

# Seeds of Vengeance

Mark Rogers

SEEDS OF VENGEANCE

By Mark Rogers

Copyright © 2014 Mark Rogers. All Rights Reserved.

First Print Edition, 2014

Fiction House Publishing

[www.fictionhousepublishing.com](http://www.fictionhousepublishing.com)

Editor: Catherine J. Hedge

[www.catherinehedge.com](http://www.catherinehedge.com)

Artist: [sezer66/Shutterstock.com](http://sezer66/Shutterstock.com)

All rights reserved. This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. All rights reserved. No part of this publication can be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission from the author.

ISBN:0692272895

ISBN-13:9780692272893

For Hiram Kinder, a Kindred Spirit

\*\*\*

I want to praise my editor, Catherine J. Hedge, for her  
excellent and tireless work.

Thank you, Leonard Bishop, for sharing your love of writing.

#### A COLLIER'S LAMENT

From the thresholds of Hell, the miners emerge  
Sluggishly, worn leather boots clapping the earth  
    Dragging picks, axes and flat shovels  
They leave behind in the dust any hopes for the future  
    Another twelve hours in the 'hole'  
Faces, mouths, and clothes blackened with the gritty soot  
    Spirits deflated from crawling like rats underground  
Burrowing through areas little wider than their pain-wracked  
    bodies  
Emptying sharp coal chunks into finger-splitting railcars  
Hoping rotted support beams won't splinter and crush them

## CHAPTER 1

### **The Anteater**

Lowland Scotland, 1904

Oxygen is fading; the shallow mine cavity crumbling. Frantic, using a piece of granite the size of a shovel's head, the 17-year-old 'Anteater' claws through rocks and dirt. Of the dozen miners, fate spares only him.

Blackness. Seeing anything is impossible.

"God! Please let me live! I must live!" he shouts, but is unable to hear himself over the roar of collapsing earth. Falling slate nicks and gouges his neck and back. He struggles to remove a canvas jacket, and then uses it to protect his head.

He has ratty brown hair, a long pale face, glistening black eyes and flattened, pinnacled nose. Because of his appearance, and since he subsists on raisins and baked beans that appear ants in the glow of the gas carbide headlamps below, the other miners have labeled him the Anteater. No one remembers the reclusive orphaned boy's real name anymore. To the people in the small mining village, he is 'Anteater.'

"One day all the bastards will pay dearly for giving me that name. I am not the Anteater! I am J.B. Smith!"

Pain from a broken shoulder and leg nearly make him black out. He tries to relax, to clear his mind so he might think of some way to survive. He clutches his granite 'shovel'. *'It will also be your pick, your axe, everything but your headstone.'*

"Rest, for just a minute. Must gain strength. Must..."  
Delirious.

He closes his eyes and lets his body melt into the cool earth. Thoughts drift to events following the previous workday. He had walked alone toward his hut, paying no attention to the joshing and conversations of the other miners. Their dungarees, faces, and leather miner's caps were coal-blackened.

"Eh, Anteater. Gonne' hibernate temerra' night, or ye gonne' get out wi' de livin'?" a pale, stoop shouldered miner about J.B.'s age yelled in his thick, lower-class brogue. He and another man hurried to catch up to J.B.

The other miner, older, craggy faced and burly, replied, "Nah! Anteater'll be comin' to de big shindig." He jabbed J.B. in the ribs, "Boss's daughter, she wants ta meet ye, Anteater. Damn if I can say why! Aye, but ye can borrow me good suit, an' try ta pull it tight ta fit. Gotte' look good fer 'er Majesty."

J.B. wanted to say to him, "Kidden' me? She really wants ta meet me?"

J.B. wanted him to reply, "Really does!"

A warm feeling embraced J.B. He didn't think Julianna even knew he existed.

In his delirium, as dirt sifting quickly from the mine roof begins covering him, he rants incoherently, "Next year I go. Meet Julianna. Woo her. Ask her to..."

