Prologue

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Jonathan hastened to keep pace with his friends. They had slipped between a pair of tall trees and slid down the muddy slope that led down to the river. His governess had warned him not to stray too far from the house, but Jonathan had never felt particularly inclined to listen to her, especially when doing so might interfere with an adventure.

It was raining, so the slope was slick, but Jonathan could hear his friends' voices ahead of him. He pushed off at the top of the hill and let his momentum carry him down. He took off running when he reached the bottom, though the ground was just as slick there as it had been along the slope. More than once he nearly lost his balance and tumbled into the mud. His governess would be furious. His clothes were ruined.

The dots in the distance quickly resolved into the familiar shapes of his friends. Harry, the son of a butcher, who had earned a reputation for being somewhat of a bully and a tyrant. And James, whose father's gruesome murder a few years after James' birth had been the talk of the town for years. Whether it was because of his father's murder or some other cause, James hardly ever spoke a word. Sometimes he might laugh, or smile, or nod, or gesture with his hands, but he never spoke aloud.

He had been warned to stay away from this pair. His mother called them common. She used other names to describe them too, some of them less kind: urchins, vandals, ruffians, scoundrels. Whatever she called them, it only made Jonathan want to spend more time with them. He knew how it drove her mad. Jonathan was supposed to be upper class, but he found other upper-class children tiresome.

At low tide the mud that lined the Thames was often tinted red by countless blood worms, aptly named given their reddish color. Harry, with a laugh, had bent down to scoop up a few handfuls of the reddened mud, unearthing dozens of them.

Harry's hands were coated in mud. Red mud had slopped onto his trousers, not that anyone would notice the additional dirt. Harry lived in a constant state of filth. The blood worms wriggled in his hands.

"Disgusting," said Jonathan.

"They're just noodles!" Harry exclaimed.

With a laugh, he mimed eating them. Mud dripped from his hands, and some of the worms wriggled free and fell to the ground.

Jonathan's stomach churned.

"I dare you to eat one," said James, suddenly.

Jonathan and Harry both stared at him in silence. James never spoke. The silence stretched out into several long, uncomfortable seconds.

Harry recovered first.

"Let John do it," he said. He held out his hands to Jonathan.

James shrugged and looked at Jonathan.

His expression must have been one of horror, but they were staring at him expectantly. Jonathan never turned away from a dare. His governess would wring his neck, of course, but he wasn't about to back down. He didn't wish to get any more dirt on his trousers, though, so he was careful as he leaned forward and looked at the blood worms in Harry's outstretched hands. He picked out the smallest one.

"Alright," he said, forcing a smile.

He lifted the worm above his head and opened his mouth. His stomach made a noise. James began giggling, while Henry started clucking like a chicken.

The worm dangled above his head, and Jonathan looked at him, annoyed. Mud dripped onto his cheek, and he wiped it away with the back of his hand.

"I'll do it," he said defiantly. He raised the worm above his mouth again, tilted his head back, and opened wide.

"He's not gonna do it," said Harry.

Jonathan stared at him defiantly. "I'm gonna do it," he said. "Just give me a minute."

Once he'd accept the dare, there was no backing down. He knew he would never live it down if he didn't make good on his promise. It's just a worm, he told himself.

"Down the hatch," he said. He let the worm fall into his mouth.

He could feel it wriggling. It tasted like dirt. He felt sick, but he forced himself to try to swallow. His throat closed up, tightened against his will. The worm caught in his throat.

Choking, he tried to cough the thing back up, but his throat had begun to swell, and his coughs came out only as a high-pitched wheeze. His hands went to his throat, and he tried to force it back up, but only succeeded in making things worse. He couldn't breathe at all.

His lungs began to ache, and his eyes went wide. He'd never felt so frightened. He was going to die, he was sure of it. This was how his life would end, with a foolish dare.

His friends were turning into hazy blotches of light. Dizzily, he reached out his hands, but they moved away from him. He heard James screaming. He blacked out.

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When he regained consciousness, there was a man with a bird's face standing at the side of his bed. Behind him, a pale white boy with blonde hair, about his own age or perhaps a few years older, stood against the wall, looking shyly back. Jonathan offered up a weak smile, but the boy turned away from him, busying himself with his work. He had a jar of leeches in one hand and a doctor's surgical bag in the other. He set the jar down on the table beside the man in the bird's face.

Jonathan leaned back on his pillow and looked up at the man with the bird's face. His face was made of dark leather, and it was strapped to his head with shiny brass buckles. He had glass lenses for eyes. Jonathan remembered seen pictures in books of doctors who would wear this style of mask in the times of the plague, but he never knew doctors still wore them. He wondered if he was still asleep, if this was something his feverish mind had dreamed up. The candle flickered, casting strange shadows upon the wall.

He tried to sit but the doctor pressed a gloved hand against his chest and forced him back down. He was cold even beneath the blankets, but he was sweating. The doctor had a thermometer in his hand. He placed it on the bedside table and turned back to Jonathan.

Jonathan wanted to ask him what was happening, but his own voice sounded strange to him. Incoherent. Slurred. He had a vague recollection of choking on something. The blood worm. He remembered gradually losing consciousness, and he remembered the frightened faces of his friends as they turned and ran. He didn't know if they'd run to get help or if they'd just abandoned him.

He tried to sit up again, but was stopped once more by the doctor's hand.

"Restrain him," said the doctor. His voice sounded strange, too, filtered through the leather plague mask, but a moment later a servant entered the room with a set of leather straps in hand.

Forgetting that the doctor's hand was still pressed hard against his chest, Jonathan tried again to sit up, and when he met the resistance of the doctor's hand, he grew more desperate in his need to sit. He grabbed at the doctor's hand with his own, tried to pry his arm from his chest, but his efforts were in vain.

While the doctor pinned him down, the servant and the doctor's assistant began to tie the straps around him, binding him to the bed. Three straps, one around his waist, one around his legs, and now the servant moved to tie one around his chest.

Jonathan heard the sound of an animal snarling. The girl stumbled back. She stared at him in alarm, her eyes wide and frightened, and it took Jonathan a moment to realize she was afraid of him. He hadn't even realized he'd done it, but he was sure that sound had come from him. He couldn't explain it, but there was a part of him that wanted to kill her. No, not kill her. Eat her. It was an uncontrollable, unshakable need, a desperate animal instinct that frightened him.

The girl took a moment to catch her breath, and the blonde boy came up from behind as if to help her. She nearly jumped out of her skin.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to--"

"It's alright," she said. "I've got it."

She bent to buckle the straps in place. She moved in close to tie them up tight. She smelled like meat. Jonathan's stomach growled hungrily. What was wrong with him?

Her hands worked quickly, and she was almost finished with the buckle. Eat her, screamed the voice in his head.

"Stop it," he said, gritting his teeth. "Leave me alone."

He had to warn them. They didn't seem to realize the danger they were in. He was scared he would hurt them.

"What's that?" said the servant, bending down to hear him better. "Did you hear that? He just said something."

The smell of her breath was torment. He felt like a caged animal. He needed to get out of these straps. He tried to sit up suddenly. The doctor still had his hand on Jonathan's forehead, but he was caught off guard by Jonathan's sudden movement. His hand slipped from Jonathan's forehead.

That single moment was all it took. Before he could stop himself, Jonathan sunk his teeth into the girl's throat and clamped down. Blood spurted into Jonathan's mouth as his teeth scraped through skin and tore out a chunk of meat from her neck.

She screamed. She grasped her neck with both hands and stumbled back. She looked down at the blood on her hands, and dropped to her knees, looking unsteady, like she might faint.

The doctor's assistant, the pale blonde boy, cried out in alarm. Only the doctor seemed to keep his wits.

"Get a bandage, boy," he instructed, "Stop the bleeding."

Jonathan watched the scene impassively. He knew this girl would probably die, and he knew that it was his fault. He should feel guilty. But he had meat in his mouth, and it was warm and sweet.

Part One: Day One

Chapter One

Chapter 1

Lord Henry Connor's annual masquerade was reputed to be the grandest ball in all of London. The extravagance of the event could not possibly have been overstated, nor the number of attendants exaggerated.

The families who attended were notable and prominent in London politics and business, science and commerce. Aristocrats, foreign dignitaries, ministers, and scientists. The well-to-do. The sort of ladies whose choices of garments would make the morning Post. The sort of men who earned more in an hour than most men earn in a year and for whom the idea of hard labour is as terrifying as the bubonic plague.

The receipt of an invitation to the masquerade was widely considered to be a compliment of the highest regard. Young ladies would wait with increasing suspense to see that cream-colored envelope enclosed with Connor's seal, and failing to receive one, would be understandably brought to the brink of despair.

