

And the Werewolf Came out of the Woods and Took Over the Dance Floor
Jason Shannon

The plane touched down at Calgary International at 11:45 in the morning.

With no checked bags, the five vacationers coming in from Toronto proceeded briskly through the massive terminal and out to the awaiting taxi pick-up area. It had been more than a four-hour flight, and Bryant just wanted to get to Banff and relax, but Viktorya instead gave the cab driver an address in town.

Cutting through city streets, the taxi van deposited them at a small townhouse in a neighbourhood called Rosscarrock. Viktorya got out to greet the young woman who'd come outside. Bryant, wanting to stretch his legs, got out onto the sidewalk and yawned.

"So, this is the guy you left us for?" the woman asked Viktorya.

Bryant came back to himself. "Hmm? Me?"

"No, no," said Viktorya. By now, Jay had emerged from the other side of the van.

Introductions were made. This young woman was evidently one of Viktorya's old friends, from when she lived in Alberta. The two women, and Jay, went inside. They wouldn't be long, assured Viktorya.

Bryant, Andy, and Mia stretched their backs on the sidewalk. Andy, looking at a shop two doors down, said, "Keep the cab waiting. I'm going to pick up a little something for tonight."

Soon, the five of them were back in the cab, and, soon thereafter, at a bus depot. Within the hour, the city limits were behind them, and gargantuan mountains towered above them. Andy had a large bag with clinking bottles of alcohol on his lap. "Things are super cheap here," he said, "but they didn't have any mezcal. But don't worry, I got the next best thing. Jay, I got you your end of the world. And Bryant, I got your cherry vodka."

"I got a little something, too," said Viktorya with a grin, holding up a new bag she hadn't flown into this province with.

Two weeks ago, Bryant and his first serious, adult girlfriend, had broken up. Jay and Andy, trying to be comforting, had arranged this impromptu trip. Apparently Banff is very busy, but they found this relatively unknown hotel-resort, and managed to get a room for a decent price.

The bus slogged through the streets of Canmore, then the quaint town of Banff, then pulled into the parking lot at the bottom of the mountain. A cable car ferried them up, up, and farther up. Bryant's ears popped. The stunning vistas of Alberta's Rockies stretched from here to the horizon, evergreen-painted slopes poking up jaggedly towards the sky.

Coming over a ridge, the cable car cycled down slightly, then climbed this new face. Now they could see the chalet. A glass dome and a radio tower were in the distance, perched atop a precipice over what looked like a sheer cliff face. In the winter, this particular area of the mountains was a quadruple black diamond. But now, in the springtime, it was green and tawny, orange sunlit, with birds chirping and a mild chill in the air.

They disembarked the cable car. Following the brick pathway, they made their way into the lobby of the resort, which was a huge, cavernous entranceway. Marble pillars reached up to the ceiling three floors up. A tremendous aquarium filled one wall, with many brightly-coloured fish flitting about.

Andy sauntered up to the check-in desk, plopped down his newly acquired bottle of tequila right on the counter as he fished in his bag for the confirmation number. The concierge was middle-aged, stiff upper lipped, fancily dressed, hair slicked with so much product it was probably dripping down his back. He looked like he'd misplaced his monocle that morning and now had to deal with this drunken tourist.

They were shown to their booking. It was out the back of the main lobby, up a set of landscaped stairs, coiling around this slope of the mountain. Going the other way, out the side entrance from the lobby and down the way, the concierge told them, was a discothèque.

In their suite, there was a central room, with a gas fireplace and a kitchenette, a shared bathroom

with a large shower, and three connecting bedrooms. Andy had agreed to sleep on the pull-out couch. The south wall was a giant floor-to-ceiling window, a sea of green plummeting off the cliff edge. And there was a small terrace with a hot tub.

Andy quickly made a phone call to his wife back in Ontario. Mia, likewise called her ex, and the mother of her children, to say she'd arrived safely. Jay and Viktorya went into the bedroom. Bryant, having already sent a check-in text from the cab, strolled out to the terrace. Resting his elbows on the stone guardrail, he looked down into oblivion.