He is shocked back to reality by the cannon-fire-like cracking of slate above him. He prays that when it falls it won't shear, and slice through him. J.B. suddenly realizes there is only one way he might save himself. He rolls onto his side, staying close to a wall. He knows that all he can do is take shallow breaths to preserve precious air, and wait. He holds the granite a few inches from his face and forms a rudimentary oxygen tent.

To keep from thinking about dying, he immerses himself in Julianna. He glimpsed the resplendent 16-year-old just once, as she passed through the village. Julianna was on her way from the railroad station back to her father's mansion after a buying spree in Edinburgh. Her step was quick, determined. Two servants followed. They carried packages stacked from their waists to just below their noses.

Julianna smiled, just briefly, as she passed him, and said only, "Good evnin', Sire."

At 5'9", Julianna was taller than most girls J.B. had ever seen, but her hands were petite; her facial features gently chiseled. Her pinched nose rose slightly between sea-blue eyes. Small cheekbones accented a long but perfectly proportioned chin. To J.B., used to the miners' wiry, clay-skinned daughters who thought him a freak, Julianna was the most beautiful girl alive.

That first time he saw her, though unable to explain to himself any reason why, he was certain he loved her. With a 17-year-old's boy-almost-man lust, he spent tortured nights thinking about her. "I'll do to you in bed, Julianna, the dozens of acts the whores of Glasgow taught me; and you'll love it, and you'll desire me even more for having taught you."

For a moment, the cramped mine cavity becomes quiet.

Then, the tonnage of flat slate screams down. It lodges against the wall inches above J.B.'s head, just as he hoped it would, creating a safety ceiling under which he can work. He knows that rescuers will be trying to excavate the collapsed north entrance of the mine. But he begins tunneling east, realizing – from studying the engineers' maps that few miners except himself ever look at – there the mine wall is thinnest.

His granite shovel serves him well. He scratches out a two feet length of tunnel, and then crawls beneath the slate. With the granite, he hammers off chunks of the slate to use to shore up his narrow escape route. His lanky 6'2" frame is being continually cramped and twisted, yet he presses forward,

steady, unrelenting, through the constant pitch darkness, repeating over and over his tunneling and shoring process.

Thinking of Julianna helps ease the pain of his broken bones and the stinging of dirt-packed lacerations. He convinces himself that Julianna would provide him the softness and caring that his parents had once shown him to exist in the world.

It takes J.B. six hours to reach daylight. He crawls, nearly paralyzed, to safety. Before passing out he hears a man suddenly yelling, "It's a miracle! Anteater has dug himself free!"

A woman, whose husband is still below, jealously rants midst her howls of grief. "Or is it de devil who allows one more animal than human to survive?"

Four men, their clothes shredded from digging to rescue the trapped miners, go reluctantly to J.B. – as if the woman's words are some ancient omen telling them, "Leave the Anteater. Let it die." They lift him onto their shoulders and carry him to his hut.

He still clutches the granite. In the digging, it had worn to the size of a baby's fist.

### **The Anteater's Dream**

During his recuperation, J.B. polishes his granite stone until its natural pearl-gray hues sparkle. Blood-red veins of iron streak through it. He mounts it to a chain and wears it proudly around his neck.

Surviving makes him hunger to live forever.

The pendant becomes his symbol of this yearning. But books he gets from the great libraries of Glasgow – histories and classics, technical books on mining, books about a state in America called Kentucky – teach him to confront reality. For J.B., during the following months, to dream of the future eases the pain of his slowly healing body.

He dreams of having a dozen sons with Julianna and achieving his immortality through them. J.B. is certain he will overcome the obstacle of his and Julianna's different stations in life.

'I'll find a way to make you love me, Julianna. When you do, together we'll sail to the new world and begin our new life. And wealth, Julianna! A thousand, ten thousand times more than you now know.' With his practical knowledge of mining and with its technical aspects he learns from books, J.B. knows he can become a king in America. Julianna – his queen. From his miserly lifestyle and rodent's existence, he's saved for passage. He'll not indenture seven years of life as most others do, to gain booking.

'Nothing, Julianna, no one, will slow the dreams!'