Annabel Grey was perhaps the exception to that rule. She had neither received an invitation to Lord Connor's ball, nor had she barricaded herself in her room in a fit of tears. Of course, Annabel was not exactly a lady, per se. Just a common woman, who had worked her way into the upper echelons through hard work, perseverance, raw talent, and most importantly cheating.

Even her identity was stolen. Her adopted name, Miss Monday, for example. The real Miss Monday had died in a tragic house fire, along with the rest of her family. It had been simple enough for Annabel Grey to assume Lady Monday's identity by retrieving the paperwork concerning her death. The unfortunate young woman had no surviving family members to dispute Annabel's claim, and Annabel had friends who specialized in insurance fraud. Annabel had dozens of identities--earned in a similar manner--but Miss Monday was a particular favourite. As Miss Monday, Annabel had claimed not only the insurance money, but also a sizable inheritance from her parents, who had both died in the fire.

Still, Annabel had not anticipated an invitation to Lord Connor's. In fact, she'd had no plans to attend the party.

Not until recently, anyway. Now, her circumstances had changed. Now she had to get into the ball. Not only that, she needed to seek an audience with Lord Connor himself. As for the lack of an invitation, that was hardly enough to deter her.

Her success in the endeavor fortunately depended on the sheer size of the masquerade, and as she climbed out of the hansom cab, she saw that Connor had not disappointed in that regard. There was a line of cabs along the street as long as the street itself, and consequently Annabel had to watch her step to avoid treading in horse filth.

Just as the street was lined with hansom cabs, Annabel could see a long line of young ladies and gentlemen which wound its way along the walkway through the garden.

With all those people to provide cover, sneaking in shouldn't prove difficult. Even with additionally hired staff working the door, how could Connor's butler possibly be expected to stop her, determined as she was to sneak in? It was, she determined, simply a matter of blending in.

She'd decided to take advantage of the fact that the ball was a masquerade. With that in mind, she'd chosen for herself a brown leather mask, which managed to hide both her feminine features and her missing eye.

She'd dressed in a pair of trousers and a black waistcoat. She'd donned a grey frock coat and ascot, and accessorized with a top hat, men's shoes, and spats. She placed a watch in her pocket to complete the illusion, and carried a cane with a rather exotic elephant's head pommel in ivory. As always, she wore a small brass key around her neck.

As a gentleman, she looked convincingly dapper. She walked with a practiced gait so as to disguise her femininity.

She took a moment to come up with a plan. In the past, she'd had success with home invasions by making her way around to the back of a house and entering via the servant's entrance, or an open window, or even, on one occasion, a wine cellar. But the side of the house was blocked by Connor's elaborate garden, which sprawled across his lawn on either side of the front walkway. Annabel didn't fancy treading through rose bushes to get around the side of the house. There had to be an easier way. Perhaps, she thought, a head-on approach would be best. She decided to use the front entrance.

Still, the line was remarkably long, and she had little interest in waiting in it.

Instead, she simply ignored the line entirely. She threaded her way through the crowd with ease. As she was dressed as a gentleman, she could walk about unchaperoned without drawing any unwanted attention.

She bumped into a gentleman and a young lady who stood conversing with another gentleman, making it look like an accident. She pardoned herself, and they parted to make way for her, looking a bit put off. She walked away with an invitation in her hand.

"Dear Mr. Grimmer, you are cordially invited..." she read.

So, I'm Mr. Grimmer, she thought.

Quickly, moving through the crowd, she crossed the threshold of the door. Just one more gentleman and lady stood in front of her. She waited patiently as the butler hurried to greet them. Their coats, having been removed, were taken by a servant to the coat room, while the butler compared their names against a list of attendees.

Annabel gathered that the gentleman was a duke of some sort, but she failed to catch the name. Not that she cared, particularly. When the butler had found the name, he nodded genially and beckoned to the pair to follow him into the adjacent room.

When he returned, it was her turn. She provided her invitation, and the butler found her name on the list. He nodded, took her overcoat and cane, and gave them to a servant to take to the coat room. Then, he offered to escort her into the foyer. So far, this had gone even more smoothly than she'd expected. She was in.

As the butler showed into the foyer, she took a moment to survey the scene. She barely noticed the grandeur of the Connor manor. She took note of the size of the room but scarcely noticed the high, gilded ceilings, the huge Grecian statues which adorned the room, the numerous paintings upon the walls. Her only interest was in finding Connor.

"Where might I find him?" she asked the butler, dropping her voice half an octave below its normal range. She had some practice at that, as well. "Lord Connor, that is."

"I'm sure you'll find Lord Connor in the ballroom, if not presently then shortly. He'll be wearing a stag's head mask in a shade of dark plum," he added.

"Thank you," Annabel replied, taking her leave of the butler.

She swept from the foyer to the ballroom. A massive circular room, Connor's ballroom, designed by Lord Connor himself, was made to impress. With enormous cogs and gears lining the ceiling, and an enormous steel rod through the center of the floor, the room was slowly turning, like a ballerina in a music box. The effect was impressive. It must have taken an enormous amount of power to drive the ballroom's engine, but Connor's guests seemed suitably impressed by the revolving ballroom. Annabel couldn't have cared less about the grandeur of it all. She brushed past servants who might have offered her refreshments, paying no mind as the floor moved beneath her feet. As she weaved her way through the crowd, the sound of the musicians playing a rousing tune grew in volume, but she had no inclinations of dancing.

The floor was filled with dancers, who moved with grace about the room. Those who were not dancing were either seated at one of the tables or dispersed in small groups throughout the ballroom. Ladies were pencilling in appointments on their cards, and gentlemen were politely making introductions and seeing to the needs of their ladies.

She didn't feel any eyes on her. She was in. So, she thought, on to the next task. She needed to find the Lord of the manor.

The ballroom was huge. She began to sweep the room, first making her way around the perimeter. She looked at each masked face she passed, systematically eliminating them, looking for a tall, middle-aged man in a dark plum stag's mask. He should be easy enough to pick out of a crowd, but she'd still seen no sign of him. Eventually, she'd gone around the entire circumference of the ballroom and still not found him.

Perhaps he was among the dancers. She found a stop at the edge of the dance floor and watched as each paired couple circled past her. As the waltz drew to an end, she felt certain she'd checked every single mask on the dance floor. There was no sign of Connor, at least not in the ballroom.

The nature of the ball seemed to have prevented his guests from noting his absence for now. They were either preoccupied with the festivities or they were simply unaware of what mask he was wearing and assumed he was there somewhere.

When another of her host's servants offered a tray of sweets, she smiled, thanked him, but declined. She took the opportunity to ask if he knew where she might find Lord Connor. She followed his directions to a flight of spiraling stairs, which led upstairs to Connor's private apartments.

"It is off limits to guests, however," the servant noted, "But I'm sure Connor will be down shortly.

At least he was more helpful than the butler, she thought.

She thanked him and made her way to the staircase in spite of his warning that Connor's private quarters were off limits. At least she wasn't entirely alone on the staircase. It wasn't exactly bustling with activity, but as she climbed the stairs, she passed a couple of other gentlemen. She watched as they headed out to the balcony, presumably for a cigarette. She glanced back to see if anyone was watching. When she was sure that no one was, she veered off down the hall, away from the balcony and towards Connor's private quarters.

There was a locked gate to one side of the staircase, which appeared to open up to a hallway.

A locked gate was no obstacle for Annabel, once she had her lock picking kit in hand. It didn't bother her that she was breaking the rules. So long as she didn't get caught. After a few moments of fiddling with the lock, she heard a distinctive click. She tried the gate, and it slid open. She grinned.

She made her way along the gas-lit hallway and quickly arrived at the door to Connor's study. A tall door of dark oak, it had a long scar along its length where the wood had cracked. It was slightly discolored, stained perhaps, in a few patches that might have been fingerprints. Stained a dark, dull red.

She reached for the handle, in the dim light, and felt her hand cling to the doorknob. She gave a start. Her glove was stained crimson. It might have been wine, she thought, but every instinct was telling her that it was blood. She should have turned around here, given up on her mission, and gone home. It was foolish to ignore the warning signs. She knew that. But she'd done so much work to get here, and her prize was just on the other side of that door. She could risk one little peek, couldn't she? She could always back out if there really was something dangerous beyond the door.

Whose blood was it, though, she wondered. Her hand hovered at her gun belt as she reached again for the handle.

She turned the knob and pulled the door open. It gave a groan of protest, but it was unlocked. It swung open on old, well-used hinges. She stepped inside and closed the door.

There was no immediate sign of any struggle. Connor was slouched in his armchair, facing the opposite direction. He looked like he was sleeping, but she couldn't get a good look from her angle. She stepped further into the room, cautiously scanning the room as she did.

