

## Chapter 1: Paved With Lies

"Sorry sir, no hires left this eenin."

"But I made this reservation six months ago," I exclaim louder than intended to the young guy behind the EuropCar counter.

"That's the way of it, but may do check Anns a' mhadainn."

"Let me speak to your supervisor!"

"I'm the boss, chief," he grins a little larger than I'd like before adding, "but where might ye be heading?"

"I was going to tour the area around Langholm," I gripe, dejection already creeping into my tone.

"The Paisley treana or Buchanan bhus will thoirt ye shios an sin," he sighs with an eye roll while placing a closed sign in the window and flipping off the lights.

I'd read all kinds of advice about traveling the rural countryside by bus or train - mostly to avoid them at all costs due to irregular schedules and only proximate destinations. In fact, all of my planning had been obsessive for this trip to the ancestral homeland, but what better way to spend the three pandemic years of geographic isolation?

Thirty years before, when I was an underpaid doctor-in-training during a previous pandemic of the suppressed sort, an older brother had mentioned seeing a lot of Bateson grave markers in an ancient churchyard while driving up the A7. The name of the place had stuck, and now I was dead

set on taking the road to Langholm in this long weekend of a trip. Determined, that is, right up until the best means of back country transportation had immediately fallen through.

"You're going to Langholm?" I ask a striking woman holding up a sign near the Glasgow terminal exit.

I recognize the words on her sign as the Buddhist monastery listed as having a unique guesthouse in all the tour books for the region.

"If contemplation is your goal, I'll be your ride," she replies with an inviting smile, her long brunette hair hiding the bare right shoulder of a maroon kashaya robe.

"Then I'm your man," I assert, surprising myself with a bit of deceit to start my supposed genealogical journey to the Scottish borders.

## Chapter 2: Adhisila

"Student or teacher?" I finally ask my escort as we're leaving Glasgow and heading into the southern uplands.

I'd been silent to avoid exposure since exiting the terminal. She'd been equally quiet while negotiating the old Lotus 7 through evening traffic around the peripheral route south of the city.

"Some of each," she answers, hazel eyes fixed on the double-decker lorry wobbling ahead of us in the long dusk of late spring. "As a bhikkhuni I mostly practice samadhi, but I also teach adhisila to beginners."

"That would be me," I play along without understanding a word while sensing sparks emanating from the fine hairs along her left arm holding onto the stick shift.

"Then your first lesson is to abandon lust," she cautions with a wink that could have been a blink since I couldn't see the right half of her face.

"My wish is your command," I laugh, risking my first night's lodging on a cheap juxtaposition.

It was a little thrilling knowing my ruse for a ride would be over the moment the driver picked up her cellphone. Sketchy reception as we entered the slopes of the Ettrick Forest was on my side, as was my Buddhist nun's absolute concentration on driving the expensive and sexy green sports car.

She was taking us to her monastery in one of the most remote and sparsely populated regions of Scotland. The upper reaches of the Esk River also had the most rainfall in all of Scotland. The sure bet of daily rain was why I had sought out the best in British rain gear for the trip.

"Barbour and Danner," she nods toward my high-end waxed jacket and leather hiking boots. "Those are brands to desire."

"When in Rome..." I shrug, seeing a small smile play at the corner of her fine unpainted lips.

"You'll need them sooner than you think," she warns, leaning forward to peer at dark clouds looming over the hills east of Lockerbie.

### Chapter 3: The Lotus Position

"Take my Swaine-Adeney," I insist, offering the chestnut single-stick I'd gotten for this trip to water world.

"Luxury if utility," she beams with a gorgeous smile, popping open the expensive umbrella and stepping out into a steady downpour. "Your room is the first on the left."

"No check-in or key?" I puzzle, eyeing the low brick building behind a white stupa that's glowing despite it being the midnight dusk of a northern latitude.

"Power's out," she explains over a shoulder, hurrying on toward the monastery before calling back "My meditation class is at six."

