# Cloudland Hotel 1908

Dr. Philias Francis Stanhope was a tall, slender gentleman with a kind face and a smile that one could feel across the room. The morning was a welcome as his travels from Raleigh, NC last night was exceedingly hot and tiring. This morning, he walked out on the balcony of the Roan Hotel and felt the cool mist and the glow of the morning sun. Today was to be a grand day as he had been savoring this for a year.

Dr. Stanhope was a professor of geology at North Carolina College of Engineering. His reputation for his discovering on new minerals discovered in the North Carolina mountains was legendary. He had grown up in the mountains of North Carolina in Mitchell County at the base of the Toe River. His parents were successful farmers, and his father was the barber for most of the central part of Mitchell County. His shop was in a village that that was next to the Tavern that was operated by Isaac English; an interesting man to say the least.

He was sent to Ravenscroft School in Raleigh, NC which was founded in 1862. He gained a mastering of chemistry, history, and law. When he finished his schooling, he went to Campbell Academy in Buies Creek. When he completed his degree, he managed to get an invite to State College in Raleigh, NC where he graduated with honors in Geology and Law. Francis opened his law office in Raleigh where business was growing and the need for legal advice was most needed. However, Francis decided to open the surveying business in Mitchell County as the area was on the verge of exploding with mines and he knew that surveyors would be needed to keep the peace. The surveying business took off as the industrial revolution was exploding and villages, towns and cities were needing to expand quickly. He was contracted by the State of North Carolina in 1906 to help with the county and town jurisdictions, specifically in the Appalachian Mountains. He was also contracted by businesses who needed land to manufacture goods and the new Clinchfield Railroad which was traversing the Toe River and through his fathers’ land.

And just yesterday, he had married a woman that he had eyes for the last 4 years. He had proposed that they correspond 2 years previous and then, a year ago, he made it formal that the two of them were indeed wanting to formally marry. Her name was Bernadette Caroline McKinney. Caroline lived in Mitchell County along with her family who were the prominent family in Mitchell County. The McKinney family were very wealthy and the first to have several mines that produced mica, feldspar, and other minerals that many industries needed. This was why the Clinchfield Railroad was building their line through this area because of industry demand for minerals from the mountains.

Francis turned because he heard the soft knock on the door and the waiter announcing breakfast. Francis cinched his robe and he had already put his slippers on, so he went to the door and opened it. The young man was a bit startled to see such a tall man, but his smile was infectious, and he immediately relaxed. “Sir, your breakfast as requested.”

Francis “Thank you son, here, something for your savings” As he gave the young man a dollar bill.

The Waiter was shocked and had the most difficult time trying to get the words out “Sir, thank you. You are to kind sir. Will you be needing anything else?”

Francis thought for a moment “Yes, I was wondering if you had a local newspaper available?

The young man stood up straight “Yes sir, I can get you 3 different ones.”

Francis “Bring them up post haste and if your quick about it, there is another dollar in it for you.”

With that, the waiter shot out the door and flew like the eagle. Francis was smiling. He was truly enjoying this weather and the air felt so good. The heat in Raleigh was just appalling. Very few places to cool off and even the places you could cool off was only cooler than the blazing sun. However, his employees loved the warm air, and the business was doing very well.

A knock interrupted his thoughts, he turned and walked back to the door and opened it. “Ah, my good man, you have found me some reading material, thank you. By the way, I did not get your name.”

The waiter was quick in responding ‘My name is Samuel, Samuel Lawwill.”

“Well Samuel, you have been on the mark, here is the other dollar. Can you tell me when the next carriage will be going down the mountain, I have an appointment with a Commissioner Deacon in the new town of Spruce Pine, interesting name. I heard that the town was named by Alice English. I heard that she would remark at all of the Spruce Pines that were growing on the mountain.”

Samuel responded “Yes sir, that is correct. My mom is friends with Ms. Alice. She loves the spruce pines. It’s the scent of the pine. She told my mother and because the English family were so well loved they named it Spruce Pine. Oh, as for the carriage, the first left at 8 AM sharp. The next one will be here at 11 AM sharp. Will you need a carriage or motor car?”

Francis was lost in thought “Oh, I am sorry for my manners, 11 AM will be fine and I will take a car please and thank you”. Francis closed the door lost in his thoughts again.

