

FROM THE GRAY

G. WELLS TAYLOR



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G. Wells Taylor
(eBook Sample)

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PROLOGUE

“Quiet back there!” Colson Parker
shouted, banging his fist on the rear cab

wall between the seats of the fifteen-foot U-Haul moving truck he was driving. The noise had started up in the cargo compartment again.

That wasn't part of the deal!

He'd rented the big beast in Ontario to move his girlfriend Tammy's stuff back into Quebec where her parents lived. She'd left Cole for another North Bay guy, Mike Warburton, who delivered Pepsi to the convenience store where she worked.

And good riddance to her!

Tammy had moved into Warburton's mobile home on property his family owned at Turtle Lake, but had delayed getting all her stuff out of Cole's apartment.

He was sick to death of having it around for the last three weeks while she had her little honeymoon, so he'd finally packed it all up and moved it to her parents' place in Villes-Marie.

In the two years he'd lived with their daughter, Cole had only met them twice by chance, once at a grocery store, and again at a restaurant. They were estranged from Tammy due to bad blood they still carried from her wild teen years, but they were still her parents; so they weren't surprised and didn't complain when he called them up and announced he was on the way with her stuff.

He'd made it sound like she might be coming to live with them, too, which

made Cole feel a bit bad, but the sheer spitefulness of the drastic move was somewhat intoxicating, since she'd have a pile of drama to go through if she ever wanted to get the stuff back.

And Warburton would have to deal with it, too!

The older couple had fed Colson a sandwich and a cup of coffee afterward. His poor French could not do much more than carry the basics, but their broken English helped them understand that Tammy could be coming to stay with them after a breakup.

And it's my pleasure to help make that happen!

He'd been lucky to get the truck when he called U-Haul in a fury around noon

that day to ask about prices and schedules. One was available so ... He'd picked it up and driven it home, but still took the rest of the afternoon to load Tammy's junk before setting out for Villes-Marie at eight o'clock that evening.

That was what emotions got you.

And what being a cheating slut would get you, too!

After unloading under the porch light, Cole had started back to North Bay around midnight, and that had him pulling up to the end of a line of parked cars and trucks on the way through Laniel where police had blocked off the highway's southbound lane.

He had grumbled, hoping that it didn't

have anything to do with the stupid pandemic—and then he'd had a terrified moment searching his pockets, thinking he'd left his medical mask at Tammy's parents.

Luckily, he'd found it in time to cover up before the cops got to his window. They'd told him in faltering English that a traffic accident had closed the highway, and emergency crews were on site. The wait wouldn't be long.

Cole couldn't see much past the vehicles ahead, but the flashing lights were proof enough for him, so he had settled in for the wait. It seemed that the satisfying act of hauling his ex-girlfriend's things into a different province had diminished his store of

frustration, because he'd soon fallen asleep with the truck idling.

His life had changed forever after that.

He snapped out of his reverie when thumping again began in the cargo compartment—this time overhead. Sputtering curses, he pounded on the roof of the cab. It was deafening, but the noise abated quickly.

Cole's eyes shifted to his passenger who'd been silent and still the whole time. The frail-looking old man had been introduced to him as Dr. Armis.

“They're in Mom's Attic now!” Cole said, pointing a finger at the roof to indicate the shelf-like part of the cargo

compartment that overhung the truck cab.

The doctor's deep-set eyes followed the gesture, but his expression remained puzzled.

He'd met Dr. Armis at the Laniel roadblock after being awakened by the police, ushered from the truck, and walked through a dark, crowded parking area into a small, well-lit house beside the gas station where an odd collection of people were having a party. They were odd because they looked like travelers. Certainly, they didn't look like they were from Laniel.

But there were fifteen, at least, having drinks in the cramped living room. They were adults from twenty to Dr. Armis' approximate eighty years of age, and of

white, black, and native ancestry. A few appeared to be a little worse for wear, stretched out on the cheap furniture, dazed and deep in their drinks. Empty beer and liquor bottles, juice containers, and glasses cluttered every flat space, and parts of the carpeted floor.

The cops guided Cole to a bedroom where two gorgeous women were waiting. One was blonde, and the other brunette, both were naked, and speaking French, but their body language explained the basics.

Cole had experienced an anxious moment when their eyes flashed red as the officers closed the door, but he was soon focused on what they were doing with their mouths and hands.

There was no doubt what they wanted from him, and they said it in such a way that he hadn't bothered to ask them why.

Hell, Cole would have signed up with the Liberal Party of Canada when those two women started working on him, convincing him to join the cause. There was nothing holding him back but a failed relationship, and a part-time maintenance job working for the school board.

