

Episode 8 — The Thing That Watched Her Leave



Part One: An Ordinary Evening

The town was called Meridian Falls, though there had been no meridian and no falls in living memory—perhaps not in any memory. The name was a fossil, the kind of thing that persisted long after its meaning had died. The population sign at the town's edge had been edited multiple times, each new number written over the previous one until the metal was grooved with contradictions. The last legible count said 247. That had been three years ago.

Margaret Voss sat on the porch of her house on Elm Street—one of the four streets that had not been abandoned entirely—and watched the light leave the sky. She was seventy-three years old and had lived in Meridian Falls since she was born. She had seen the town hollow out like a rotting tooth, seen the stores close, seen the young people drive away in pickups heading anywhere else, heading toward lives that could still grow.

She had stayed. Inertia was a powerful thing.

The house smelled like evening: dust, the faint copper of the gutters beginning to rust again after winter, the green smell of the lawn she kept trimmed because it was something to do. The sun was melting into the horizon, spreading gold and orange across the fields beyond the town's edge. It was

beautiful in the way that only abandoned things could be beautiful—the way a ruin is beautiful because nothing demands anything of it anymore.

Margaret had been thinking about her daughter, who lived in Portland now, who had children Margaret saw in photographs mailed every Christmas. She had been thinking about the diner—Roy's—where she still worked three days a week serving coffee to other people who had nowhere else to be. She had been thinking about nothing in particular when the feeling arrived.

It was not a sound. It was not a presence that arrived through any of the five senses. It was more like the absence of something, the way you notice a missing tooth by feeling the gap. But the gap was at the edge of her perception, at the place where the town ended and the open country began.

Margaret looked up from her hands.

The light was still leaving the sky. The fields still stretched away toward the horizon. But at the boundary—at the fence line that marked the separation between the town's careful order and the wild—something was wrong. Not wrong in a way she could articulate. Not wrong in a way that would satisfy a question like “what's wrong?” But wrong in the way that made her turn her head away and find suddenly that she was looking at the porch railing, at her own knuckles, at anything that was not the boundary.

She did not wonder why she had looked away. She did not question it. This was something Meridian Falls had learned, in the months or years—she could not quite remember when it had started—that certain kinds of looking were not worth the effort.

She watched the sun until it was gone, and even as it was disappearing, she felt the sensation intensify. The feeling of attention. The feeling of something at the edge of the field, in the spaces between the fence posts, in the places where human order gave way to whatever governed the wild. It was not predatory, exactly. It was not hungry. It was simply watching. With the patient certainty of something that had decided you were worth observing.

When full dark came, Margaret went inside and locked the door.

—

Part Two: The Arrival

Ace's vehicle was a 1997 Land Rover that she had modified over years in ways that did not follow any conventional logic. It was missing half its interior—she had removed everything that was not essential, from the back seat to the radio. The suspension had been reworked by someone who understood how to make a vehicle move through terrain without making sound. There were racks for her weapons, carefully padded to prevent vibration. The engine was modified to run almost silent. It was a tool designed for one purpose: to arrive at destinations unannounced and leave before people had finished processing that she had been there.

She parked it on the outskirts of Meridian Falls, near the gas station that still operated and the sign that announced the town's uncertain population. She had been tracking something for two weeks—not an active threat yet, but something that registered on the senses in ways that active threats usually did. The traces had led her here, to a town that had the quality of a held breath. Of waiting.

She sat in the silence of the vehicle for three minutes, listening. This was part of the process. Before entering a new space, she let her awareness extend outward, let her instincts sample the quality of

the wrongness. Sometimes threats announced themselves. Sometimes they hid, testing to see if she would find them.

This thing was hiding.

Ace stepped out of the vehicle and stood motionless in the darkness. The town before her was mostly dark—streetlights on in the commercial district, lights in a few windows scattered through the residential area, the fluorescent glow of the gas station and diner still operating at this hour. She could hear the wind. She could smell dust, the faint petrichor of a day-old rain, the metallic taste of something in the air that did not have a name.

She began to walk into the town, moving without apparent purpose. This was also part of the process. She was not investigating—not yet. She was letting the thing that was here become aware of her, seeing how it responded to her presence.

The response came immediately.

It was not quite a sound. It was not a touch. It was the sensation of being tracked, of attention shifting from the general ambient awareness it had maintained over the town and focusing specifically on her. For a moment, only a moment, she could feel the weight of it like a hand placed on the back of her neck.

Then it faded, drawing back, becoming distant again.

Ace filed this away. It was aware of her. It was interested. And it was cautious.

She walked the main street of Meridian Falls. The diner was still open—Roy's, the sign said. She could see three patrons inside, all of them middle-aged or older, all of them with the quality of people who had nowhere else to be. She kept walking. A boarded-up pharmacy. A closed hardware store with weeds growing through the asphalt of its parking lot. The gas station, where a young man with tired eyes was restocking the refrigerated section.

At the motel—the Meridian Rest, with a faded sign of a sleeping deer—she stopped.