The room was small and unassuming, unlike the rest of the house. It was neat and organized. An old bookcase took up the entire length of one wall, a large wooden desk sat in front of Connor, with little atop it: a stack of paper, a feather pen, inkwell, a letter opener, the purple stag mask, and a kerosene lamp that must have been running out. It was flickering weakly, casting shadows across the room. The carpets in this room were plain in comparison to those in the ballroom downstairs.

Tiptoeing so as to catch Connor off guard, she crept further into the room. She drew her gun and made her way silently across the short span of the room until she drew close enough to realize how stupid she'd been, or how blinded by greed. She stood only an arm's breadth away from him. Close enough to see that he wasn't asleep. He was dead.

Suddenly, she realized how obvious it was. She should have known from the moment she opened the door, but she hadn't wanted to see it. There were flies buzzing around his motionless body. The smell that came from him was enough to make her choke.

She hesitated. She knew she ought to call for help. But she also knew that if she did, she wouldn't have the chance to steal her prize from Connor's safe. She cursed herself, knowing that she'd already made up her mind, and knowing that she'd made the wrong choice.

"I'm going straight to hell," she muttered, turning away from Connor.

In the opposite corner of the room stood Connor's safe. It was disguised as a tea trolley, but it was a weak disguise, and Annabel was quick to determine what it really was.

She lowered her mask, revealing a face that was beautiful and delicate on one side and scarred on the other. A long, jagged scar ran from eyebrow to cheek, interrupted by the bulky mechanical contraption that was strapped over her right eye. She allowed the mask to hang from her neck while she retrieved her lock-picking kit.

She heard a noise from behind her. She swung around, raising her gun instinctively. Connor stirred, shuffling in his chair and looking up at her. He groaned softly.

"Good god," she gasped, "You're still alive."

She put a hand on his forehead. He felt cold. She stooped over to get a good look at him. She recoiled when she got a clear look at his face. His eyes were white and lifeless, his skin grey and cold.

"What on earth...?" she whispered to herself.

Now, she thought, she had really better call for help. It was one thing to turn her back on a dead man--he would still be dead after she'd robbed him--but it was another thing entirely not to help a man who was clearly sick and on the brink of death. There was a cold, lifeless look in his eyes that made Annabel take a cautious step back.

But before she had a chance to shout for help, Connor opened his mouth and snapped his teeth at her, hissing. Annabel stumbled back, lost her balance, and crashed into the desk.

Hitting the floor with a hard thud, she lay there awkwardly for a moment, the wind knocked out of her. Her gun, which had been in her hand only a moment ago, was suddenly nowhere to be found. In a moment, with surprising speed, Connor had flopped his way out of his chair and landed hard on the floor. He began crawling his way toward her ankles.

Annabel lay on the floor, struggling to regain her breath. She could only watch as Connor reached out with a hand that was gnarled and decaying, grasping for her. His breath was hoarse and ragged. He moved with a relentlessness that made Annabel shrink back, though his movements were clumsy and stiff.

He managed to grab hold of an ankle. He held her with a tight grip and used her leg to pull himself closer still. As he inched his way towards her, the kerosene lamp burned out. The last few strands of the wick flickered away, plunging the room into darkness.

Chapter Two

Chapter 2

Annabel let out a cry of alarm. Annabel wasn't the screaming type, but she was on the verge. Her eyes were wide. Her heart was hammering, and she suddenly found that it was a struggle just to suck in a breath of air. Of course, it couldn't have helped much that her breasts were bound in cloth as part of her disguise; she was wrapped up tighter than a pharaoh in his tomb, and every breath was painful.

She reminded herself that she'd been in spots tighter than this. She told herself to remain calm, but the darkness was oppressive. She kept flashing back to the day she'd lost her eye. She could almost feel Connor's rough fingernails raking across her face, digging into her flesh, gouging out her eye. Silly woman, she scolded herself. She gritted her teeth. She'd survived that day. She would survive this one too.

She took a deep breath, reached up, and adjusted a dial on her eyepiece. The world through her right eye took on a greenish hue, but she could see again. Not well, but well enough to see Connor. He was right on top of her, inches from her face. She gasped in surprise. He was closer than she'd thought.

She'd lost her gun, but she had another one. Trouble was, it wasn't easily accessible, and she wasn't sure she'd be able to fish it out before Connor could sink his teeth into her flesh, which is what he seemed to be trying to do. She needed to get out of his grasp, just long enough to get it.

Forcing hereself to remain calm, she dug her heels into the carpet for leverage and shoved hard, sliding on her back across the floor. She reached out, above her head, and grasped for something to hit him with. Eventually, her hands collided with something thick, solid, and...wooden. It was one of the legs of the desk. It wasn't a weapon, but, at least, it was something. She held tight and used it to leverage herself toward the desk, kicking at Connor's face as she scrambled to get away.

She was relentless, and eventually, one of her kicks struck him hard enough to do some damage. Connor's head snapped back violently, and he toppled backward. But before she had gained any ground, he seized hold of her leg and began crawling back towards her face once more.

She pulled hard on the leg of the desk, trying to drag herself further back, but this time, she only succeeded in moving the desk. She growled in frustration and tried to pull herself out from under him. It was futile. She could barely even move with him on top of her.

What she needed, she thought again, was a weapon. Something, anything to hit him with, just to get him off of her long enough to retrieve her gun. She looked around for something within reach.

There. She could see the slightest hint of light beneath the desk. A glint of silver. It was her revolver. She could have cried with relief. Urgently, she reached out, stretching her fingers in a desperate plea to grab the gun.

She could almost touch it. Almost, but not quite. She tried to stretch out further, grasping desperately as she pressed her face against the side of the desk just to get a bit closer. She reached her arm out until she was sure that she would tear it from its socket before she managed to grab hold of the revolver. She felt her fingers just brushing up against the handle of the gun. Almost, almost...she thought. And then she slipped, and the gun slid even further out of reach.

No, she thought desperately, as if she could only will the gun back to her. For the first time, she realized she might actually die here. She might die with the gun just out of her reach, another one nestled in its holster, inaccessible with the deranged, sickened Connor atop her.

Connor growled, his voice barely recognizable as human, and she felt certain that he would eat her alive if he could.

"This is not how I die," she grunted. It was all she could do to remind herself that she would get through this. She was a survivor. She'd grown up on the fierce streets of London, a dirty, scrawny orphan with nothing to her name but the will to live. She would not die like this.

She squirmed. Finally, she managed to get a leg free. She kicked him hard in the face. She was rewarded with the brutal sound of Connor's nose shattering. The air filled with the tangy, metallic scent of blood. She kicked him again, dislodging a few yellowing teeth. Still, his grip would not relent.

She thrashed, urgently trying to shake him from her. Her heart beat so hard within her chest it was painful, especially with her chest bound so tightly. Her breath came out in short, quick gasps. Somehow, she managed to maintain some semblance of calm, or, at least, the will to survive.

She gritted her teeth. The only thing for it was to shoot the bastard, but the gun was beyond her grasp. She still had her second gun, though, a pocket-sized Derringer. Not exactly her style, but she couldn't be too choosy. If she could just get at it, it would do the trick.

Even as Connor tried to tear her face off with his teeth, Annabel reached into her belt, fending him off with her other hand. Finally, she managed to find the pistol.

Connor's jaws gnashed. She drew the weapon and aimed it at him. He seemed not to notice. He snapped at her fingers, dripping spit onto her chest.

She cringed.

But she felt more like herself again with the gun in hand. Almost calmly, she stuck the pistol straight into his mouth. She angled it upward, just slightly, so that it was aimed directly at his brain. Then she waited. One second. Two seconds. As patiently as she could.

Against all common sense, despite the gun in his mouth, Connor was still trying to reach her, his putrid breath making Annabel gag. His hands groped the side of her face, and she twisted her neck to avoid being scratched by his yellowing fingernails.

She felt his cold, dry hands against her skin, but she willed herself to wait, just a moment longer. The music was beginning to wind down. The song was in its last few measures.

Finally, the moment arrived. The waltz had finished. A chorus of applause broke out. She hoped it would be enough to drown out the gunshot. She shut her eye, turned her head away, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet whipped through Connor's skull, taking huge chunks of brain matter with it. Cold, thick blood exploded. It spattered across her face and chest.

A chorus of applause broke out, and Annabel had the momentary sensation that it was her work that was being appreciated.

Connor's body went limp and landed, hard, against Annabel's chest. She grimaced with distaste, but she was relieved it was over. She took a moment to try to wipe the blood from her face.