The drive over the Galloway Hills through a thunderstorm had been harrowing. The thrum of drops pelleting the canvas top of the old Lotus was enough to induce white-knuckles, but not for my intrepid driver. She just hunkered down in the blinding curtain of rain like an interstate truck driver on a deadline, leaning into the switchbacks and gliding through the hydroplanes. After that display of grit, I wasn't about to disobey her call to worship.

What with flight delays, an aborted car rental, the theft of someone else's lift, and a hair-raising midnight ride, I was out cold upon hitting the tatami mat. Waking stiff from a dreamless sleep into a blue-black dawn, I hobbled in my black tee, zip-offs, and hiking sandals over to the chaitya hall and into a silent classroom.

Six other students in spandex were already settled into the lotus position, their hands on thighs with thumbs and pointers turned upward into circles. My Buddhist nun, similarly positioned and dressed at the front of the group, was even more interesting beneath her burgundy kashaya. I did my best to mimic the pose, unable to stifle a groan as I sank to the floor.

"Under the sits bones," she commands, sliding a medallion of an orange zafu under my bottom as I push hands into the wooden floor to lift the ischial tuberosities. "It will help the hips to open up and the knees to fall out."

"Bonnie," I whisper in another double entendre as I again feel sparks shoot from her wrist as it brushes across my back.

The blush rising in her cheeks disappears as soon as we see an older Tibetan monk frantically waving from the doorway.

## Chapter 4: The Last Minstrel

"Whew, that was some hike," I huff, dropping my pack by the door of the first place I come to after a two-mile trek into Eskdalemuir.

"Opening at ten mate," calls the barkeep, a portly balding fellow carrying a tray of clean thistle glasses from the kitchen at the Old School Cafe. "But ya look like yer could use a pick-me-up."

"Only if it's no trouble," I bargain, bellying up to the bar. "What's your local Scotch?"

"No such thing lad, but if it's a malt you want, that be The Borders."

"Then make it a boilermaker with this Reiver Red," I nod toward the labeled tap.

My escape from Samye Ling was in a nick of time. As my goddess nun made a beeline for the front door to consult with the agitated monk, I beat a hasty retreat out a side exit and ran for the guesthouse, stuffing toiletries bag and raincoat into an already overloaded backpack.

I was hoisting it on and about to exit the compound when I remembered the fancy umbrella. Chancing detection, I slipped back into the monastery to the first open room where I spied another object of my desire, a sash from her maroon kashaya. Slipping them both under the cinch cords, I hobbled with the heavy bag as fast as I could out into a foggy dawn.

At first I was barely able to see the narrow track of the B709, but soon enough both mist and man were burnt by the morning sun breaking over

the ben. Despite a pandemic's worth of planning, I had somehow neglected to train for hiking with a heavy pack, so I was short of breath and dripping with sweat by the time I arrived in the sleepy village.

"A wee hauf and a hauf to start or end your day," the merry barman calls, sliding over a pint and a lowball as a wrinkled old man in black and white kilties, plaid knickerbockers, red polo, and tweed bunnet todders in and lodges himself onto the end stool.

"And another for our young friend," I respond, nodding his way and raising my thistle pint.

Without a glance, the old fellow leans into the mahogany slab and breaks into a mumbling verse:

*Hearken, Ladye, to the tale,  
How thy sires won fair Eskdale.  
Earl Morton was lord of that valley fair;  
The Beattisons were his vassals there.  
The Earl was gentle, and mild of mood;  
The vassals vere warlike, and fierce, and rude;  
High of heart, and haughty of word,  
Little they reck'd of a tame liege lord.  
The Earl into fair Eskdale came,  
Homage and seignory to claim:  
Of Gilbert the Galliard a heriot he sought,  
Saying, "Give thy best steed, as a vassal ought."  
"Dear to me is my bonny white steed,  
Oft has he help d me at pinch of need;  
Lord and Earl though thou be, I trow  
I can rein Bucksfoot better than thou."  
Word on word gave fuel to fire,*



*Till so highly blazed the Beattison's ire,  
But that the Earl the flight had ta'en,  
The vassals there their lord had slain.  
Sore he plied both whip and spur,  
As he urged his steed through Eskdale muir;  
And it fell down a weary weight,  
Just on the threshold of Branksome gate. (1)*

"Who was that man?" I call into the kitchen after the old guy downs his shot and beer to my applause and then stumbles out.