*

As the sun set, all five of them crowded into the hot tub. Andy had started the pump and run a bunch of chemicals through it over the course of the afternoon. Now, puffing on a cigar, he sunk into the bubbles and relaxed. Mia came out in a one-piece bathing suit, her hair tied back. Jay, using the bottles Andy had purchased earlier, quickly stirred his cocktail as he came out into the chilly evening air.

Mia said, "Yeah, I'll try one, but what's in it?"

Jay said, "Maker's Mark 46, Gdąnsky Spirytus 76, and Gosling's 151."

"What does that mean to someone who doesn't drink?"

Andy said, "It's battery acid that will fuck you up. Pour me one of those."

Jay returned a minute later with a snifter glass for Andy, who guzzled it like a shot he was hoovering from a sorority girl's navel.

"When I make you one," Jay said to Mia, "don't drink it that quickly."

"What are you drinking?" Mia asked Andy.

Andy had a huge glass beer mug from the kitchenette that he was pouring a waterfall's dosage into. "Cazadores tequila," Andy said. Then he reached for another, smaller bottle on the table, and added about a tablespoon of this into his tequila. "I call this 'emergency mezcal'."

Bryant squinted. The smaller bottle was Wright's Liquid Smoke. "More like welfare mezcal," he said, and guffawed.

Viktorya came rushing out of the room in a skimpy purple bikini, holding a green bottle in her hand. "Don't drink yet, don't drink yet," she said, passing everyone a fresh glass.

Slipping into the water and out of the cool air, she uncorked the bottle and poured about a finger's worth into her own glass. Then she did the same for her boyfriend.

"What is that?" Mia asked.

By now she'd poured a finger's worth into everyone's glass. Grinning hugely, she said, "Czech absinthe."

Jay sipped his. "Whoa, that's strong."

"It's eighty-nine percent," announced Mia, studying the bottle.

"Oh, yeah, gimme some of that contraband Iron Curtain hooch," said Andy, sampling his shot.

Bryant had already shot his back. He liked it. He took the bottle from Mia and poured himself a healthy second dose. "Wait, this is illegal?" he spat.

"In Canada it is," said Jay. "It's got wormwood in it."

"Well, it's highly regulated," clarified Viktorya. "The European stuff has a much higher allowable limit for thujone. That's the supposedly psychoactive ingredient."

Bryant took a pull from the drink. "How did you get it?"

"I smuggled it," she smirked.

He raised an eyebrow. The open bottle was hovering in one hand above the glass in the other hand. "Did you... keister it?"

Then he hesitantly sniffed the exterior of the bottle.

Viktorya snorted, "It's an eleven hundred-millilitre bottle!"

Bryant shrugged. Pouring a healthy dose into his glass, he said, "Well, you are dating this guy," and pointed at Jay.

This prompted Mia to tell the story of the Weird Al presentation in seventh grade French class.

Jay, Mia, Andy and their friend Allen were to give a presentation to the class, reading from a report in French. Mia had brought children's suspenders belonging to her younger brother for Jay to wear in an attempt to dress up like Weird Al, only they were far too small, and wound up pulling Jay's track pants waaaaay up, revealing his camel tail. It didn't help that Andy was silently pointing and making laughing gestures to the class while Jay stuttered through the report, his eyes on the page.

Everyone shot their drinks back. Andy returned to his welfare mezcal. Jay went back to sipping his end of the world. Viktorya was drinking a bourbon and Coke, and prepared one for Mia as well.

Mia said, "Do you want to hear a Nazi knock-knock joke?"

Jay said, "Sure."

"Knock knock."

"Who's there?"

"*Ve vill ask ze questions!*" barked Mia fanatically, waving her arm and inadvertently splashing Jay and Bryant.

Bryant guffawed and drank from his vodka ginger ale. He began twisting all the knobs on the hot tub jets.