He had been curious as to why the phone call he just received before young Samuel came in and Commissioner Deacon wanted a word with him. Very strange indeed. I wonder if it has to do with the railroad coming through. Sure, that is it. The railroad was traversing a tight location and the track locations was at best, tricky. Climbing up over 1000 feet from Marion and then heading north to let me think, oh yes, Johnson City, TN.

So, with that in mind and filed away, Francis woke up his bride with a kiss and asked her to join him for tea and breakfast on the veranda. This was truly becoming an interesting day and he had every reason to be happy in his world.

Caroline and Francis took their time and enjoyed the splendid view and the delicious breakfast. They finally pushed away from the table sipping on the most delicious, refreshing drink called sweet tea and just gazed into each other’s eyes. After what seem an hour tuned out to be a few minutes they each picked up a separate newspaper devouring the information. America was growing and there was so much news to be had. One article got Francis’s attention.

“*White Star Liner in Sussex England has laid the keel of the largest ship ever in history. Her name will be the Titanic.”*

Another article caught Caroline’s eye; Theodore Roosevelt was running again, and the elections were getting interesting. The markets were looking good and even the local areas seem to be booming as the railroad companies were putting down rails as fast as possible. America was truly growing at a phenomenal rate. With the advancement of the combustion engine and now, homes had electricity, life will forever be changed.

Francis thoughts were interrupted by Caroline stating that she wanted to get dressed and come with me on the train “So, you were awake when I was talking with that you man Samuel.”

“Well of course my love. I was hoping you would stay in bed, and I could play another role in the hay with you. But for naught, you had been up and were fiddling about. So, I figured the least I could do after that phone went off was to go with you and see more of this beautiful area. I have always loved this place. I never in my dreams would have guessed I would marry here at the Cloudland and with a local boy from here as well.”

“You cannot beat good, hard working mountain people my love. And yes, you may come, however, you must not dilly dally as it is 9:30 AM and we must be in front of the hotel to take the car at 11 AM sharp.”

Caroline came up to Francis and kissed him, pulling his knot lose on the robe. “I think just once more ‘role in the hay’ for me would please me.”

At 11 AM sharp, they climbed aboard a bright red Chalmers motor car. We put our goggles on and scarves around their face and neck. Francis thought again how advancement in modern technology is. Riding in a self-powered motor car was truly a new experience and fun. The driver looked at us to make sure we were secured, and he released the brake, and we were off. The road going downhill was still new and narrow. There were cut-outs where if one was to come upon another vehicle, they could pass that vehicle. Three times, they had to stop and let the vehicles heading up go ahead of them. This was not a trip for the faint of heart as you could see over the edge and the shear drop down to the tops of the trees. The trees were beautiful, the rhododendrons were blooming and were a sight to behold. God had truly taken his time with this beautiful place and Caroline looked please with herself.

They arrived just north of Bakersville where a steam engine could be seen idling. They arrived a bit dusty but in fine shape. The journey had taken over an hour to descend 1500 feet. The driver exited the car and let Francis and Caroline exit the vehicle. Francis saw men and women milling about in their usual formal regalia which was the thing to do when riding a train. Francis noticed a few of the people were pointing his direction. They headed towards them.

“Do I have the honor of meeting Dr. Stanhope and his lovely wife Caroline?” This from Commissioner Deacon

“Yes, indeed you do sir and this in my bride, Mrs. Bernadette Caroline McKinney.”

The look on Commissioner Deacon was brief but the name rang a bell and he flinched, just perceptively, but he flinched.

“I am glad to meet you at last Mrs. Stanhope; I know your family well. As for you Dr. Stanhope, your reputation proceeds you. You are a very smart man to many up here in this area as your discoveries for many minerals is well documented.”

Francis got the feeling that he, what is the latest term, was covered in honey? He wants something and he seems to keep his intent very close.

“Commissioner, I do not want to be rude but as Caroline and I are on our honeymoon, can you get to the point of why you telephoned me this morning?”

Commissioner Deacon looked at me and smiled “Well sir, I would like you to climb onto the train as we are going up the tracks a bit and have a look at something. It will only take about 2 hours at the most, if that is okay with Mrs. Stanhope?”

Caroline spoke up “In for a penny, in for a pound. I am game for the journey.”