There was something wrong with the back of the building. Not visibly wrong. She could see it clearly: the ordinary brick of the structure, two windows dark, the loading area where delivery trucks presumably once came, now marked only by oil stains and gravel. But her eyes did not want to focus on it. When she tried to look at it directly, her gaze slipped sideways to the parking lot, to the sky, to anything else.

This was where the boundary was. This was the edge of the thing's influence.

She moved away from the motel and continued walking, letting her senses work through the town's layout. The feeling of being watched never entirely left her, but it remained distant. Cautious. As if the thing was testing whether she was truly a threat or simply someone passing through, worth watching but not necessarily worth confronting.

By midnight, she had a basic understanding of the town's geography and had identified three places where the wrongness was acute: the back of the motel, the fence line along the northern edge of town near the residential area, and somewhere further out in the dark—a place she could not quite locate but could feel, like a sore tooth that you keep poking with your tongue.

She took a room at the motel, paid cash to the same tired young man at the desk, did not ask

questions or make conversation. The room was clean and aggressively ordinary. Two beds, a television that did not work, a bathroom with rust stains in the sink. She did not sleep. She sat on the edge of the nearest bed and watched the darkness beyond the window, feeling the weight of attention pressing against the glass like something condensing on cold metal.

—

Part Three: The Investigation

Morning in Meridian Falls was not significantly different from evening. The light was different, but the quality of absence remained. Ace moved through the town with a different approach now—no longer arriving, but integrated. She visited the diner. She bought coffee and a sandwich from a woman named Carol who did not ask questions. She sat in the booth by the window and observed.

The regular customers were four: an old man named Henry, who came in every morning at six; a woman Margaret who worked here three days a week; two other men whose names Ace did not learn because they spoke only in grunts and knew each other from decades of silence. The place had the quality of a shrine where people came to affirm that they still existed.

Margaret watched Ace with particular attention. When their eyes met, Margaret's gaze did not slide away, but there was something fragile in it, something questioning. As if she was trying to communicate something without words.

Ace did not encourage conversation. She drank her coffee, ate her sandwich, left cash on the table, and left.

She spent the day moving through the town's perimeter, trying to get a better sense of what was watching. It responded to her presence inconsistently. Sometimes she could feel it, a pressure against her awareness, a consciousness that was not human. Other times it seemed to withdraw entirely, as if uncertain whether to reveal itself.

She found the marks on the fence posts in the afternoon—circular patterns pressed into the wood, not carved but impressed, as if something had leaned against them with great force. The patterns were not consistent—some were clearly defined, others seemed to blur into the wood grain itself. And all of them were relatively recent. Months old, perhaps. Not years.

She found similar marks on trees at the edge of the residential area. Always at boundaries. Always at the places where the town ended and the wild began.

She did not find the creature.

By evening, she was standing at the northern fence line, watching the fields roll away toward darkness, when she felt it arrive. Not physically—it did not move toward her. It simply became present, the way thoughts become present when you focus on them. A vast attention, ancient in a way that had nothing to do with time, settling its awareness on her with the weight of something vast and incomprehensibly patient.

This was different from before. Before, it had been cautious. Now it seemed to be making a decision. Now it seemed to be trying to understand what she was, why she was here, whether she represented a threat to whatever pattern it had established with the town.

Ace stood very still and let it look.

It took a long time. Longer than she could measure. The sun went down. The stars came out. And through the duration of that examination, she could feel the creature assessing her. She could feel it moving—not physically, but mentally, circling around her presence, trying to find the shape of her intentions.

When it was done, it withdrew. Not entirely, but significantly. The pressure on her awareness lessened to a point where it was almost bearable, almost ignorable.

She understood then that it could hurt her if it wanted to. Understood that whatever pattern it had established here was old enough and secure enough that her presence could be tolerated, even if she remained a mystery. It had decided not to act. Not yet. Perhaps not ever.

—

Part Four: The Question Without Answer

Ace spent three more days in Meridian Falls.

She tried to understand the creature through its effects. The animals that did not come to the town's edges. The way the townspeople's eyes slid away from certain directions. The marks on fence posts and trees, repeated in patterns that seemed to have meaning but not meaning she could access. The way Margaret watched her with a question in her eyes, a question that never quite became words.

She found no evidence of missing persons that could not be explained. She found no signs of predation. The creature was not eating the town. It was not draining them. It was simply watching. Watching and waiting, as if it had all the time in the world.

She tried to find it to fight it. She moved toward the sources of wrongness with her katanas ready, but each time she approached, the feeling would retreat, moving further back into spaces that might not be geographic at all. It was not hiding. It was simply refusing to meet her on the plane where violence could occur. It existed in a space adjacent to hers, close enough to watch, not close enough to touch.

On the evening of the fourth day, Margaret came to her motel room.

Ace was standing at the window when the knock came. She did not ask how Margaret had found her room. She opened the door and let the older woman inside. Margaret sat on the edge of one of the beds, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes still carrying that question.

"It doesn't hurt us," Margaret said finally. "It just watches."

Ace did not respond.

"At first we thought it would attack. We've been waiting for years for it to attack. But it never does. It just stands at the edges. At dusk especially. It watches."