"So, Bryant," said Mia. "Whatever happened with your ex?"

"Oh, don't bother him," said Viktorya. "This is supposed to be a get away and relax weekend. Bryant, you don't need to explain yourself to us. Sometimes people just aren't right for each other."

"She just... she said I wasn't present. Like, what does that even mean? Where else am I if I'm not here? I just... she wanted me to recognize this, and be eagle-eyed aware of that, and forecast every everything I'd say to see it's effects twelve months down the line. Like, fuck, women always say 'be confident, be confident, be confident', with no roadmap as to actually do that beyond those two words, and I finally decide, fuck it, I don't care what people think, I'm just gonna be myself and to hell with everyone else – and it works, and people respond, and I get my pick of shifts, women are flirting with me, Ashleigh started sending me nudes, and she's this little sexpot with pierced nipples and more vibrators and buttplugs than I can count and a sex swing mounted to her ceiling, and I'm not wrapped up in my own head – and then it's like, 'you're not present, I'm on a certain level, I've done work to get here, it's not fair to me to have to teach you'. I *was* present. Being present got me her in the first place. Forgetting all the bullshit and living like each day is here and gone. Like, can't I just be myself? Now I'm double-knotted inside my own head, hyper-analyzing every word I say again lest I set off some tripwire."

There were other things, too. Ashleigh had a special needs daughter who required the majority of her time. That, Bryant understood. But this...

"Fuck it," he said, and shot back the huge mouthful of absinthe in his glass.

Jay patted Bryant on the shoulder comfortingly. As he did so, he nearly knocked over Andy's Samsung Galaxy Fold phone, which he'd placed precariously on the edge of the hot tub.

"Careful," Andy called, leaping for the phone.

"Why don't you place that on the table next to the vodka?" Jay said.

Andy re-lit his cigar. Puffing, he said smugly, "I like to live dangerously, and nothing says living dangerously like getting a footjob from a velociraptor."

Viktorya stared at Andy like he'd just confessed to murdering five children and stuffing their limbs in his freezer.

Ashleigh had given Bryant a footjob once. Wasn't exactly his cup of tea, but he appreciated her enthusiasm. Appreciated it all over her shins.

Everyone drank, the night air chilled, and by and by they were all mellow and the sky was dark above them. A thousand tiny stars shone, the mountainside was utterly black and spooky. At one point, a wolf howled. It must be the wolfdog sanctuary they passed on their way in.

"We should go to the disco!" announced Bryant out of the blue. He was in the zone, feeling it, wanted to dance.

"Hey, I'll be your wingman," purred Andy.

So the two of them got out and towelled themselves down. Mia was feeling the effects of the alcohol and decided to retire. Jay was calling after Mia to eat some carbs before bed, but was unable

to follow up on this, as Viktorya was also feeling the effects of the alcohol, and took to fondling his nipples right there in the main room.

Andy oiled his beard and spritzed on some cologne. Bryant buttoned up his best dress shirt and pulled on a blazer. Stumbling out of the room, they made their way downstairs. The lobby was basically deserted, save the stuffy concierge who still had a look on his face like someone had both pissed and shat in his morning oatmeal.

Bryant was rushing for the side entrance. He knew the discothèque was out and down the path to the left. Andy said, "Hold up, I gotta piss."

Bryant turned back to see Andy disappearing into the lobby restroom. Feeling energized, ready to party, he was now frustrated he wasn't there already, ordering kamikaze shots from the bar, feeling the music, watching the young women shake and gyrate on the dance floor. He sat down on a marble bench next to the giant aquarium and slouched forward. A second later, he heard a tapping.

He looked back. Inside the aquarium was a man! Shirtless—

No – he... had a fish's tail?

The man waved at him and smirked. Bryant stared back, bug-eyed.

The concierge appeared next to Bryant. "This is Laurens de Graaf," said the concierge in a syrupy British accent.