\*\*\*



'I'll ask her to be my wife, tonight!' J.B. keeps repeating to himself at the shindig. He watches midget clowns, black-suited magicians, jugglers, and fire-eaters roving the village square. They entertain the miners' families. Dancers in plaid, knee-high socks and ceremonial kilts twirl under candle-lit streetlamps to the whining strains of bagpipes. Pixie-like harlequins in shiny tights scurry between ragged children giving hard candy. Under a canopy, a line of jaw-clenching customers await turns with a travelling barber-dentist. Hair and blood mat the ground beneath his adjustable chair.

As J.B. peeks through the slit of a sideshow tent, seeing the bearded lady, Siamese twins and dancing pinheads, people pass and stare as if he is the oddity. A graybeard pats him on the back. "Aye, Laddie. Now don'tch ye go in there. They'll mistakes ye fer one a dems and keeps ye."

A year has passed since the accident. J.B.'s recovered fully – except for his hair, shocked white by the terrifying experience; and, he stoops slightly. His ivory teeth glisten, but never having smiled much in his life, when he practices for Julianna his mouth puckers unnaturally. He appears even more anteater than human. His borrowed brown suit is two sizes too big, yet ten times more presentable than anything he owns. But he is proud of how he looks.

'The girl I love will look past it, past the monster anteater face, and into my soul. She will see my love for her, and she will instantly love me back.'

J.B. suddenly finds himself pulled, twirled, beyond his control, by one of the harlequins. Around. Around.

His village world becomes a collage of decrepit buildings, tinderbox houses, and sky. When the spinning stops, he's dizzy. He teeters, but stays balanced. The harlequin disappears into the crowd to find a more nimble partner.

J.B. looks up when the whirling in his head ceases. He sees Julianna.

She and her father sit on velvet-cushioned, high back chairs in the grassy park. Spread before them, on an enormous oak table are platters of sweet-smelling cooked

pheasant, grouse, Scottish smoked salmon kippers, and a roast wild boar glazed in sugar. A sporadic spring breeze pushes the savory scents through the park. There are salads, ballooned breads shaped as flowers and trees, multi-layered desserts, and wine; more food and drink than J.B. thinks he consumes in a year, maybe two. Passed around, tasted, are bowls of traditional Scottish haggis – sheep innards minced with oatmeal, suet, and onions, stuffed into a sheep stomach, and boiled.

Seated at the table are a dozen men; some in suits, some kilts. They seem anxious to win his girl's favor. J.B.'s seen them at the office where he waits outside for his paltry wages each week. They're paymasters and bookkeepers that pass him without acknowledging his existence. He wants to spit at their feet. 'Men such as you will one day do my bidding.'

J.B. cannot hear their conversations because children screech when they see creeping actors with faces painted like scaly reptiles. A group of drunken miners starts singing a raucous beer-drinking ballad. The unfamiliar racket is more piercing to J.B. than the pounding and clatter of the mines. Being among so many people for this first time in his life intimidates J.B. But the feel of the pendant pressing his sweating chest, and the sight of the beautiful Julianna, renew his confidence.

Julianna's hair is radiant, fine burning strands flowing onto her yellow silk gown. Miniature ivory hearts and gleaming pearls trim the gown's long, tight sleeves. Its plunging V-cut front fits tightly to her firm breasts. A simple gold heart pendant rests on her creamy skin. The gown, sewn for her great-great grandmother when she was Julianna's age, saw every generation of the family's young women since wear it.

Julianna stands, posing for a hired photographer.

Watching her, J.B. feels his groin stiffen. He shifts nervously, glad for the baggy pants camouflaging his arousal.

Julianna puts her hands on her father's shoulders. The Sire sits straight. His square chin juts out. Whenever someone addresses him, he seems to stare above their heads as he answers them in his imperious manner. He wears a smoothly pressed, pleated kilt. A sporran, the traditional fur purse, drapes from his waist. Hanging grandly over his left shoulder, and running diagonally to under his right arm is his tartan, printed with the wide intersecting stripes of his clan that date to the mid 17th century. To the villagers it symbolizes his power to affect life and death in their region. He is a muscular, sturdy Scot, but his hands are velvety, not rough and calloused as those of his ancestors who made his fortune.