With that, everyone found a seat and sat down in the first-class car which was a premier Pullman Coach car. The stain class at the top of the windows and at both ends made for an elegant car. The seats were stout furniture and very comfortable. There was a small bar with a small prep room for food. At the other end was a balcony that was new for a Pullman car.

“Do you mind Commissioner if we go out to the balcony and watch the scenery go by?”

“By all means, that is a splendid idea” Commissioner proceeded to open the door.

Francis, Caroline, and Deacon sat on the chairs that were firmly bolted to the rear platform. The Pullman car swayed as we rode on the rails, the wheels clicking as they found ran across the rails bolted together. The scenery was lush, brilliant, and spectacular. Caroline would use her finger to get my attention when she saw something new that piqued her interest. She is so beautiful and sharp minded. How I do love this woman.

I could sense that the train was slowing down and then it stopped. “Where are we located Commissioner?”

“Doctor, we have arrived at a place that is most curious for us and to those that have discovered something that is truly magnificent.”

I spoke up “Which direction were we traveling? It felt like we changed so many directions.”

Commissioner smiled “Sir, that is a very good question. The way we keep up with the direction is by the mileposts we pass. As we move ‘north’ the numbers get larger. We were heading south towards the new town of Spruce. Now, come with me, we made some rather informal walking planks to see what we wanted you to look at.”

My interest was piqued. I knew about the milepost concept. The railroads had used this for years as this gave the conductor the means of gauging exactly where they were and for the engineer as well. I have found that if I keep myself looking as I am smart but to just a degree, I find that people will tell me more. I never confirm to them that I know more. I am kind to a fault, but I do have my limit.

We stepped down from the vestibule and walked on the planks. Several people were milling around us now and I was feeling a bit uncomfortable as Caroline was the only woman here.

Commissioner saw my face “Doctor, let me introduce you to the local sheriff, Lewis Deweese. He has been in these parts for many years and knows most people.”

Sheriff Deweese spoke in his typical, drawn-out Southern slant “Doctor, I know yer mom and dad very well. They reside not far from here and yer dad has been cutting my hair fer years. Yer mom also cooks and brings things to the church every Sunday. I am glad to meet both of yous. This fella you might recognize, he grew up here too, his name is Morgan Bailey.”

A smile grew on my face “Why yes, I thought that was you, Morgan. How are you.” They shook hands vigorously.

“Francis, it’s good to see ya. Been doin good. Lost mom last year to the Spanish Flu. Dad is workin the mines and makin good money from it. I got sworn in just after mom died as deputy sheriff.”

“I am sorry to hear of the loss of your mom. I am glad though you are doing well as well as your pop. So, sheriff and Commissioner, can we get going, I still have a honeymoon to follow up on.”

Francis started to walk towards the trail. Sheriff Deweese motioned “Follow me doc and let me show you something amazin.”

We walked over to another set of tracks that looked old and worn but there had been activity on them, and the growth has been pushed down recently. I looked up the hill which was steep hill full of foliage that was well established. I kept walking, following the Sheriff and the commissioner. Caroline was holding my hand and walking right with me. I was getting a feeling of dread that I could not explain but I felt the hair standing up on my neck. Something was not as it appears.

We walked into the tunnel and there were lamps showing the rails and one could smell the dampness and something else, that I could not place. Caroline stopped and pulled me to her “Francis, that smell, I know that smell.”

“Please share my dear as I cannot place the smell” I stopped and looked around then, it hit me. “Oh yes, I know that smell. That is the smell of blood. A metal type of smell because of the minerals that actually make up the blood cells.”

Everyone finally stopped. Commissioner Deacon spoke “What’s up doctor?”

“Sir, I smell blood and it is fresh” Francis continued on “And I am questioning as why I am here. I am a surveyor and lawyer. What is my interest here so important to you?”

Commissioner spoke up again “Sir, that is not blood you smell, step a little further down and look up.”

Caroline and I moved cautiously and looked up.

We GASPED out loud “Oh my goodness, where are we at?”

“Sir” this from the sheriff “That is the same response we had. We heard you were involved in minerals but what we are lookin at is something that we have no clue. And frankly, we have no idea where it came from.”

“My first question is how do you come upon this location?” I asked while pulling out a pencil and notebook.