The applause began to subside and eventually gave way to silence. In the quiet moments that followed the gunshot, she heard the click of a latch and the creak of hinges. Someone had opened the door.

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As Jonathan Grimmer stepped down onto solid ground, heads turned. It was one thing to arrive in an upscale carriage, like so many of the other guests, or to show up dressed in the finest silks money could buy. It was another thing entirely to arrive by airship. Even among the ton, the Penny Dreadful drew attention. If Prince Albert himself had arrived at the party in a velocipede, he still would not have made such an impressive entrance. Which was precisely what Jonathan wanted. If he was to gain an audience with Lord Connor, he needed to get the man's attention. He removed his hat and with a sweeping hand, gestured his thanks to the captain above.

"Thank you, Captain Merrick," he said, loud as he could manage. He knew he was being obnoxious, but it wouldn't be the first time Jonathan had made a scene at a party.

He returned his hat to his head and joined the lineup, while those who had been staring at him the whole time turned away and resumed their conversations as if to give the impression that they'd hardly noticed him. He flashed a cocky grin at the woman in front of him, while she hastily drew out a fan in order to give the impression that her attention had been fixed on the unseasonable warmth of the weather this evening and not on him. She blushed.

"Mr. Grimmer, I presume?" she said, indicating the company name emblazoned on the airship beneath the ship's own name. Grimmer and Sons Publishing Inc.

"Mr. Grimmer was my father," Jonathan told her, trying not to let it show that she'd just thrust a dagger in his heart. She couldn't have known that the mere mention of his family name was painful. Mr. Grimmer had died recently--a tragic hunting accident. It had been less than a week since Jonathan heard the news.

The young lady gave him a smile.

"It must be a family business, then?" she asked. She curtseyed, and added, "I'm Lucy Marshall, by the way."

"Charmed," said Jonathan, flashing his lady-melting smile. Miss Marshall's fan fluttered in response. "And yes, you're quite right. Family business, although the name is a bit misleading. My father insisted on calling it Grimmer and Sons, although I'm an only child."

Miss Marshall's male companion turned around to join the conversation, a look of impatience on his face. The man wore arched eyebrows and had an aquiline nose. He wore a sneer on his lip.

"Solomon Grundy," he said, tipping his hat and offering a forced smile. He placed his hand on Miss Marshall's arm, puffing out his chest.

Jonathan snorted. "An unfortunate name," he said impulsively, then instantly regretted it as Grundy's eyebrows narrowed impossibly further.

As they spoke, a young gentleman bumped into Jonathan. The man asked their pardon as he barged his way through the line. They parted, letting him by, none of them quite sure how else to proceed.

"Well, that was rude," said Grundy. "Anyway, I understand the Grimmer Company runs a number of newspapers and literary magazines, isn't that right? Quite a business, I imagine."

"We also publish penny dreadfuls," Jonathan said with a grin, enjoying the look on Grundy's face. Meanwhile, Miss Marshall's eyes lit up.

The sensationalism and bloody subject matter of penny bloods were not considered to be in good taste among proper gentlemen. Jonathan was a man accustomed to the comforts of the wealthiest families in London, but he was still just a newspaper man, not exactly a respectable career among the ton. He enjoyed shocking more respectable gentlemen by talking about the source of his family's wealth.

"Actually, I've only just returned to London; I'd been away, traveling, but have been summoned back to take over the business." In fact, Jonathan had only come back to England upon hearing the news of his father's death. "I thought I'd start by writing an article for one of the company's journals."

He disengaged his attention for a moment to peer ahead at the progress of the line. It was moving along quickly, Lord Connor's servants competently ushering the guests inside. Jonathan would have hated to be stuck making small talk for long. He had enough on his mind as it was.

"Mr. Grimmer? May I ask what it is that you're writing?"

"Sorry," he said, returning his attention to the conversation. "Actually, I'm afraid I have an ulterior motive in attending this ball. I'm writing an article about Lord Connor."

"Oh, really? On what subject?" asked Grundy. "I've known Lord Connor a long time. Perhaps I could be useful."

Jonathan hesitated. He wanted to hear from Connor before saying anything more on the subject. In fact, this was the first time he'd told anyone that he was writing about Connor. He thrust a hand into his pocket and felt a small scrap of paper in his father's handwriting.

Jonathan was expected to take over his father's duties at the publishing company. His office was still full of his father's belongings, and Jonathan had been avoiding the task of cleaning it out ever since he'd returned to London. The truth was that he hadn't taken the family business seriously for a long time. As a boy, he'd looked up to his father. He wrote hundreds of articles and published them in his father's paper, but Charles Grimmer had been so busy with running the company that he'd barely noticed Jonathan's efforts. Rather than continuing to fight for his father's attention, Jonathan had turned his back on the family business.

His mother had pleaded with him to take the business more seriously, but by then Jonathan was more interested in seeing the world, trying his charms on beautiful women, lavishing in the life of a socialite. His father had barely noticed; he'd given Jonathan the airship and offered him the freedom to travel, suggesting that Jonathan might attempt to make some business connections abroad. Jonathan had been on a bender in Prague when he'd gotten the news.

The last conversation he'd had with his father, they'd talked about Jonathan taking on more responsibilities with the company. Now that his father was gone, he had a nagging sense of guilty about everything. He wished he'd taken the publishing company more seriously. He wished he'd spent more time with his father. At least it wasn't too late to start taking an interest in the company.

Jonathan's assistant at the newspaper, Mr. Palmer, who had been his father's assistant and had worked for the company for so long that Jonathan thought of him as family, had begun showing Jonathan the ropes. After all, while Jonathan was heir to the family business, he was new to it. Palmer had suggested Jonathan should gain more experience writing before taking over as editor-in-chief. Jonathan had agreed. After all, it had been years since Jonathan had written anything for the paper. He decided, in honor of his father, to publish one of his father's unfinished stories.

His father was an extensive note-taker. There were boxes full of Charles Grimmer's research for articles he would never write. The thought of rummaging through his father's notes had filled Jonathan with guilt, but the thought of leaving his father's work unpublished disturbed him even more. When he finally got around to the task, he found himself ill-suited to the endeavor. He couldn't help but actually read each and every document in his father's boxes. It made for slow work. He'd stayed up late into the evening, until the office grew cold, and Jonathan headed to the fireplace.

It was there that he'd found the scrap of paper, burnt around the edges, almost buried beneath a pile of burnt pages and firewood. This single scrap alone had miraculously survived. Jonathan had plucked it from the ashes and stared at it in wonder. A single phrase had been scrawled on the page in his father's handwriting.

Lord Henry Connor is Francis Varney.

Jonathan's father had stumbled into something deep. Jonathan felt certain of this. But something had scared him. Something had caused him to burn his note. Only a single sentence had survived. Jonathan was determined to discover what it meant.

Jonathan knew the name Francis Varney as the villain in the penny dreadful, Feast of Blood. Varney the Vampire. He also knew that the Resurrectionists--that nefarious society of mad scientists who murdered and called it experimentation--adopted the names of penny dreadful characters as their own. Did this mean Lord Connor was a Resurrectionist?

"If you see him, could you let Lord Connor know I'm hoping to speak with him?" Jonathan said, at last, avoiding the question.

His newfound friends nodded obligingly.

"Of course," said Grundy.

Finally, they had reached the entrance, and their turn came to enter the ball. The butler held out his hand for their invitations, but Mr. Grundy stepped aside.

"After you, Mr. Grimmer," he said.

"Thank you," said Jonathan, as he reached into his pocket. "Now, where in the world has it gone?"

"Your invitation, sir?" said the butler.

"I had it just a minute ago," Jonathan told him, bewildered. He was sure the invitation had been in his pocket. Anxiously, he checked his other pockets for the note from his father. He was relieved to find that it was still there.

"Not to worry," said Grundy, flashing his own invitation. "Mr. Grimmer is with us."

The butler sniffed. "Very well, Mr. Grundy. If you can vouch for Mr. Grimmer. Now, let me see here..." he trailed off as he checked his list. "There we are. Grimmer, Jonathan. But it says here that you're already inside."

"Well, as you can see, he clearly isn't. A simple clerical error," Grundy pronounced. Then, taking Miss Marshall's arm, he marched inside. "Come on then, Jonathan."

Bewildered, Jonathan nonetheless followed them inside. Grundy wore a superior expression on his face, seeming to enjoy having gotten Jonathan in without an invitation, if only so he could gloat about it. Ignoring him, Jonathan slipped his mask on, and Miss Marshall did the same. As he took in the crowded ballroom, he reminded them to keep a look out for their host.

"Of course," said Grundy, slipping on his own mask. His was black, leather, and in the shape of a bird. A plague doctor's mask. Jonathan stared at it for a few seconds, then returned his attention to the other, numerous masked faces in the ballroom.