Despite this, J.B. knows he controls his village with an unyielding grasp. 'You even stage this annual carnival to try to delude your workers into believing their slave labor is appreciated. You pompous bastard.'

Watching father and daughter, the grandeur they effuse midst this commonality of mining life, J.B. suddenly realizes why he wants Julianna. She is from the genes of the mine-owning family. 'Quality stock.' Over the generations, they built a dynasty.

'Together, Julianna and I will breed an even stronger line. I will make this mighty mining family, mightier. But it will become the J.B. family. Julianna will recognize my importance the moment she sees me. She will disregard the old clothes and envision me in her father's kilt, wearing his sporran, parading his tartan. She will leave his side and come to me...'

For a glorious moment, J.B.'s imagination overtakes him.

"Oh, Mr. Smith. Kind of you to come. So glad you recovered so well from the accident. Please... meet my father."

"Well Mr. Smith. A fine strapping Scot as you must join us. Move aside now, Gentlemen. Make room for my daughter's guest."

“Now don’t let my father bore you with accounts of their trifling business affairs, Mr. Smith. Please, sit beside me. We’ll talk of...”

Reality returns.

Julianna looks over, sees J.B. She seems puzzled.

J.B. feels her studying him, sweeping his body, scrutinizing parts of him, then all of him. He realizes dozens of people are watching. But he is confident. He knows Julianna’s gaze is most intense.

J.B. approaches her.

“He arrives, Bonnie Prince Anteata’ from his ’ole in the glen!” Julianna sarcastically cries out. “I ’ave ’eard about you. I ’ave always wanted to see you.” She curtsies in mock homage. “My good Sire! Ye are truly the Anteata’ of whom people speaketh.”

Villagers within hearing range stop their activities to watch and listen. Julianna lifts a bowl of shelled peanuts from the table and begins throwing them at J.B. “I always wanted to see how everyone says you ‘suuuck’ up your ants. Go ’head Anteata’. ‘Suuuck’ them up!”

The office keepers laugh at J.B., acknowledging him for the first time.

The peanuts seem to J.B. to come in slow motion. They slap his face and pummel his body. He stands petrified as he lives out a nightmare. ‘Is this Julianna’s punishment for my coveting her emotions without permission? Or is it a lesson. Not to cross that line – animal to human?’

Villagers circle J.B. Their jeers trumpet into his ears as a chorus of, “Anteater! Anteater! Anteater!” swells.

J.B. must admit to himself to being like one of the freaks he saw inside the tent – an inert bulk of distortion; an anonymous stock of ridicule expected to have no feelings. These seconds, midst the rain of peanuts, seem hours.

J.B. looks to the mine owner. His face is stone.

J.B. had gone to his office. Just once. Bowing subserviently, he asked, “May I recommend, Sire, a simple method of increasing mine productivity? If you group

workers in crews of three instead of four, you will eliminate deadwood. Production will increase by more than one fourth.”

Instead of awarding J.B. a bonus, or giving him a foreman job, the owner utilized the idea and disregarded him.

After that, late at night, while he studied in his hut, J.B. devised dozens of mining innovations – more efficient ways to remove coal from the face, precision working tools, and poultices for the cave ponies to fight disease to add to their longevity. He shared nothing with the owner, though often he was tempted: to sacrifice everything to the man, for a chance to ingratiate himself to the daughter.

But now, ‘Thank God, if there even is a God – How could there be a God to spare my life only to make me go through this? – Thank God I didn’t share my ideas,’ is all he thinks about as his girl, ‘No...the bitch, The Bitch!’ crucifies him.

The few dozen peanuts Julianna flicks seem a thousand to J.B. When she finishes she sits, forgetting him, his usefulness to her majesty’s amusement complete. She continues her conversations with the males surrounding her. After a final thundering burst of laughter, the noise around J.B. quiets. The crowd thins in search of new entertainment.