"Fancies his self Sir Walter Scott, I suppose, but that's just crazy Rolland Beattison from up to Wut-Carrick."

1) From Scott, Walter. *The Lay Of The Last Minstrel*. 1805.

## Chapter 5: Craggs And Stanes

"What ye upty, Da?" makes me jump, seemingly spoken by the boulder I've just leaned back into.

"Hell," I gasp as a dreadlocked young man peeks around the rock.

"Looking...for an old guy...in a golf outfit."

"Steamin and scuddered, are ye?" he laughs, scooting around to sit beside me on the shady side of the stone.

"English please?"

"A little early in the day to be drunk and tired, hey mate?"

"Just ran a mile," I explain, pulling the stolen burgundy sash from the pack strap and wiping my sweaty forehead and neck.

I'd made it to the pub door in time to see the minstrel peddling south on a rusty English Racer. Scrambling into shoulder straps, I took off in the best trot I could muster with forty pounds jostling on my back, but soon lost sight of the old bugger.

Slowing to a fast walk bought me the brain space to ponder my predicament. I had no idea what Wut-Carrick was and no plan for when I got there. Still, the second half of the ancient sounding word was near enough to crag that I started looking for boulders along the scenic road following the downstream burn of the White Esk. I soon came to a small field of protruding rocks below a green hill to the east.

"What is this place?" I ask Rasta man who's pulled a small paper bag from a pocket of his baggy harem pants.

"Loupin Stanes they call it. Fancy ye some caps to navigate this solstice portal?"

"Come again in the Queen's English?"

"*Psilocybe semilanceata* will take us through the heel stone on the longest day."

"If it might show me the way to Wut-Carrick, I'm game."

## Chapter 6: Liberty Caps

"Two should be direach mu dheis for a first trip," my self-appointed spirit guide explains, handing me a couple of spindly dried mushrooms.

"What do I do with them?" I ponder, sniffing their sweet earthy scent.

"Eat them, ye numpty-noo," he scoffs, stuffing a handful in his mouth.

"You'll be alright with that many?"

"Ye Americans are so unco guid."

"Just naive," I grumble, trying not to react to his tone despite having no idea what I'm being accused of.

"Greasaibh oirbh!" he commands, scooting back around to the sunny side of the obelisk. "Solstice noon only comes once a year."

I sat there leaning against the cool stone and staring at the slender mushrooms in my palm. My mind was still boiling from the chase along the White Esk after a mid-morning whisky and beer. I was well into the second day of my genealogical excursion and only inching toward the Langholm churchyard cemetery I'd set out to find. Still, my Rasta friend might just give me a lift there if I stuck it out for his journey.

Telling myself it was just a microdose, I popped them into my mouth, chewed what tasted like moldy leather, and swallowed all the pieces in one gulp. As I waited to feel some effect, my eyelids got heavy and I let myself sink back for a little rest before joining him. Waking with a start after a few

moments, the day had morphed into dusk in an apparent solar eclipse. I scrambled around to the sun side, and he was gone.

"Which way did he go George, which way did he go?" I giggle, mimicking a dog from a childhood cartoon as a big black bird alights on a neighboring boulder.

"Path, path, path," I'm startled to hear it answer, and I look up from the heel stone to see a faint trail glittering in the semi-darkness and winding it's way away from the stanes.

## Chapter 7: Wool Fight

"A wee pee for Mr. Peewee?" I laugh to myself from the top edge of what looks like, in the waning quarter moonlight, a large oval mound.

"Chuffle," is the snorting answer I get from across the plateau behind me.

I'd followed the glittering trail across the B709 and over a pasture to a steep rise, arriving at the top after slogging up a barely discernible switchback path.