“Doc, the water from the hotel was beginning to have the smell so a couple of guys went down the well. We thought we had lost them and then, 2 days later they showed up here and scared the dickens out of the railroad workers. They stated that they could see their way as it glowed and could see their way through for the 2 days. They came across the water pool and found the tunnel that led to this tunnel. So, here we are.”

Francis went to the wall and saw the ‘glow’ of the mineral and asked for a pick so he could take a sample with him. He had no idea what this mineral was and knew that these individuals wanted an answer. The question being that should the answer give anything that would lead them to be more curious or could he just ‘salt’ his answered to keep those individuals for being nosey.

“I think you have stumbled upon something that has properties that could be an issue for humans to have long exposure. I would recommend your workers to avoid this place as there could be side-effects that could result.” Francis stopped.

In the distance, you could hear gagging noise and what sounded like tools hit something metallic. Everyone raced to the location of the sound and saw, before them, 2 men who were foaming at the mouth.

“Everyone gets out of here, now! Get out of here immediately!” This from Francis

Everyone ran, walked fast out of the tunnel. The sheriff told his deputies to be armed and looked over to the railroad supervisor ‘Get this place closed up and make sure no one can get in.”

The supervisor got on it while the rest of the entourage got on the train.

“Is everyone okay?” This from Francis

There were nods and ‘yes’ that supported that everyone was okay. The train started to move on, and everyone sat and were left to their own thoughts.

Francis sat there and was thinking something different. He knew what that smell was now, and he had an idea of what that mineral was. His thoughts were interrupted briefly when the train shuttered and then lurched and then, the car started to roll down the side of the hill. It hit the river.

Three days later, he awoke in the bed at the hotel and with his wife. He could not move his lower body. Caroline awoke and saw the look on his face. “We were in a train wreck, or more like the engine exploded and we were tossed down the hill. We were helped by the railroad crews. You hit your lower back on the steel support and lost your feelings in your leg.”

Francis was looking for something and he could not find it “Where is my notebook and that specimen that I took from the tunnel?”

Caroline looked at him with a look of concern, “I do not know where your pouch is Francis.”

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# Prologue

The news in DC that four senators and others were exposed for their corruption and trying to kill a prominent billionaire was creating a stir in DC. All the major news networks were filling their time slots with commentors on the four senators and one woman who were tarred and feathered on the Capitol steps. The Department of Justices had started multiple cases, not only on the senators but with other ranking officials and even a few CEOs with their hands caught in the cookie jar.

All of this because they, the senators came after me. Those four horsemen as we started to call them, could not help themselves in meddling with my business which I never wanted in the first place. I was sitting at home and minding my own damn business and bang, I get the letter from my grandmother that tells me after 19 years since she left this earth that; guess what my favorite grandson, you just won 3.2 billion, with a B, dollars.

Money is the root of all evil I was once told, and I think it was grandmother who told me this and guess what; it is. Now, as for me, I act like I barely have 2 nickels to rub together but Sally and the others, including Kelly and Kira, will not let me forget that I am not just rich, but filthy rich. They are right, I am rich. I cannot even imagine that kind of money. I asked Sally to do me a favor as I was feeling sorry for myself one day. I think it was when I had lost my leg and I was having a stupid moment. I said “Sally, can you get enough $100-dollar bills and cover me completely with the bills”. And she did as I asked. Then afterwards, she brought Lee, Wild Bill, Bill and Buck and anyone who wanted a good laugh. They then took it upon themselves to take selfies with me.

I regretted that stupid stunt but as I reflect, I think it was less stupid than it was the fact that I realized I was truly wealthy, and I had a lot on my shoulder to carry. I had to be responsible and to be smart about what I did and how I could help others to have a better life.

The fact of the responsibility came to full force after we had attacked by those who wanted what I had and then, to find out that politicians were letting their greed take over which was never a secret for politicians, but in this case, they really stepped over the line. And finally, the discovering of the Orange Marigold. There is a saying that if more than one knows about a secret, it is no longer a secret. Granted, there was a very small group that knew of this new, rare mineral that can neutralize radioactive material. But it would only be a matter of time before the secret would escape and I had to be prepared and I refused to have anyone else lose their life over me.