And he'd have done anything for the girls the way they ...

“What’s a *Mom’s Attic*?” Dr. Armis snapped with a flinty rasp, to draw Cole from his reverie one more time. The fellow’s rheumy gaze glared up at the

cab roof and back at him.

The eerie dashboard light gave the codger's features a withered, goblin-like appearance. The actual dimensions of his skeletal frame were all but lost in the folds of his black suit, and oversized trench coat, but there was an exacting strength to any movements he made.

“*Up* there, where they were pounding—it's cargo space!” Cole explained. “I don't want to lose my deposit on this rig if they wreck something.”

Dr. Armis shook his head slowly, sighing.

A shudder ran through Cole then that ended with an electric convulsion shooting up his left hand that tore free of the wheel so the fingers jittered and

shook, and the joints cracked and snapped.

“Goddamn!” he cried, watching Armis sidelong, before his attention was pulled back to the quivering digits. “I’m changing again.”

He’d had a minor fit of the sort just after the people were loaded into the truck—when his doubts about his choices were first growing.

He was only twenty-six. What was he getting into?

But this attack was much worse. The finger bones were twisting, and the knuckles swelling up as the muscular spasm raged. Then, a ridge of stiff bristles grew up along the back of his hand, and down past the wrist—before

itchy hair sprouted over his palms.

“My fingernails!” Cole shrieked, as they darkened, thickened, and grew out from the bruised bed to form cruel, hooked claws. “Why? They said it would take days!”

He couldn’t recognize his own voice. It was as gruff as a bear’s.

“I said that, *and* that you’d have to use self control when the changes began—*especially* during the early stages,” Dr. Armis said. “*Breathe!* Manage your anxiety if you can.” He reached down between his feet to lift a small black travel bag onto his lap. “I have something to calm you!”

“But, since the women—since they ...” Cole clung to the wheel, peering

under the dashboard, and tapping for the brakes with a fuzzy club-like foot and leg. “It’s not even a full night!”

“There are many factors at work—the coronavirus hybrids among them, I suspect,” Armis said, producing a bottle of pills, but throwing them back into the bag after gauging his driver’s mouth.

Cole’s now mismatched teeth and distorted jaws could not swallow or chew pills.

“Calm yourself—*breathe!*” the doctor commanded.

“I had a bad day!” Cole growled, as the tumult returned to the overhead compartment. The sound rattled the cab as the people hammered on the steel floor of the Mother’s Attic.

“They’re trying to punch through!” Cole’s words were garbled around his protruding tongue. His ongoing transformation disoriented him, caused his lopsided shoulders and arms to shudder as he steered. The truck swayed drifting over the centerline and back. The highway curved through rugged terrain. Swamp and rock cuts lay to either side.

“They were tied with rope!” Dr. Armis said, producing a small cylindrical container from which he retrieved a syringe. “One of them must have—*watch the road!*”

He tore his eyes away from the windshield to fill the needle from a brown glass medicine bottle.

“I caught no telling scent. Of course, *my* hunting abilities are nothing compared to those of my former employer,” Armis said, intent upon his task. “However, my experience tells me that even if they had been attacked at the dock ... there hasn’t been enough time for *their* manifestation—let alone *yours!*”

“It hurts!” Cole rasped, his distorted, big-bad-wolf’s muzzle dripping saliva. The seams of his jacket tore as his hairy chest expanded. “My clothes!”

“You’ll soon have no need of them,” Dr. Armis said, tapping the syringe with his index finger. “If you survive the transition.”

The tires suddenly rumbled on the soft shoulder and the vehicle rocked as

Cole heaved awkwardly on the wheel, steering it back onto the road.

“If *we* survive!” Armis remarked, thrusting the needle through Cole’s denim sleeve and into his right arm. He pushed the plunger.

The effects began before the needle was withdrawn.

Heat spread through Cole’s body.

The clawed hands on the wheel trembled as the dense hair withered to leave human skin, and the lethal claws slid painfully back into the flesh.

Then, a grating sound preceded a vibration in the cab as they veered into the oncoming lane, and back toward the soft shoulder.

A coarse rumbling from Cole’s chest

accompanied his transition. The bones in the bestial face soon altered and shrank to become the simple features of a young man from North Bay.

In moments, the remaining bristles on his jaw and neck were the result of lazy personal hygiene, and not arcane lore, cryptid species, or a runaway curse.

“What did you give me?” Cole asked, with a look down at his torn clothing. He felt along the frayed seams. Tammy had given him the jacket on his birthday.

“A sedative,” Armis answered.