Laurens de Graaf swam over to a mermaid statue next to an eight-foot underwater castle. The statue was old, the paint faded. She wore a seashell brassiere. The fish man swam up behind her and reached around to cup the seashells in his hands.

"He's a Dutch national. Unfortunately, Ottawa is not renewing his work visa, so he may have to be re-released into the Canals of Amsterdam."

Now de Graaf grabbed the statue but her tail-hips, leaned back, began thrusting in an overexaggerated manner, like a frat boy humping a sorority pledge who showed up to the mixer in a bikini.

"Uuuuhh... shitty," said Bryant.

Andy came marching out of the restroom. "Bryant, let's go. The night awaits, *mon frère*."

The two marched out of the lobby and turned down the brick path.

The discothèque was outdoors. There was a building on the one side, with a canteen, a bar, and restrooms. The dance floor, incredibly vibrant and colourful, technicolour lights flashing in squares, was on a flat plane of land next to the forest. Overhead lights and a glittering disco ball hung from scaffolding. There were sixty or seventy people here, some sitting at the bar, some socializing in the corner, most of them dancing. Some wore 1970s-style disco outfits, sequin suits, sharp collars, jean jackets, platform shoes. Some wore t-shirts and jeans and yoga pants. Speakers mounted to the overhead scaffolding blared *Funkytown*.

Andy immediately went up to the bar. "Uh, Crown Royal, good sir."

"Would you like it with anything?" asked the bartender.

"Surprise me."

"I'll make you something special." The bartender grabbed the Crown, and poured a healthy dose into a mixer cup. "And for you, sir?" he asked Bryant.

Bryant saw he was mixing Jägermeister in with the whiskey. "Cherry vodka and ginger ale," declared Bryant.

Andy's drink was served. He sipped it. "What is this?" he demanded of the bartender.

"Jägermeister old fashioned."

The bartender snatched up the bitters to put behind the bar again; it was a bulbous black bottle with a narrow bottle pourer plugged into the top of it. Andy read the label and exclaimed. "*Unicum*?"

"It's Hungarian," said the bartender. "Premium stuff."

"Why do I have a feeling it's short for unicorn cum?"

Then he sipped the concoction as the bartender poured cherry vodka into a highball glass.

"Delicious," declared Andy. "Now that's premium unicorn cum!"

Andy was feeling it. He'd already consumed half of his bottle of welfare mezcal, and now was

drinking unicorn cum. He was getting sloppy. Resting his elbows on the bar, he said, "Bryant, we're gonna find you some wench to take back to the suite tonight. Get it out of your system. Blow a few wads, munch some carpet, and you'll be right as rain. Hell, this is Alberta; you probably don't even need to eliminate pegging or gimp costumes from the menu first out here."

Andy then cackled, and in doing so, leaned back and bumped into a young woman sitting at the bar. She was dolled-up, blonde, petite, big earrings, a little cleavage. Pretty.

Andy apologized to the young woman. He said, "Oh, excuse me, madam. Hey, please allow me to introduce you to my friend, the best man I know, Bry—"

Before he could finish, a huge hand snaked in and gripped Andy by the back of his collar and yanked. He was pulled back like a child, his cocktail splashing a bit on the bar. Bryant and Andy turned. A tremendous woman towered over them. She stood at least six-foot-seven, four hundred pounds. Half her head was buzzcut, the rest of her short hair was neon blue. A septum piercing and a spiked dog collar. She was glaring at Andy.

"How dare you harass my girlfriend," snarled the beast.

"What?" spat Andy. "I—"

"There was some rude comment about equine emission, you fascist filth!"

"Whoa, whoa, everybody calm down," stammered Andy.

"Bertha," said the petite blonde, her voice high, "I think he tried to look down my shirt."

"Why you little..."

"Hold on, there's been a huge misunderstanding. Listen, Ms. Bertha, allow me to apologize. I'll gladly buy you and your girlfriend a beverage."

"Let's take this out back, you toad," snarled Bertha, her septum ring swinging as she barked.