Only time will tell when the curtain opens and the world would find out that in the mountains of North Carolina, there was over 14 trillion dollars’ worth of material that would change the world. Was I ready for this, hell no. I want to be back in my little office and plugging away at grading papers and cutting stones? That, however, is not the reality. Time for me to think ahead and set up something that would protect everyone care for he re in the house, the BOD, and the company. And still have this business that employs thousands of wonderful people.

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# Chapter 1

There was a chill outside as we were heading to the hospital. Sally received a phone call notifying us that Kira had come out of coma, and we were requested to come. Kelly, Sally, Wild Bill, and I were in the Armored Range Rover. Bill, Buck, and the security crew were in the front of us in the other armored range Rover We were heading on the renovated Hwy19 at a good clip. We passed a Mitchell County Sheriff and he just sat there as if we were invisible. Well, that might be the fact that our loyalty was in debt to them and maybe, because of what we did for those that had died because of the mess from the four horsemen. We never asked for favoritism as we felt that, yes, we had a lot of money, but we follow the law like anyone else.

I tapped Bill on the shoulder “Bill, let’s not go to fast as I do not want to be in anymore debt to the local sheriff than I already am.”

Bill responded back with a big smile “Sir, I will have you know that we had asked them before we hit the road and told them what’s up. They let us know that they would make sure we had a clear shot to Asheville. Who was I to disagree?”

“Bill, I appreciate the thought, but one thing leads to the next and then the Sheriff shows up one day and says “Dr Stourton, I wanted to ask you a favor.” Where I would respond “Okay but I do not know what I can do.” And then the sheriff says something like “Well sir remember when Bill came to us and asked us so and so?’ You get my meaning?”

“Sir, I understand how you feel, but understand that they know that Kira is one of yours and that the attack was personal. They are very protective of you and those around you.”

I could see that it was useless to argue my point, so I turned to Sally “Have you contacted the girls and let them know about Kira?”

Sally looked up from her phone “Yes sir I have plus I have notified the BOD of the current situation. Also, we have some issues that will need to be addressed as soon as you have visited Kira. One, the fallout from DC has reached home. You are being summoned to DC to testify in front of the congressional committee. It is a big deal and there will be cameras. Second, you have been requested by the National Security Advisor that the president wants to meet with you. You do not say no to the president either. I know you and I needed to shut you off because you don’t like DC and that is not an option.”

“Well, dammit all to hell”

Sally popped up “Sir, that will be $10 for the curse word.”

“Well then, dammit to hell and crap all over it. There is another $10 worth.” Oh, I am in deep doodoo now. I also know what that means, I can forget there being any comfort from Sally.

Sally looked back at me “Sir, we agreed over a month ago that your mouth needed washing out as you were not watching what you were saying and that most of us, decided that as a big boss needs to watch your words better. That is why you are being penalized for your mouth. You also know why you are being penalized and THAT is what you should consider.”

In my most contrite voice, I said “I am sorry. I need to develop words that are not cuss words, but they have the same meaning. Your boss is set in his ways sometimes and is hard to change the habits”.

Sally rolled her eyes “Sir, any excuse is better than nothing, I guess. Look I know this is not easy, but you are in the public eye a lot more and if you get in the habit of not cussing as soon as you open your mouth, maybe you will not get foot in mouth disease”.

“Okay, okay, dually noted. So, what is on the back burner?”

Sally pulled out her book “Well sir, you have to meet with the BOD this afternoon. We must discuss Project Matter. We also must go look at some property that for reasons unknow, you have acquired through the death of a recent relative. Another thing is to get Kelly and her new friend in a place that make them happy. Some of that stems from what happens with Kira. Finally, you need to go to the UK and finally meet the people over there and get caught up on the UK operations.”

I just sat there and looked out the window. Project Matter is going to be a thorn in my hand until I pass from this earth. The responsibility of the project is so important that it could change the world. It could also become a prelude to war which would be centered around me, and I do not like that at all.

Sally tapped me “You okay sir?”

“Yeah I am. My mind drifted to Project Matter and the details of that project. Since the discovery of that mineral, we have had no issue from anyone because of what happened in DC. Oh, and have we heard from Mr. Lawrence Lately?”

“No on Mr. Lawrence however you sent him to take care of the Georgia operations, remember? And as for the DC area, you are going to meet with Steven and discuss on what you will be facing in DC.”

“Great!” Okay, so let us get to Asheville and see Kira. Then let us tear off the bandage and deal with the wound this afternoon.”