Suddenly famished, I sat on the southeastern edge of the mound and polished off the cranachan the barkeep had pushed into a pocket of my pack during my hasty exit from Eskdalemuir. The perfect mix of crunchy oatmeal, tart strawberries, and rich cream was just the thing, but it also triggered my gastrocolic reflex.

I'd stood and whipped it out in hopes that a good urination would relieve the urge to shit on the open top of the exposed hill.

Startled by the guttural response to my rhetorical pun, I spun around to an even more startling vision. Staring straight at me from across the plateau was a huge red-shagged monster with sharp horns. Before I could even gasp the words woolly mammoth, it charged.

"Hey!" I scream, raising my arms to make myself look bigger as if this beast were as blind as a black bear.

"Bye!" I yell back, fleeing straight down the slope as it lumbers after me.

"Andale, andale," I pant in desperation, whipping the maroon sash from the pack strap and flinging it off to the side.

## Chapter 8: Hard Heads

"Trespassing Americans," grumbles an old man striding toward me in the grey pre-dawn and clasping a golf club over his right shoulder.

"Hold on Mr. Beattison," I bargain, recognizing the old minstrel from the Eskdalemuir inn. "I'm a Bateson."

"Fore!" he screams, swinging the antique wooden driver.

I'd stumbled down the hill after the beast fell for my decoy and tore up the burgundy sash. There was a streak of silver on the eastern horizon as I halted at the Esk, and suddenly I knew it was no bad trip I'd been on. Instead, I'd slept off the mushrooms all afternoon and evening and was now greeting the dawn of my last full day in Scotland.

Scoping out the shallows in the thin light, I had waded across with growing thirst, resisting the temptation to slurp from the pastoral waters probably teeming with *E. coli* or worse. I was heading back to the B709 to continue on to Langholm when spotted by Rolland Beattison.

The old bugger marched over and swung that wooden driver for my head, but I saw it coming and whipped out my Swaine-Adeney, holding it up in front of me with both hands. The shaft of the antique golf club snapped around the umbrella handle, propelling the heavy knob of back around and into his forehead.



"Jeez Rolland, are you okay?" I worry, helping him up.

"A taste of me own medicine, eh?" he groans, standing shakily and feeling his forehead.

"Guess my wood's harder than your wood," I offer. "Or at least it's newer."

"Well we at Wat-Carrick never liked youse wandering Bateys," he explains. "What ye doing snooping round anyways?"

"I was chased down that hill by what looked a woolly mammoth."

"Only me highland bull," he guffaws, holding onto my shoulder as we hobble toward the road. "And that hill-fort is Castle O'er where our sinncearan held off the Romans."

## Chapter 9: My Kingdom For A Horse

"Twas Bauldy Beattie and me white Beattisons down to Langholm," begins the wobbly linkster when I tell him where I'm heading.

"Then that's where I need to be before the end of the day," I enthuse, pulling out my cellphone and hitting the on button.

"Yer people over to Score be long gone, hung or worse by Scottish Jimmy," he continues, filling my water bottle from a stone culvert spouting a steady stream from a crack in the basalt outcropping beside his low stone house.

"Still no cell service for me to get a Lyft," I complain into the now darkening mid-morning sky after checking my phone and finding no signal. "How far is this place?"

"Tis a fur piece round to the Black Esk, but nary a short run thar a' mhonaidh for me nag."

So it was either continue on my perilous footpath to Langholm or trust the goodwill of a cantankerous distant cousin from the wrong side of the family. If being outed by a monk, chased by a bull, and assaulted by a golf club were the signs, I'd better change my course before the next threat came along.

Cell service is sketchy to begin with in the Southern Uplands, but particularly so in the quiet zone of the Eskdalemuir Observatory, a governmental magnetic and seismic research station. I couldn't count on Google maps to get me back to the airport in Glasgow. I did, however, have a visual memory of crossing the Black Esk on the drive over to Samye Ling

that first night in Scotland. I'd have to rely on that image and the kindness of a stray driver on the B703 to be able to make it to my tribal homelands before the next morning's flight back to the states.