Saying a quick thank you for getting him in without his invitation, he turned to take his leave.

"Mr. Grimmer," Miss Marshall called, stopping him. "The waltz is about to start, and I'm in need of a partner."

"What of Mr. Grundy?" said Jonathan.

"Kind of you to think of me, Mr. Grimmer," said the man in question. "But Miss Marshall will surely save the last dance for me. This one's all yours."

Apparently there was no way out of this. "I thank you for it," said Jonathan. Then, taking Lucy by the hand, he led her to the dance floor. At least, this should give him the opportunity to look for Connor without drawing attention. "Any sign of Lord Connor?" he asked Lucy.

"I'll let you know if I see him," she replied as the dance began.

True to her word, Lucy kept her eyes peeled as they circled the revolving ballroom, scanning for their host, who was nowhere to be seen. She informed Jonathan, as they danced, to expect Connor to be wearing a stag mask. Apparently these sorts of details were printed in lady's magazines, and evidently Lucy was current in her knowledge of social affairs. Well, she'd have to be, to be invited to Lord Connor's at all. Still, they'd seen no one in a stag mask, and both Lucy and Jonathan were disappointed by his absence.

As the dance ended, they showed their appreciation for the musicians by joining in the applause, which all but drowned out the sound of a muffled gunshot from upstairs. It was a sound that Jonathan had heard before; his father had been a hunter. Otherwise, he might not even have noticed it. His eyes darted upwards, but when he returned his attention to Lucy, it seemed that he was alone in having heard it.

"What is it?" she asked, having noticed that Jonathan's attention had wandered.

"Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" she replied.

Jonathan shook his head, second-guessing himself. Perhaps it was just the clang of clockwork, a cog in the machine that rotated the ballroom.

"Never mind," he said. "What room do you suppose that would be?" he added, pointing up in the direction the gunshot seemed to have come from.

Miss Marshall paused to think for a moment.

"Lord Connor's study, I believe," she replied, "Why? What is it that you heard?"

"Thank you, Miss Marshall," said Jonathan. "Be sure to give my regards to Mr. Grundy."

Any other night, Jonathan would have been happy to remain in Miss Marshall's company. He might have made a contest of it, to see if he could steal her right from under Grundy's nose. Tonight, he had other things on his mind. He beelined for the stairway, which he was relieved to see was crowded with other guests. It seemed there was a balcony upstairs, which was populated by gentlemen who had the good grace to take their cigarettes outside.

He wasn't certain it was gunfire that he'd heard. Maybe it was nothing at all. Even so, a visit to Connor's study was in order. If there was no one there, perhaps he would root around and find some further evidence of Connor's association with the Resurrectionists.

As he reached the top of the staircase, he turned away from the doors that led outside to the balcony and headed instead for the gate that seemed to bar the way to Connor's private quarters. He was relieved to find that it was unlocked.

#

The moment she heard the click of the latch, she reached for her mask, and with deft hands, covered her face with it.

When she returned her attention to the door, a gentleman stood there watching her. The expression on his face was one of shock.

"My god!" he exclaimed at last.

"It's not what it looks like," said Annabel, still attempting to free herself from beneath Connor.

It was a compromising enough situation, dressed as a man, lying on her back beneath the body of a man. Perhaps she could catch the man off guard by selling him on the illusion that she and Lord Connor were sharing amorous and horizontal affections. That ought to shock the man into quitting the room in all haste, providing Annabel with sufficient time to make her escape.

Unfortunately, the man at the door was astute.

"It looks like you've just shot Lord Connor," he said.

Annabel frowned.

"Oh," she said in a voice that she hoped disguised her disappointment--or, at least--her femininity. "Then I suppose it's exactly what it looks like."

Chapter Three

Chapter 3

Jonathan wasn't easily shocked. From a young age, he'd been trying his hand at the family business, writing articles for his father's papers. As a teenager, he'd often conduct research for his father's stories, never quite taking it seriously but nonetheless often winding up in unusual situations in the name of journalism. He'd interviewed adulterers, men dressed as women, murderers, and hangmen. For a man of his profession, it was important to be able to remain calm and composed in any situation. He had to think quickly on his feet. He'd been beginning to think that nothing could surprise him.

"Oh my god!" he exclaimed now, taking in the scene.

If Jonathan had been hoping to pry answers out of Lord Connor--answers about Connor's possible connection to the Resurrectionists--he was to be disappointed. Connor was dead. Even from where he stood, Jonathan could see the bullet hole through his skull. Connor's killer was still struggling to get out from beneath him.

Finally, Jonathan thought to draw a weapon. He had one, a pistol, in his belt somewhere. He reached for it, drew the gun from his belt, but Connor's killer was quicker. Much quicker.

"Drop it," said the killer, already on his feet. His voice was cold, threatening. He had already killed Connor. It seemed that Jonathan was the only witness. It seemed unlikely that he would hesitate to shoot Jonathan now. He hesitated to relinquish his weapon, but it seemed he had little choice but to do as the killer asked. Taking care not to make any sudden moves, he set the gun on the floor.

"Kick it over here."

Jonathan did as directed.

When he stood, the killer had moved closer and had his pistol aimed directly at Jonathan's face. His own weapon had been stuffed into the killer's belt.

"What are you doing here?" the killer asked him. Jonathan noticed that though his tone was threatening, his voice was high in pitch, almost feminine.

"I heard gunfire," Jonathan told him, just barely managing to keep his voice even. He would have killed for a glass of absinthe right now. Anything to steady his nerves.

The killer cursed. "I'd hoped the applause would drown it out," he said.

The killer eyed the body uneasily. Jonathan's first inclination was that the killer was an enemy of the Resurrectionists. A hired killer, maybe. The way he held his pistol suggested that this was not the first time he'd killed a man. But Jonathan was a newspaper man; he knew how to read people. And this man, this supposed killer, was uncomfortable with the dead body in the room. He noticed Jonathan studying him and returned his attention to him.

"You came here alone?" he asked. "Nobody else heard the gunshot then?"

"They might have heard it but failed to recognize that it was gunfire. My father used to take me hunting," Jonathan told him. "I know the sound of a gunshot."

"Well, that is inconvenient. For both of us," said the killer. "You know, you really ought to knock before you enter a room. You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble."

Jonathan snorted. He was beginning to regain some of his usual composure, which was probably not such a good thing. It might not do to be his usual sarcastic self in the company of a killer.

"I can help you escape," he said.

"You saw me kill an innocent man in cold blood. Why would you want to help me?" the killer asked eventually.

Jonathan eyed Lord Connor's body. His flesh was already rotten, he noticed, as if he'd been dead for weeks. Strange.

"Lord Connor wasn't an innocent man," Jonathan replied. He hesitated before he said the rest. But Jonathan was either a witness to Connor's murder, or he was an accomplice. Better, he reasoned, to be an accomplice. "Connor was dangerous; he had powerful friends. I don't know why you've killed him, but I would like to."

It was impossible to judge the killer's reaction to this piece of information. He was masked, for one, and it was too dark to see clearly, even with the door still slightly ajar. And for another thing, his right eye was hidden behind some sort of mechanical monocle. As its clockwork gears rotated, the lens pivoted around its axis in a way that was similar to the movement of an eye. Jonathan wasn't sure how it worked or what its purpose was, but he had the sensation that the killer was looking straight through him.

"Someone else might come up here. Do you want my help or not?"

"I could just kill you, you know. It would be simpler." He raised his pistol as if to demonstrate, even aimed it at Jonathan's head. He mimed shooting it, mouthing the sound of a gunshot, and blew away a puff of imagined smoke. Jonathan braced himself.

"You could," he said, and took a deep breath.

At last, the killer holstered his pistol.

"Who are you?" said the killer, still managing to give the impression that he was looking straight through Jonathan.

"Mr. O," he said. Jonathan had taken to writing using a pen name. He'd written a few articles using his own name, but he'd always felt that he was under his father's shadow. With anonymity came a great sense of freedom. Mr. O was his nom de plume.

"Oh?"

"Exactly," Jonathan replied. "And you are?"

"Monday," said the killer, reaching out and shaking his hand. "It seems, Mr. O, that we are in this together. At the very least, for the moment. That is, assuming you would prefer to remain on my good side."

"Are you threatening me?"

"Sorry," said Monday, still grasping Jonathan's hand. He stepped closer, so close Jonathan could feel Monday's breath on his skin. "I didn't mean to be so indirect. So let me be clear: if you betray me, I will destroy you. I won't just kill you. I will ensure that Lord Connor's death is pinned on you and you alone, and I will walk away laughing. So, I'll say it again, my new and dear friend. We're in this together, you and me. Aren't we, Mr. O?"