Andy whispered to Bryant, "I'll smooth things over. If I'm not back in ten minutes, call the National Bigfoot Society."

Then Andy and the two lesbians stepped off to the side, away from the bar and dance floor.

The bartender was wiping up Andy's spilled cocktail. Bryant whipped out some money and paid for both his drink, and Andy's equine emission.

The Bee Gees were now playing on the stereo. Bryant turned to the dance floor. It was awash in lights, flickering and sizzling, a mass of bodies swirling about on the glittering floor.

He was feeling the music. It was seeping into him. And he felt his shoulders bobbing despite himself.

A curvy woman in a seventies-style white suit was dancing at the edge of the floor. He liked the way she looked. She didn't appear to be with anyone. Maybe he should go dance with her. Introduce himself. Offer her a drink (he'd refrain from any Hungarian bitters). It was Banff, after all. A vacation town. Towering peaks were all around them. Cyan lakes were scattered through the valleys. Bears and moose prowled the woodlands. People come here to have fun. She probably came here to have fun.

But no, he just wasn't feeling it. Picking up a random woman on a long weekend trip, that just wasn't his style. He huffed. He'd have to sign back up for Tinder when he got back to Ontario—

A shape appeared between the trees, a shadowy form beyond the purple glow of the disco lights. It was huge, shoulders shambling forward. A creature emerged from the forest, and came lumbering into the clearing and onto the dance floor.

It stood nearly nine feet tall, and probably weighed seven or eight hundred pounds — a huge torso, great arms like a gorilla. Its feet were tremendous, and it padded in on tippy-toes, its heels arcing up almost like backward-facing knees. Its elbows had a dagger-like boney growth jutting out on the back end of the forearm. A fierce snout, torn and tattered ears, a long face like a gharial, jagged teeth, red eyes.

From head to toe it was covered in a greyish fur, save its scalp, which had blondish dreadlocks falling down its back, and tinged violet in the disco light. It—

Well, it was actually a she, for she wore the remains of eviscerated women's clothing. A kaleidoscopic sequin suit hung off of her, the pants slashed at the feet and barely hanging onto the upper legs, a bushy tail springing out the back. Likewise, her bodybuilder arms turned the

The wind rustled and the leaves blew. Sunlight shone down through the branches and bathed Bryant's face in light. He groaned, sensing the glare through clenched eyelids, and rolled over. He fell off the bench onto the brick terrace.

"Guuwwhh," he mewled, lying face-down on the dewy brick, a weed pushing against his cheek

"Oh, good lord," came a voice.

Bryant pulled his head up, looked over. A blurry vision of Mia came into view. "Guh, wake me up tomorrow."

"You're naked," said Mia.

Bryant rolled onto his side. He looked down at himself. Indeed, he was buck naked.

"Oh," he said.

Mia ran to grab him a robe. Bryant pulled himself to his feet, stumbled to the terrace guardrail, looked at the sloping valley of evergreens and aspens and larches hundreds of feet below. The sun cast the shadows of clouds across the valley. Green and white and grey, and a lake in the far distance that was cyan blue.

He vomited profusely over the side of the terrace.

"Bryant, *mi amigo*," said Andy a few minutes later, when Bryant was dressed in a robe, Andy offering him a hefty mug of coffee. "How did we get back here last night? I barely remember anything after that lesbian threw me in the leaf pile like a bouncer at a nightclub."

Bryant sipped the coffee greedily. He closed his eyes, took in a deep breath, tried to force his brain to work through the splitting pain.

"I was dancing with a werewolf," he said at last.

"Yeah," said Andy. "And I'm Presitator-for-Life Xi Jinping chomping a cigar and sipping premium Chinese sorghum liquor on an airship the size of a football stadium floating above the smog."

Bryant's cell phone rang. He answered it. It was the guy at the check-in desk. "Mr. Biel, this is your morning wakeup call."

"Huh? I called for a wakeup call?"

