, but then realized it was actually all about consumerism. Good Christians drowning in all the things that Capitalism tells them they need."

"Good Lord," moaned Charles, "here he goes again." Edie was laughing hysterically, fully under the influence and charmed by the perennial bout between the two old friends.

"It's true! It's both an antidote to industrialization..."

"The man can barely read!"

"And a misdirection from industrialization," Harry continued.

"Now what's that supposed to mean?" asked Charles.

"It takes the objects of mass industrial production and wraps them up in colored paper."

"Good lord, he's sayin' this cause nobodys got the poor man a present. Look under the tree, Edie, I thought there'm somethin' there for him."

Edie wasn't quite sure whether Charles was serious but looked around under the tree anyway.

"Christmas takes the sacred and makes it material," said Harry.

"And there," Eddie interrupted, "enters the devil."

“Yes, you could say that. Christmas sublimates the injustices of capitalism. And who does that better than...

“Here it comes,” warned Charles.

“I’ve put it into a song.”

“God help us!” Charles hooted.

“Where do we find the gifts from our Lord? In Santa’s Claws.”

This bit of wordplay sent Edie into further convulsions of laughter, revealing to Eddie a sense of humor that confirmed his adoration for the woman. They fell into each other’s arms on the floor, savoring the further verses Harry sang decidedly off-key.

“Where do we find the promise of more? In Santa’s Claws.”

“Enough!” cried Charles.

“What takes the sacred and makes it profane? Santa’s Claws.”

There was a twinkle in Harry’s eyes. Years of consuming recent Russian history was finally making him the life of the party. “It’s the truth and we’s all know it. Santa gives us gifts in return for our souls.”

“Which truly makes him a first-class fiend, wouldn’t you say,” Eddie suggested to anyone who’d listen. “I can’t believe I’m agreeing with Harry.”

“That’s right,” agreed Harry. “He wants our obedience and goodness. He wants our “self.”

“And traditionally – like Santa – the devil was always the most fun character in medieval plays, the most colorful character, just like Santa,” Eddie added.

“All one’s gotta do is listen – and it’s impossible not to hear these days, if you turn on the wireless – just listen to that Mr. Crosby and his *White Christmas*.”

“They do plays that one an awful lot, I’ll give you that,” Charles reluctantly agreed.

“If you’s really listen, what do ye hear? All that nostalgic yearning, the snow, the tree, the sleigh bells, and togetherness...”

“But I love all that, I really do!” cried Edie.

“Of course, you do, love,” Eddie assured her.

“But Harry says he’s the devil!”

“Not Bing Crosby, love. Santa Claus.”

“Christmas takes us into this kind of dream state, capitalism’s dream of itself, with all its hopes and terrors, all of it out of reach, just not quite there.”

Roberto grinned through it all, as if their celebratory words were right out of the liturgy.

“And I do begins to see your connections to the traditional picture of the Anglican devil, Eddie. Charles has told me about your studies of the Bard and his love of witches.” It was here that Eddie hoped to steer the conversation towards something other than witchcraft, old or new, afraid once again of a subject he believed to be sensitive for Charles.

“Charles, tell us more about how you came to know Roberto.”

“But you know, Eddie, you’ve struck a bit of gold here,” said Harry. “I’d never imagined Santa in quite that light. Think about it. Wasn’t he, just like witches, a person who made a pact

with the devil to disguise consumerism in exchange for supernatural powers?”

“That’s a bit of a stretch, isn’t it?” Eddie objected.

“And Santa had all those animals around him, all his reindeer,” Harry said. “Elizabethans believed witches had pets – a toad or a bird – to be their demon advisor.” Eddie looked closely for any response or change of expression from Charles. Could all this be going over his head due to his state of inebriation?

“People often accused witches of being old and poor...” Harry continued.

“And of being a woman. Santa was neither poor nor a woman,” objected Eddie.

“And witches were so convenient, am I right, Eddie? If your cow was sick or your beans wasn’t growin’, all you had to do was point at a witch.”

“That’s right,” Eddie agreed.

“And it were legal to kill witches, too, according to the Witchcraft Act of 1563. I can’t believe I remembers that date.”

“One year before Shakespeare was born,” added Eddie.