Jonathan forced a smile. "Yes, I suppose we are."

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Annabel stooped down to get another look at Lord Connor. She had to roll him onto his back to do so, and he was heavy. Damn heavy. She heaved him onto his back. She almost recoiled. His face was a vision of horror.

"Was he always this ugly?" she muttered.

He was in his sixties, Annabel guessed. His face was whiskered, and his white hair was stained with blood. His skin was mottled and grey, and in places, it was cracked and blemished. His eyes were white. His nose was broken where she'd kicked him, and there was an exit wound in the back of his skull. She shuddered and stepped back. She hated that she was so disturbed by dead bodies. Not for the first time, she wished she was more ruthless.

Connor would be difficult to move. She wondered if Mr. O had any ideas.

"We could just leave him here," she mused. "You said you had an escape plan?"

"I do," he told her, "But first I need to know...why did you kill him?" After a pause, he added, "Did someone hire you?"

Annabel took a moment to reach under Connor's desk to retrieve her revolver. She slipped it back into her gun belt and withdrew a spare bullet for her derringer. She reloaded the gun and holstered it.

"That thing only takes one bullet?" he asked, watching her.

She nodded.

Annabel considered her ally by circumstance. She noticed for the first time how tall he was, and how broad-shouldered. If he'd been a fighter, he could easily have overpowered her, wrestled the gun from her hand, and regained control. The fact that he hadn't tried that suggested that he wasn't a fighter. He'd mentioned that he hunted, which meant he knew how to fire a gun; luckily for her, the derringer was not a hunting weapon.

"So, when you were pointing that thing at me, it was empty?"

"It was," she admitted. "Listen, I'll make you a deal. You get me out of here and I'll tell you what you want to know about Connor."

Mr. O seemed to consider her offer, then gave her a nod.

"I need you on lookout," she said. "Let me know if anyone's coming. There's something I need to do before we can leave."

Then she took out her lock-picking kit. Just because Connor was dead didn't mean he couldn't still be robbed. She spared her new accomplice one last glance. She wondered if she could trust him not to run off as soon as her back was turned.

As he stood at the door, Annabel reached under Connor's desk to retrieve her revolver. She slipped it back into her gun belt and stood. Then she took out her lock-picking kit. Just because Connor was dead didn't mean he couldn't still be robbed. She spared her new accomplice one last glance. She wondered if she could trust him not to run off as soon as her back was turned.

She turned away and made her way over to the safe. This would be much more difficult now that she could no longer demand the safe's combination from its owner. But she set to work cracking it.

"There was something wrong with him. He was sick," she said, as she fiddled with the lock.

"Hm?" said Mr. O, who was standing at the door, true to his word.

"Lord Connor. I didn't come here to kill him. He was sick. Deranged. He came at me. I had to put him down. It was self-defense."

She put a hand to her lips. She needed to listen for the click of the lock as she slowly turned it. Then it clicked. She made a mental note of the number, then began to turn the dial the opposite way.

"Sick how?" Mr. O asked. "Consumption? Ergotism?"

Annabel looked up from her work. "Something else, I think. He was trying to eat me," she offered by way of example.

"He what?" Mr. O exclaimed.

"Well, look at him. He's far too rotten given he's only been dead a few minutes. Clearly there was something wrong with him. Anyway, this really isn't the time. Is anyone coming? This is taking longer than I'd hoped."

"Still clear," he said.

Annabel had to remind herself to breathe. It was easy to get lost in her work. That was why she wanted a lookout. She couldn't afford to be listening for approaching footsteps when she was intent on hearing the click of the mechanical components of the lock. She needed only one more number, and she nearly had it.

"I think someone's coming," Mr. O said suddenly.

"Almost..." she said, ignoring him. She really was almost there, if she could just get that one last number. She continued to work the lock, listening for the tell-tale sound of the lock sliding into place.

"We've got to go," he whispered urgently.

Cursing, she looked up from her work. Mr. O had shut the door and had his ear pressed against it, listening for the approaching footsteps of whoever was coming. She watched in silence, holding her breath as Mr. O tensed.

A minute passed in silence as they waited for the door to burst open on them. Again, she drew her Derringer. She aimed it at the doorway, even as she willed the door not to open. So far, this had gone exactly how she didn't want it to go. She began to ask if the coast was clear, but Mr. O shushed her.

Another minute passed. She could hear floorboards creaking outside the door, even over the sound of the music from downstairs. Finally, Mr. O took a deep breath and turned back to her, relief clearly written on his face.

"False alarm, I suppose," he said. "They must have gone into the other room. Still, someone is bound to have noticed Connor's absence by now. We can't afford to linger any longer than we already have."

Annabel had to agree. Still, she wasn't leaving until she had what she'd come here for. She didn't bother saying so aloud; she simply returned her attention to cracking the safe. Annabel swiveled the dial, more quickly now. At last, it slid into the correct position. She heard the satisfying click announcing that she'd gotten it. To the untrained ear, the sound would have been easily missed, but Annabel was an expert. "Got it."

She pulled the door open and hastily withdrew a thick, yellow envelope. She got to her feet and stealthily made her way to Mr. O. She realized she was grinning, and she felt that flush of excitement she always felt when she'd retrieved an item of value. O was looking at her impatiently, but she couldn't help but notice how blue his eyes were. A woman could get lost in those eyes.

Smiling as she handled the envelope from Connor's safe, she forced herself to focus.

"So, how do we get out of here?"

He held up a finger, as if to say hold that thought, and made his way to the window, drew aside the curtains, and opened the latch. A cool breeze drifted into the room, causing the curtains to ripple like waves and the paper on Connor's desk to dance. Annabel could hear the lilting voices of ladies and deep baritone laughs of gentlemen from somewhere below.

In the yard, just a few feet from the window, an airship was secured to a tree. It was elegant and sleek in design, with propellors of polished brass mounted along its enormous length, with sails beneath its gondola. She could only see a portion of it, from their present angle, such was its size.

"Are you insane?" said Annabel, looking at her newfound companion in astonishment. "This vessel is yours?"

"I like to travel in style," he replied, looking out at the airship, seeming not to have noticed her tone.

"Have you no concept whatsoever of the word clandestine? The idea is to avoid attention, not draw it. Are you honestly suggesting we throw Connor's body in your dirigible and just fly away? You don't think anyone might notice?"

He shrugged. Annabel crossed her arms and tapped her foot.

"Well, yes, I've always found the airship draws a bit more attention than I'd care for. To be honest, I hardly ever use it. It does seem a lucky coincidence that it's parked just outside the window, though, doesn't it? When weighed against the option of dragging Connor's body downstairs, through the ballroom, and out the front door, hoping nobody will notice, flying him away in a conveniently located airship doesn't seem like such an absurd option, does it?"

Annabel snorted. Well, when he put it that way, the plan wasn't as idiotic as it seemed upon further consideration, but still, the airship was certain to draw attention.

"Fine," he said at last, "Then I suppose you've got a better idea?"

"As I said earlier, suppose we leave the body here? Certainly he'll be discovered eventually, but so long as we aren't found with the body, that's still better than being seen removing the body."

"Hm. One small problem with that solution. What happens when the body is discovered and the police start asking questions?"

"Nothing will happen. No one saw you heading upstairs, did they?"

Mr. O awarded her question with a contrite expression and a shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh, god," she said. "You really do have no idea how to be discrete, do you? Well, I'm afraid that's your problem. You can feel free to fly away in your little airship; take Connor with you if you feel so inclined. I couldn't care less, so long as I'm not on that airship with you. I intend to leave the way I came in. Through the front door."

"I thought we were in this together," he protested, using her own turn of phrase.

"That was when I needed you as a lookout," she retorted. She almost felt a bit guilty, but she reminded herself that she didn't owe this man anything. He'd done little but slow her down and get in the way. "Do yourself a favor. When the police do come knocking at your door, don't mention my name."

She paused. Her shirt was stained with Connor's blood.

"I need your jacket, by the way," she said.

Mr. O snorted. "You want my trousers too? While you're at it, how about my dignity?"

"Don't tempt me," Annabel replied. "I am a thief, remember."

She stood at the door, ready to leave. Before she did, she handed him back his gun. It was the least she could do.

Chapter Four

Chapter 4

The door closed behind Monday, leaving Jonathan with a sense of being trapped. He was alone, in the dark, with Lord Connor's body. He hovered at the door for a moment. He nearly considered following Monday out of the room, but he quickly realized that wasn't an option.

This wasn't the first time Jonathan's impulsiveness had gotten him into a sticky situation. He didn't know what he would have done if Connor had been alive when he'd stormed into the room. He hadn't thought that far ahead.