“That was wild,” Cole gasped, straightening in his seat behind the wheel as he started coaxing more speed from the truck. “You said I won’t need clothes—what’s that mean?”

“You’ll understand when your training begins ...” Armis gave him an unconvincing look. “Everything in its time.”

When the people in the cargo hold began pounding overhead *and* in back, Cole cursed and balled up a fist.

“Just ignore them!” the doctor snarled, raising his gnarled hands with wrinkled palms up. “Control is required to survive the transition.” He nodded sharply, as Cole focused on driving the truck. “That’s what doomed Kevin Lonsdale. He moved too quickly. He pushed his troops before they were ready.”

“I don’t get it,” Cole admitted. “I thought they said Lonsdale was leading

us.”

He remembered the heady moments after his exchange with the naked women, when the changes first began. His vision had doubled as his nervous system overloaded. Cole’s sense of smell, and hearing had increased to terrifying levels ... and more disturbingly, bits of what *they* knew seemed to appear in his head as if they were his own thoughts.

It was an efficient way to fill him in on their mission, and the opportunity it presented, but it would take some getting used to.

He blushed, wondering if that meant *they* knew he still missed Tammy.

“So it began,” Armis said. “Until he

was repurposed by other more powerful forces as a useful distraction.”

“Then where are we taking *these* people?” Cole frowned, watching the winding road in the headlights.

“They witnessed the fall of Lonsdale’s camp, and may have useful information ...” Dr. Armis said. “But it is the same battle, and much-anticipated war.”

“I still don’t like the ‘war’ part,” Cole said, deflating. “I got family and friends ...”

But I don’t have Tammy anymore ...

“You can bring them with you,” Armis assured. “If you truly love them!”

Something banged on the wall behind them.

“In time, you will understand the world that awaits,” the doctor said. “For now, you must focus on controlling your emotions. You’ll learn more when we join the others.”

“Right ...” Cole watched the broken centerline. “It *is* nice. Past the pain ... when it came on—the power! I won’t have to take any more shit from bosses—or *girlfriends*.”

“No, you will not,” Armis said. “Once you learn to control your emotions.”

“Sure. I’ll do anything to stop the Great Reset,” Cole added. “We gotta be free—this is Canada!”

“You’ll be that,” Dr. Armis declared, “and a good deal more.”

A short time later, Cole's eye was drawn to a red flicker in the side mirror.

“Ah, shit!” he hissed. “*Cops*. We must have picked them up when I lost control ...”

“And the flashing lights?” the doctor said.

“They want us to pull over ...” Cole's lips curled away from his teeth.

“Then you should, of course,” Armis said, waving a hand toward the soft shoulder. “Stop up there. Yes. *There!*”

“But, we have people locked in the back—I don't want to go to jail ...” Cole said, watching the police cruiser in the mirror. “That's not why I signed up.”

Why did I? Was it just to show

Tammy? No. Those women ...

Almost as if on cue, their prisoners started thumping on the dividing wall again.

“Ah, jeez ... *perfect!*” Cole sighed, slowing the vehicle.

“*I’ll* deal with the police,” Dr. Armis said, looking through his bag.

“What are you gonna to do?” Cole asked, pulling onto the soft shoulder.

“What I do best,” Armis answered, sitting forward on his seat as the truck came to a stop.

“But ... they’re the police!” Cole watched as Armis opened the side door, and then looked back at him when the interior light came on.

The old man’s face had hardened into

a fierce and rigid mask. His right hand gripped the leather-wrapped hilt of a long knife that he slid blade first into his left sleeve.

“*And* they are also artifacts of a fallen empire ...” Armis said, before stepping out into the night.

End of this eBook sample.

The story continues in

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by G. Wells Taylor

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

G. WELLS TAYLOR was born in Oakville, Ontario, Canada in 1962, but spent most of his early life north of there in Owen Sound where he went on to

study Design Arts at a local college. He later traveled to North Bay, Ontario to complete Canadore College's Journalism program before receiving a degree in English from Nipissing University. Taylor worked as a freelance writer for small market newspapers and later wrote, designed and edited for several Canadian niche magazines.

He joined the digital publishing revolution early with an eBook version of his first novel *When Graveyards Yawn* that has been available online since 2000. Taylor published and edited the *Wildclown Chronicle* e-zine from 2001-2003 that showcased his novels, book trailer animations and illustrations,

short story writing and book reviews alongside titles from other up-and-coming horror, fantasy and science fiction writers.

Still based in Canada, Taylor continues with his publishing plans that include additions to his Vampires of the Kind books, the Wildclown Mysteries, and sequels to the popular Variant Effect series.