"Indeed, Mr. Biel. We also have your breakfast order. You placed it last night. Taiwanese fried chicken sandwich, with two waffles as the bun, chopped dragonfruit and a slice of Hawaiian pizza dressing the sandwich, and a linguine burrito."

"Uh... oh... okay."

Bryant pulled himself to his feet, chugged some Gatorade, and went downstairs.

The lobby was deserted. Bryant could hear the clacking of his shoes echoing through the cavernous room. He went up to the front desk. The concierge handed him a doggy bag.

"Uh, thanks," said Bryant.

Feeling famished, he decided to unwrap his breakfast and take a few bites right here. He sat down on a bench and unwrapped his pasta burrito. He stuffed his mouth and bit off a huge portion. Creamy pesto sauce and Parmesan cheese dripped out of the flatbread.

He heard a tapping on glass. He turned around to the giant aquarium.

Laurens de Graaf had his fingers splayed in a peace sign, and was flicking his tongue between them in a cunnilingus gesture.

Bryant rushed back to the room. He burst through the door like a SWAT team.

"Guys, I can prove it!"

"Prove what?" asked Jay.

"The werewolf. I can prove the werewolf!"

"I think you had too much of that absinthe last night," said Viktorya, microwaving a breakfast sandwich. To Jay, she asked, "Did you feel any effects from that last night?"

Jay said, "I thought I saw a shooting star at one point, but it could have actually been a shooting star."

Bryant threw up his hands. Marching out to the terrace to get away from them, he resumed eating his burrito in peace, looking over the edge at the steep slopes beyond. Trees filled this whole side of the mountain, thick brambles from just below the terrace all the way to a lake in the far distance

around a corner at the end of the valley.

Something caught his eye. About a hundred meters away, at a small clearing down the slope, a coyote poked its head out into the sunshine. It looked about timidly before trotting farther out and licking up water from a rain puddle.

Bryant stared at it. The sun hit the fur on the top of its head and neck, poofed up in the morning breeze. It had a purplish tint to it.

The small creature lapped up the water, then abruptly looked up at Bryant.

Andy said, “Bryant, what the hell are you eating?”

Bryant turned, startled by the interruption. When he looked back, the coyote was gone.

Bryant stared for a time, letting the morning sun hit him. At last, he answered his friend. “Nothing, Mr. Presitator. It’s nothing.”

“Huh? What the hell?”

*

This concludes *And the Werewolf Came Out of the Woods and Took Over the Dance Floor*.

Growing up in Belleville, in high school, about the only thing to do in that town was go to the movies. This was in an era of dial-up internet, and theatres didn’t have their own sites with individualized showtimes. The only way to find out what was playing and when was by calling the theatre, and the only way to do that was with the phone book the town mailed out. Only the Belleville phone book had a typo, which they just copy and pasted for at least three years straight.

So one day, a friend and I were at Favour Players seeing one movie or another. Prior to the movie, we both went to the bathroom. I finished washing my hands just as my friend was using the the low-flow hand dryer. He commented, “These things blow, eh?”, to which I replied, “You mean they suck?”

Once the air from the dryer cut out, however, we could hear the overhead radio once more. The first thing I heard was the DJ say, “And the werewolf came out of the woods and took over the dance floor.”

To this day, I have no idea what it means, but, twenty years later, I got a story out of it.

Bryant, Jay, Andy, Mia and Viktorya are characters who have appeared in other stories. Check out the stories *The Wedding of Jay Shanahan*, and *The Funeral of Andy Buttons*. A third story, following Mia, titled *So Bad It’s Good*, is coming soon. I’m also writing a novel called *Viva la Winter* – Jay Shanahan has sold one of his novels to a Canadian film studio, which is filming it in Yellowknife, when the storm of the century hits and a communist revolution breaks out. Mia is directing and Bryant has a cameo role. The short stories, and the first chapter of the novel are available at www.jasonmshannon.com

Copyright 2023 by Jason Shannon.

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions.

No part of this work may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without prior written permission by the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author’s imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, or locales is purely coincidental.