“They considered it a cleansing,” replied Harry, “as if the blood of a witch could purify your fields and make the crops grow again.” Once again, as if the topic had been thoroughly explored, the Angel of Silence descended for the third and last time, and again Eddie saved the day.

“I don’t think I’ll ever hear Santa’s bells in quite the same way,” he exclaimed to everyone’s rather nervous laughter, even that of Roberto, who seemingly gathered the gist of their last conversation.

Once the evening's darkness became apparent through the windows and Harry's stories of the glorious success of the Russian army in Stalingrad the year before had been exhausted, there seemed little else to hold the group together. Harry agreed to make sure Roberto safely found his way back to camp and Charles, having again consumed significantly more alcohol in one sitting than he had as a young man, excused himself for a "wee nap." Soon enough, their cozy celebration having ended, Edie and Eddie found themselves alone under the tree. Both exuded the sense that all was right with the world.

"An all-around success, wouldn't you say, love?" asked Eddie.

"I would say, yes. And I loved Roberto, though I don't feel like I got to know him very well."

"My guess is we'll see more of him, don't you think?" Eddie wrapped his arms around Edie, warming her neck with his breath and cherishing the quiet of their Christmas night. "One thing, though, hasn't happened that I thought would happen."

"What's that?"

"I haven't asked you to marry me yet. Will ya?"

Edie didn't seem surprised or even overly excited. The moment was simply too sublime to spoil with excess emotion. She responded as if it was already written in stone, merely the next line in their preordained dialogue. "Yes, Eddie, I will." Inside, she was screaming with joy.

Chapter Thirteen

Phantom Dogs

The brooding mounds of earth known as Meon Hill mark the remnants of early Roman encampments, a place where it is said even the birds won't sing. Arawn, Lord of the Underworld, lies prone at the highest point of the most southern mound. A smile of satanic satisfaction defines his face, as if he were a billboard announcing the kind of pleasure few of us will ever experience. His right-hand wraps around the neck of his chief dog, the finest canine specimen in the land, while the left-hand massages his genitals covered in wolfskin. He rules at the entrance to the Gateway of Hell.

"AArrgh," he barks, as the lead dog in his glorious pack of black beauties. He is about to begin the prowl, his nocturnal hunt to gather the souls of the departed. No mortal is safe from the designs of this slippery, fiendish, and hungry demigod, all that remains alive on the Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds, who requires a nightly meal of wayward men or women brave enough to resist his enticing arms and throbbing member.

Arawn locates his prey, a whisp of a woman whose ivory face and heaving bosoms lure him in her direction. She holds in her hands an amethyst stone set in silver. He lifts his lean legs and with his lead dog in tow approaches the young vixen, trying with all her might to show her strength and self-control, but failing from the start to ward off the sort of creature she has

always wanted to take her, in just the way her parents warned her would happen.

Words are pointless; the ritual they are about to perform has long been written in the story of the young girl, and language would only muddle the intent of either of them. His lithe arms reach out to grasp the back of her head and pull her forward, forcing her to her knees where she drops her amethyst and slips her hands beneath the wolfskin. He gazes into her pale eyes, his smile unchanged, as if it was etched in stone. She handles him, as if his length of protruding flesh was the love wand for which all her previous life had prepared her. Every stroke represents her greatest effort to please the god, to feed his fire, and bring him down upon her.

He mounts the virgin, tearing apart her slender gown, and enters her, his hands supporting her buttocks and cupping her fleshy dunes. She screams with every thrust, embracing long moments of unspeakable pleasure until his center erupts in a river of semen. He drops her to the ground, delighted by another evening's conquest. She lies in the dust, amazed that the guilt she has been told will follow such a deed never shows itself. How is it possible, she wonders, that she feels freer now than ever before, ready for any consequence, knowing, perhaps, that she has reached the culmination of all that has come before?

He hesitates for only a moment, understanding that any empathy will hinder his ultimate mission: to bring the living into his fold, to liberate this pathetic figure of desire by introducing her to the netherworld and thereby declare himself the ultimate power. He reaches into his boot to bring forth his

silver dagger, and with a swift and beautiful motion, he severs her head from her body, watching it roll down the side of Meon Hill. As if on cue, the hounds show their obedience by following the head to the bottom of the hill, circling it, and raucously barking their delight.