"Here, take my umbrella," I offer in trade as Rolland hobbles over with a sad-eyed elderly horse.

"She be descended from Lord Maxwell's white stallion," he bargains, standing up a little straighter and thrusting out his bony chin.

"This Barbour will keep you dry," I concede, handing over the expensive waxed rain jacket even as dark cumulonimbus clouds are bunching low over the ridge to the west.

"She knows the way over O'er and back again," he concludes, passing the reins and pointing a craggy finger to those hills.

## Chapter 10: Over O'er

"Easy Betty Baty," I croon to the old mare tossing her head as a bevy of big black birds flies up from a grove of slender birches on the western slope behind the ancient hill-fort, their silvery serrated leaves fluttering upward with the flock.

"Snort," she blows, reluctantly obeying the reigns urging her up into the mist of a low cloud hanging at the ridge top.

Though Rolland Beattison's white nag didn't want to go that way, it was a good thing she knew the trail. It was midday and might as well have been midnight for the lack of visibility from dark clouds massed over the divide between White and Black Esk waters. The clamour of rooks might have been enough to turn my superstitious ancestors back, but not me. This might be the only chance to see where my paternal line originated in tribal Europe.

As to who those ancestors were - Britons, Picts, Angles, Gaels, or Norse - it's a good bet they had some of each from the successive waves of immigration from the mainland and subsequent integration of culture and language. What the Bady's weren't was Roman. The Southern Uplands are north of both Hadrian's and Antonin's walls, and the mountain passes with hill-fort defenses were the last line of resistance to conquest.

"Steady old girl," I call with a squeeze of my knees as she prances into a sudden gale striking our faces when we reach the crest.

"Neigh," she whinnies with a toss back of the head as we're pelted by rain.

"Hang on!" I shout over the tumult, jumping off to make a run for cover under a rock outcropping.

"Roar!" she trumpets, tucking her haunches as I lunge for my pack and bolting away back down the hill.

## Chapter 11: Confluence

"Fancy meeting you out here in the forest," I gasp to the stylish woman stopped at the wheel of a green Lotus 7 with the top down.

"Going my way, old man?" she teases, flashing that brilliant smile I'd seen once before when proffering my umbrella.

The half hour squatting under a basalt overhang after the white horse spooked in the driving rain had given me plenty of time to contemplate my predicament. Following the old nag back to retrieve my backpack would place me once again in the hands of the traitorous Rolland Beattison and his White Esk clan, and my Danner boots and the promise of U.S. dollars were all I had left to trade for a ride to Glasgow. There was still no phone service on the Black Esk side of the ridge, and the battery was down to 10% and counting. Luckily, I'd stuck my passport, credit card, and Covid verification into a pocket of my zip-offs that morning.

I emerged from my cave into an evening sun peaking through the clouds breaking up in the west. Heading for that coral horizon would take me to the road to Lockerbie even if I lost the faint memory of a trail that was now all but washed out by the downpour. And where was I, after all, if not following in the footsteps of my ancestors who had been dispossessed by King James I in the border reiver wars at the turn of the sixteenth century?

So I headed west into the gloaming on the prayer of a hitchhike ride once I reached the B703. After a mile of meandering down the darkness of a fir covered slope, I emerged into an open fen and caught a glimpse of a

trickle in the waning light. It was barely what we'd call a creek back home, and the ragged trail brought me to the shallow ripples of an ancient ford. Over the squeak of my boots as I trudged up the west bank I barely heard the hum of a distant car engine and took off in a sprint.

"What brings the maroon nun back over these hills, and in street clothes at that?", I query my nemesis turned potential savior.

"I've got a class in Glasgow in the morning," she shrugs, bronze shoulders glowing in the lingering dusk.

"More contemplative yoga for beginners?" I guess, hoping for a chance to resume my lesson before a mid-morning flight.

"This time I'm the student, funny guy, and it's a course in tantric massage that I've waited a long time for."

"I could be a good receiver of some pre-workshop practice," I submit, leaning in with hands on knees.

"Then hop in, Mr. John Bateson, and we'll see where this road goes."

The End