"How long?" Ace asked.

"We don't know. Time moves strange when you learn not to look. Maybe a year. Maybe longer. Maybe it was always here and we just started noticing it." Margaret's voice was hollow, the voice of someone who had spent a long time with a question that had no answer. "Can you kill it?"

Ace looked at the older woman and said nothing.

After Margaret left, Ace packed her few belongings and prepared to leave. She had stayed longer than

she usually did. She had found no threat that could be eliminated, no clear pattern that could be disrupted, no enemy that could be fought with blades. The creature—whatever it was—had chosen a form of existence that existed parallel to violence. It could watch. It could mark the boundaries of the town. It could press its attention against human awareness. But it did not step across the line into aggression.

Ace could not fight something that refused the form of combat.

She loaded her equipment into the Land Rover and drove slowly through Meridian Falls one last time. The creature's attention followed her. She could feel it like cool fingers on her spine. She did not try to engage with it. She did not try to run. She simply moved, steady and purposeful, toward the southern edge of town.

At the boundary, where the fence posts and the dirt road and the wild all converged, she paused.

The feeling of being watched was intense. More intense than ever. As if the creature was pressing everything it had into this moment, as if it wanted her to understand something fundamental about what it was. She could almost grasp it—almost see the shape of a vast, patient attention that had decided Meridian Falls was worth watching, worth waiting in, worth existing beside for as long as existence was a concept that mattered.

Then she drove away.

—

Part Five: The Watching That Continues

The Land Rover moved south, away from Meridian Falls, away from the town that had learned not to look at its edges, away from the creature that watched and waited. Ace drove in silence, her eyes on the road, her awareness extended outward in the way she had learned.

For the first fifteen kilometers, she could feel it. The presence following her, not pursuing but tracking. Watching to see if she would return. Watching to see if she was truly leaving or if this was some deception, some turn in a pattern it could not yet comprehend.

At twenty kilometers, the feeling diminished slightly.

At thirty, it was almost gone.

By the time the lights of Meridian Falls disappeared entirely behind her, swallowed by the dark, the sensation of being watched had faded to the point where she could almost believe it had ended. Almost.

But she knew better.

She could still feel it. Faint, like a star at the edge of vision that disappears if you look at it directly. Like the memory of a touch on your skin long after the hand has moved away. It was still there, in some space adjacent to hers, still watching her drive away from the town. Still noting the direction she traveled, still aware of her with an awareness that transcended distance.

The creature had not attacked. Had not revealed itself. Had not come across the boundary into a space where violence could meet it. But it had looked at her—truly looked at her—and in that looking, it had become aware of her in a way that was not the same as how it watched the rest of the town.

She did not know if it would remember her. She did not know if it would look for her. She did not know if the distance between them would diminish over time or persist in perpetuity. These were not productive questions. These were the questions that led to obsession, and obsession led to death.

But as the kilometers accumulated and the feeling faded from acute to chronic to almost unperceptible, Ace understood one thing with absolute clarity: she had been looked at by something that existed in a space beyond violence, beyond answers, beyond the reach of her blades.

And it had looked back.

She drove through the night toward the next location, the next trace, the next demon that waited to be found and stopped. Behind her, the road was empty. The fields were empty. The darkness was vast and uncaring. But somewhere in that darkness, at the place she had left behind, something with no name and no clear intention was still watching her tail lights recede into distance.

And even when those lights were gone, consumed by the dark, it watched the spot where they had been, remembering the place, remembering the presence, remembering that there were some things in the world that moved with purpose and awareness and fire in their eyes.

Things that were not like the townspeople. Things that came with violence and certainty and the will to fight.

Things that were worth watching for a very long time.

—

The road ahead was clear and dark and endless. Ace did not look in her mirrors. She did not think about Meridian Falls. She did not think about the creature at the edges, or the marks on the fence posts, or the way Margaret's eyes had carried the weight of a question that had no answer.

She thought about the next location. The next trace. The next demon that was waiting for her to arrive and end it.

But in the space between her thoughts, in the gaps between breaths, she remained aware of being watched. And this awareness, she understood, would not fade completely, even as the distance increased. It would persist like a scar. Like a mark pressed into the wood of her being by something that had decided, for reasons she could not comprehend, that she was worth remembering.

The thing that watched her leave would continue watching. That was simply what it did.

And Ace drove on into the dark, carrying that watching with her like a passenger, like a shadow cast by a light that came from nowhere.

Carrying it all the way toward the next impossible dawn.

[ace, demon-hunt-years](#)

—

© 2025-2026. "World of Ace, Mai and Shammy" and all original characters, settings, story elements, and concepts are the intellectual property of the author. All rights reserved.

Non-commercial fan works are allowed with attribution.

Commercial use, redistribution, or adaptation requires explicit permission from the author.

Contact: editor at publication-x.com

From:
<https://datavault.ws/> - **DataVault**

Permanent link:
<https://datavault.ws/doku.php/demon-hunt-years:episode8>

Last update: **20/03/2026 11:37**