Such was the tale that fed the imagination of the 8th c. Viking King who led a hunting party marking the Celtic celebration of fertility on Meon Hill centuries after Arawn had last been seen. Only his dogs remain present to remind all who encounter them that the rule of Arawn must still be respected.

Their revels that night marked a harbinger of death for those who might resist the Devil's thirst for domination and his fury instigated by their nearby construction of Evesham Abby. Meon Hill has become his earthly residence, a launching point for his forays into the night where he wishes to rid the land of newly established Christians.

Unable to lure this new congregation through his gates to the underworld, Beelzebub kicked a massive boulder down the hill to destroy the abbey. However, alerted to the plot, the believers gather to pray, hoping to divert the boulder's path. The boulder misses the abbey and comes to rest on Cleeve Hill, near Cheltenham, where villagers through the ages have carved it into a giant stone cross to ward off further attacks.

Only a few miles from Meon Hill can be found the ancient megalith site known as The Rollright Stones, divided into three sections: The King's Men (a circle of seventy-seven large stones built for ceremonial purposes), The King's Stone (a single monolith that stands to the north of The King's Men), and The Whispering Knights (five upright stones that lay

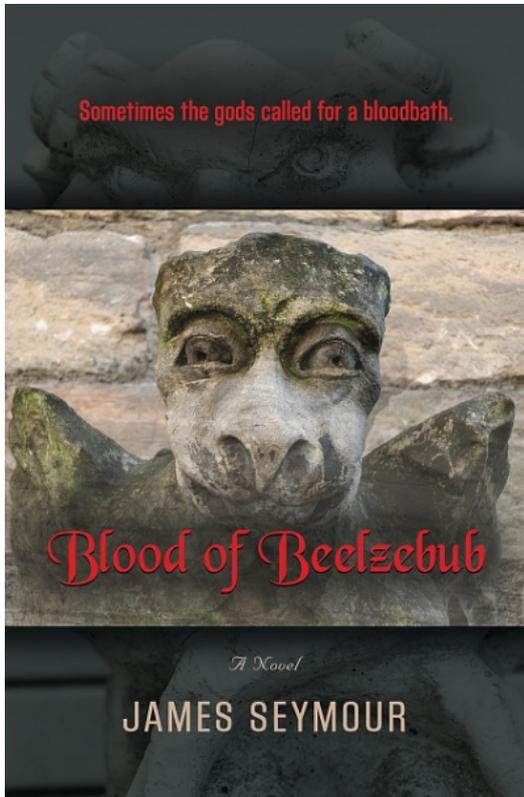
inwards towards each other as if they were whispering behind the king's back). But before these locations were literally set in stone, the Celtic King and his army met their demise.

The old king on his even older stag was riding through the night in pursuit of the fleeing inhabitants of the Cotswolds, intent on conquering all of England. He reaches a ridge near Long Compton, and he spies a local witch, Mother Shipton, the Sovereign, a goddess protector of the land, so angry that she transforms the invading army into stones and herself into an old tree that guards over the army for eternity. On certain nights at the stroke of midnight this curse is briefly lifted to allow members of the king's army to come to life. Some of the soldiers drink at a nearby spring, while others join the faeries from underground caves to dance in ecstasy around the King's Stone, a phallic emblem of fertility.

Lured by the supernatural power of the King's Stone, women unable to conceive come to the phallus and, by rubbing their bare breasts against the stone, are able to give birth nine months later.

Forever present are the dogs. Meon Hill and the nearby Rollright Stones have come to serve as the center of all rituals in which local witch covens gather, overseen by their horde of black dogs. In the 17th c. a witch accused of murder "by the means of black magic" was also accused of joining the festivities at the King's Stone and summarily hung.

While the evidence of hooded figures surrounding a fire and the discovery of the remains of dead animals abound, the dogs – black harbingers of death and misfortune – remain the most feared.



Explore one of Scotland Yard's rare cold cases, the 1945 Witchcraft Murder near Stratford, and discover the ways in which privilege and power destroyed a chance to discover a path into the paranormal.

Blood of Beelzebub

By James Seymour

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