J.B. stands alone. He wants to run back to the hole of security that is his decaying hut. That is his easiest choice. But he stands rigid, clenching his fists. ‘They’ll not make me run. She’ll not snub, and then make me feel a fool. How can I have been so stupid, so naive about her ever loving me?’

The beauty he had seen in Julianna becomes the grotesque look of a witch, a thousand times uglier than the Anteater. The shame of the public flailing provides J.B. strength he’s never before felt. It tells him he can have anything, do anything.

He realizes the mine owner still glares at him. J.B. stares defiantly into his eyes as he slowly leaves. He walks stiffly, to compensate for his stooped, subservient appearance.

Desire for vengeance paints J.B.'s face. The mine owner recognizes it. He diverts his eyes to J.B.'s feet, acknowledging the power this non-entity possesses. Then, for the few seconds it takes J.B. to pass, he looks up and locks J.B.'s stare. In silence, he purveys his message, 'I will destroy you, Rodent.'

'You'll not get the chance. One day I will have the power to destroy you.'

A sharp wind gust sweeps the park. It blows dust from a nearby dirt field into the faces of those at the table. J.B. watches as Julianna, her father and the others cough and gag. He thinks as he clutches for his pendant, 'Tonight, I have the power to harness the wind.'

Inside his hut, J.B. smashes his rickety wooden table and chairs. Into his knapsack, he stuffs clothes, mining books, formulas, and the drawings for the mining innovations he devised. To help forget Julianna, he thinks of finding the 'new stock' of woman in America who could bear his dozen sons. "I will find a strong woman, unafraid of work – the spirited, robust, American woman."

J.B. digs from the dirt floor the money he's hoarded. He pushes it inside the lining of his canvas jacket. "No son of a bitch will call me Anteater again!" he curses, taking a can of coal oil, pouring it around. He saturates a rag curtain as a wick. Lighting a match to it, he leaves, still smelling the bile of pleurisy that killed his mother and father, forcing him into the mines a decade before.

"The wind will do my work now."

J.B. walks up the mountain that overlooks the village of thatched roofs. He stops at the summit and watches as wind whipped amber waves destroy his past.

Flames begin skipping across rooftops. He listens to the echoing of footsteps as bucket brigades futilely begin forming. Children are crying, and women screaming.

He imagines Julianna's ornate dress engulfed by the fire, her soft skin and hair melting into the earth. Wishing this torture on her, he realizes he would do anything to gain a slim stake at immortality – even to destroying those he loves or might love.

The village becomes an inferno of yellow, red, and blue. Shanties' timber frames, glowing skeletons, tumble inward; explode against the earth.

Even from this far up, J.B. feels the heat touch his face. He perceives a surge of power – one to control the lives of others. He rubs his warm cheeks to prove he isn't just dreaming this new strength. He feels a sudden disregard for life as he wonders if anyone is burning to death.

“It is the same one Sire has when one of his workers' lifeless bodies is pulled from a cave-in.” At this moment, J.B. knows he has become the enemy he's hated. If he had a mirror, and would look into it, he knows he would see the Sire's twisted, sadistic face.

### **The Pendant: Part I**

As J.B. watches the destruction, he pulls his leather knapsack to his shoulder. He removes the pendant lifesaver from his neck and clenches it. It seems to throb like a heart. The pounding – even louder than the collapsing of the village – travels up through the nerves and blood vessels of his arm and neck and reverberates in his ears.

J.B. realizes, through this newfound strength to control, to have anything, to do anything, this is where he'll find his immortality.

He squeezes the stone tighter, wanting it to penetrate his skin, to become liquid, and mingle with his blood and infuse in him the vitality it symbolizes. As he clutches it, he thrusts his fist above his head and in triumph, yells down at Julianna, her father, and those in the flames:

“The Coals of Hell you all heaped on me! They are now yours forever! An eye for an eye...”

J.B. smiles, and then walks to the port of Glasgow.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Rogers is an editor at Fiction House Publishing. He has also written, *Tales of the Fiction House* as Raji Singh.