He felt sick to his stomach as he thought of how it would look when Connor's body was found, even if he managed to flee the room unseen. As he'd pointed out, he'd made no secret of the fact that he was looking for Connor. Lucy Marshall had likely seen him heading upstairs in pursuit of Connor. As soon as the police questioned her, they'd learn Jonathan's name.

He looked at the body on the floor. He needed to get rid of it. That was the only answer he could think of. It would be heavy, difficult to move on his own. Managing to get the body into the airship would require the ship to pull up so close to the window that it would be scraping the side of the house. As Mr. Monday had pointed out, that would be sure to draw attention. Which was exactly the sort of thing he needed to avoid.

He cursed Monday for leaving him here to deal with this on his own. There were no good options, but he had little choice but to deal with Monday's mess.

He was beginning to think that things couldn't possibly get any worse, when a knock came at the door.

"Lord Connor?" said a voice from outside.

With a sickening sense of dread, he thought of who might be on the other side of that door. One of Lord Connor's servants? One of his guests? Or, he thought with a deepening sense of panic, was it the police? It was possible that someone else heard the gunshot and thought to summon policemen to investigate.

His lack of good options had narrowed even further. He desperately scanned the room for some place to put the body, feeling like a cornered animal.

Under the desk? A closet? Anywhere, really, so long as they didn't see Lord Connor's body lying face up on the floor the moment they walked in. No options presented themselves. The body was too large, and the room didn't even have a broom closet.

"Just a moment," he said in his best imitation of Connor's voice. He wasn't sure if it was convincing, but if it was, he might have just bought himself some time.

Quickly, but with an effort to be stealthy, he grabbed Connor's chair and lodged it under the doorknob, jamming the door firmly. There wasn't a proper lock on the door. The chair might not hold long, but it was the best he could do, given the circumstances.

"Sir, your guests are expecting you," said the voice.

"Yes," he called again. "Just give me a moment."

After a moment, he heard muffled voices, conversing, arguing. Then the latch began to jiggle. They were trying the door. They must not have been convinced by his impression.

Bang.

The chair rattled. It held, but they began to bang on the door with more force. They would find their way in, sooner than later, and Jonathan would be caught in the room.

"Shit, shit, shit," he said under his breath.

There was no hiding the body at this point. There were only two ways out of the room. The first was through the hallway, where Connor's servants were banging relentlessly on the door. The other option wasn't that much better. But on the off-chance that he hadn't been seen heading up to Connor's office or on the chance that the police failed to question Lucy Marshall, it would at least be better than being caught in the room with Connor's body.

He headed for the window, the chair continuing to rattle.

"Captain!" he began shouting. The chair jostled more furiously, and the wood began to splinter.

"Captain!" he shouted again, more urgently.

He felt a sense of panic as he looked out at the airship. He was trapped in this room, the airship his only hope for escape. If he could hail its captain. Otherwise, the ship was still too far to reach from here. His panic worsened the longer the ship continued to float there, unmoving. Every time the chair rattled, his nerves rattled with it.

He looked down at Connor's corpse and thought dismally of how he might fare in Newgate Prison if the chair failed to hold. He tried not to think of what he might wear for his date with the gallows rope.

At last, the ship's captain emerged onto its deck.

"What is it, sir?" said Captain Merrick, whose disheveled hair and lethargic movements suggested that he'd been catching some sleep. "I wasn't expecting you so soon."

"Never mind that! The ship!" Jonathan called, still in a bit of a panic. "I need you to bring it closer."

"Closer?" the captain repeated.

"Right up against the house," Jonathan explained.

He chewed his lip as he waited, a nervous habit of his that tended to leave his lips a bit chapped. He gestured frantically for the captain to hurry it up. Any moment now the door would cave in beneath the efforts of Lord Connor's servants and whoever else might be assisting them. Perhaps, he thought again, even the police had been summoned.

The captain issued a message to his crew, speaking into a little tube that conveyed his voice into the cabin. A moment later, they were taking in the lines that held the airship tethered to a nearby tree.

The ship at last cast off, but it was already too late. With a violent splintering of wood, the door crashed open. The chair toppled to the floor. Jonathan saw that the latch had been broken. Three men were fighting their way through the doorway.

To his surprise and horror, they were not servants at all, neither were they policemen. They wore the black, bird-like leather masks of plague doctors. Like Solomon Grundy, the man he'd met on his way into the masquerade. Suddenly, something clicked inside his mind. These men were Resurrectionists.

The first of them, masked like the others and wearing a red cloak, had set his eyes on the spots of blood on the carpet. The bullet hole. The body.

Jonathan turned away for just a second, looking out at the airship. Still too far to reach, but there was nothing for it but to jump. He pushed the window open a bit further, and climbed up onto the windowsill.

"Stop!" cried one of the plague doctors, his voice muffled through the leather of the mask. Jonathan recognized him by his top hat. It was Solomon Grundy. "He's going to jump. Stop him!"

Jonathan realized the Resurrectionists hadn't seen the airship. They thought he was going to jump to his death. He waited, trying to bide his time and let the airship draw closer. He wobbled on the windowsill, but the Resurrectionists had halted, wary of startling Jonathan and causing him to jump. At least, he thought, this meant they wanted him alive. Probably so they could question him and kill him later, but still. It was nice to know they didn't want him immediately dead.

He didn't dare look out the window to check on the Penny Dreadful's progress, for fear of giving away his escape plan. Worst case scenario, should he fail to make the jump, he was only on the second floor. He'd land on the grass below, suffer a broken arm or leg, and be apprehended and arrested for murder, tortured and killed discretely by the Resurrectionists, or he might hit a propeller on the way down and meet his swift end to the spinning blade. So, no pressure.

Best to wait until the last possible moment. The ship was quick despite its size, but the Resurrectionists were quicker and had less distance to travel.

"Just come down from there," said Grundy, his voice so muffled by the mask Jonathan could barely understand him. "We just want to ask you some questions."

"Don't come any closer, Mr. Grundy," Jonathan warned. "I'll jump."

"Let's just shoot him and get it over with," said the plague doctor with the red cloak.

Jonathan drew his own gun and pointed it at them. His hand was trembling from nerves, and he was wobbling precariously on the ledge of the window. This caused them to hesitate. Nothing was more dangerous than a frightened man with a loaded gun.

Jonathan tried to listen for the airship. As its engines grew louder, he judged that it might now be close enough to make the leap. Suddenly one of the Resurrectionists cried out and lunged towards him; he must have seen the airship behind Jonathan and realized his plan. He'd tried to hide the airship with his body, but there was nothing for it now but to jump.

He turned and leapt. He could practically feel Grundy's hand reach for him and miss. For a moment, he was airborne. Then, he was grasping for the railing. He struck the side of the gondola, hard. He felt the breath knocked out of him. His pistol slipped out of his hand and hit the ground below, but he managed to hold on.

One of the crewmen hurried over to help Jonathan scramble over the railing and swing himself up onto the ship's deck.

"Get us away from the house, Captain," said Jonathan, still struggling for breath.

Already, Grundy was looking like he was considering making the jump himself, and the ship's momentum was propelling it, still further towards the house. The jump would be easier to make now. Grundy began to climb onto the window ledge.

The captain took his hand from the steering wheel, drew his pistol and aimed it at the window.

"Don't even think about boarding my ship," he warned. "I'll shoot you dead the moment you step aboard."

Grundy hesitated, looking back at Connor's body. Jonathan could hear the voices of the other plague doctors, though he couldn't make out what they were saying. At last, Grundy backed down, growling in frustration.

"Let's go, Captain. Party's over," said Jonathan, wheezing.

"Yes, sir," said Merrick. Then into the speaking tube, he directed his crew. "Take 'er away, lads."

#

He looked out the window, down at the city below. He still felt that same tingling sensation in his nerves when looking out at this height. As he'd told Monday, he didn't often travel by airship. If it could be helped, he'd have preferred just about any other method of transportation. Carriage, train, bicycle. Foot, even. He headed for the bar. A dash of absinthe and he'd feel right as rain.

He tapped a finger on the bar to get the barman's attention, and gestured for the bottle. There was always the possibility that it was the night's episodes that had so worn his nerves: Lord Connor's death; meeting his killer, Mr. Monday; being pursued by Resurrectionists; jumping out of the window. Even thinking about it made him long for the warmth of a drink in his belly.

He gestured to the barman with his finger, making an upward motion at his glass.

"Bit more."

The barman filled it a bit more.

"Bit more," Jonathan repeated.

Glug glug. The barman added another ounce.

"Bit more."

At last satisfied with his lot, he slid his drink from the counter.

"No sugar this time, Mr. Grimmer? No water? That's an awful nasty drink taken straight like that, if I may say so" said the barman.

Jonathan emptied his glass in a few quick gulps and set it back down on the counter. The barman's eyes widened, even as Jonathan wiped his mouth with one hand and slid the glass forward for a refill with the other.

"Sure, why not? Sugar and water sounds great. Thank you, George," he said, when his glass had been refilled.

He watched as George set about placing an absinthe spoon atop his glass. He set a sugar cube upon the spoon, slid the glass beneath the fountain, and allowed Jonathan to top up. Jonathan turned the spigot and watched the ice-cold water hit the sugar cube and flow into his glass. The absinthe took on a milky consistency and filled the air with the sweet scents of anise, fennel, and wormwood. It was not just the drink that stilled Jonathan's nerves. It was the entire ritual of drinking absinthe. The sweet aroma, the exotic green that swirled inside his glass.

He settled into a nearby chair, while the airship's captain piloted the ship across the vast urban sprawl of London. It would be a quick trip; his destination was not far from Lord Connor's home at Lincoln's Inn Fields in High Holborn. The airship was unhindered by traffic and Jonathan had little concern of running into the police so long as he was airborne. They were bound for Soho, the address of one of Jonathan's longtime friends. Jonathan hated to call unannounced, especially at such a late hour, but his friend kept late hours anyway. Besides, desperate times...

Chapter Five

Chapter 5

Annabel slipped silently into the revolving ballroom, apparently still unnoticed despite the drama that had unfolded upstairs. The dance continued. The musicians still played, the ladies and gentlemen continued to waltz, or to stand on the sidelines and clap politely when the dance ended. But somehow the atmosphere had changed, subtly. At first, Annabel could not mark what that change was, but eventually she discovered what had set her on edge.

There were, spread out through the crowd as if not to dispel their association to one another, a group of gentlemen, identically dressed and masked. They wore black, and their masks were of plain, worn leather, shaped like the heads of corvine birds. Not the sort of mask one wore to a masquerade. One such mask, on its own, might not have caused much alarm. But there were dozens of these masks, spread out through the crowd. It was enough to send a chill crawling up her spine.

The men moved with purpose, their heads turning from side to side, searching through the crowd, looking for...

Connor, she supposed.

Something Mr. O had said ran through her head. She'd dismissed it at the time as the ravings of a man trying to save his own skin. But now she wondered if there might be something more to it. He'd said that Connor was dangerous, that he had dangerous friends. Her eyes flicked from one mask to another, watching as the men weaved through the crowd. Were these Connor's dangerous friends?

And if so, she thought, beginning to look for a way out of the ballroom that wouldn't cross paths with them, how long until they found Connor's body? Or, she thought with increasing panic, if they'd already discovered it, they might be looking for his killer. If she'd been seen fleeing Connor's study, they might be looking for her.

She couldn't help but think of an old friend of hers. Jack Bernhardt, a man she'd once known, had often worn a plague doctor's mask, not unlike the ones on the faces of these ominous gentlemen working their way through the ballroom. She'd lost touch with him, years ago, but she still thought of him from time to time. And then, when a group of scientists known as Resurrectionists became the talk of the town, Annabel had thought of Jack.

She looked now at one of the crow-headed men, taking care not to let him see that she was watching him. The Resurrectionists were reputed to don plague masks to protect their identities. Their scientific methods, Annabel recalled, were radically controversial, bordering on criminal. A few years back, a gruesome killing spree was reputed to be the work of one of their members. Dangerous friends indeed, Annabel thought.

She casually scouted out her exit route. There were two of the crow-faced gentlemen between her and the door. She would have to circle around to make her way past them. Like her, they were moving through the crowd, slowly, careful not to be observed. Trying to make their movements look casual, appearing to socialize as they threaded through the partygoers. The more she watched them, the more obvious it became that they weren't here as a social outing.

One of them was headed her way. He turned his head towards her, but Annabel was quick to turn away.

She stepped onto the dance floor, taking the arm of a pretty young lady as she went. The girl yelped in surprised delight; she might have had one too many glasses of rum punch. The dance was fast-paced. Annabel had made a study of waltzes, but she hadn't grown up in high society. It was still foreign to her, and she hadn't bothered learning the male parts. She stumbled her way through the dance, which seemed to involve trading partners. She watched her fellow dancers and followed their lead, spinning the young lady and holding out her arm to allow a new partner to take her place. But as her new partner stepped into the young lady's place, Annabel found herself face to face with a tall gentleman in a black suit.

"Good evening," he said, pressing something cold and hard against her chest.

She looked up to see that he wore the crow's head mask. She stared daggers at him, but allowed him to lead her from the revolving dance floor. He ushered her, without a word, into an unoccupied corner of the room, where he pushed her roughly against the wall so that she was hidden from prying eyes by his tall frame.

"Don't move," he instructed. She saw now that it was a gun that he'd pressed against her body, and though she could be quick to draw her weapon, she was not that quick, and his grip was strong. She had to assume that he did not want to shoot her in front of this large group of witnesses, so at least she had that advantage. "Now slowly, hand it over."

"What?" she said, genuinely confused. She'd assumed he was just going to try to kill her. She hadn't anticipated him making other demands.

He cocked his weapon.

"Do not make the mistake of thinking I won't shoot you, here and now. The package," he said. "You do have it, do you not? From Lord Connor's safe..."

How in the hell did he know about that? Unless...

"You," she muttered. "You're the buyer."

For the benefit of her buyers' confidentiality and for her own, Annabel made her arrangements through a third party. They never met face to face. So how in the hell did he know who she was? Especially since she was in disguise...

She'd been sold out, she thought bitterly.

"Not me specifically, but yes, we're the buyers," he admitted. "Now, hand it over."

She withdrew the package, which she'd slipped into a pocket sewn inside her vest. He reached out to take it, but she held it back, out of his grasp.

"Connor tried to kill me," she told him, merely to gauge his reaction. She could only see his eyes, but he didn't even blink at the revelation. "He was sick," she pressed. "Maddened."

The man pressed the gun harder against her chest. She gritted her teeth determined not to cry out in pain, but she suspected it would leave a bruise.

"Enough. The package, that's all we want."

"Did you know he would be sick?" she demanded, defiantly setting her jaw and refusing to acknowledge the gun shoved against her ribs. "If I'd known how dangerous this would prove to be, I'd have charged more for the item in question. Is that why our mutual friend didn't warn me?" she asked, referring to the third party, who'd let her know there was a buyer interested in Connor's safe. "You know, I could have been killed, infected."

The man only smiled. She knew it only from the way his mask shifted on his face as he grinned, and from the crinkled lines in the corner of his eyes. It was a malicious smile.

"Don't sell yourself short," he said. "We know who you are. You think one zombie alone was going to stop you?"

She smiled back.

"Zombie?" she said. "Is that what Connor's sickness was?"

With deft hands, as casually as running a hand through her hair, she reached up and pressed a button on her eyepiece. There were a few quick clicks and whirs, the hiss of air releasing, and a blur of motion from her eyepiece. A moment later, the man fell to his knees, a dart sticking out of his neck. His eyes were wild, unfocused.

"What?" he said, confused. "What did you do to me?"

She bent down and whispered in his ear, "You're right. I shouldn't sell myself short."

She stood and walked away, stepping back onto the revolving floor and disappearing once more into the crowd, while the two crow-headed men who had been barring her path hurried over to investigate their fallen comrade, leaving her exit unguarded. Just as she was about to make her escape, she heard some commotion from upstairs. It must have been coming from Lord Connor's office, judging by the sound. She immediately thought of Mr. O.

She hesitated. She could still help him. He was clearly in trouble. But he wasn't really her problem any more, even if it was sort of her fault. Of course, if he'd been first into Connor's office, he'd have been the one to have faced Connor in all his sickness-induced cannibalistic glory. And they both knew how that would have turned out. So, no, she'd done enough for Mr. O already. And she still had herself to worry about.

She turned away. The crow-faced men had already removed the dart from the man's neck, and though he still looked dazed, he was pointing in her direction, and two of them were headed her way. She spun around, headed for the door, but a third barred her path. He was right in front of her.

No time for subtlety. Without warning, she struck him across the face. He flew backward, landed hard and laid still. His mask tumbled off his face with the clasps torn clean off, and she stepped over him. She spared a quick glance to see if she might recognise him, but she didn't. The way cleared for her. Ladies and gentlemen alike scrambled out of her way.

"Stop him!" someone cried, "Stop that ruffian!"

The crow-men were hard on her heels, pushing roughly through the crowd. As the hallway cleared, the thinning crowd revealed more of them blocking her path. How many of these damned Resurrectionists were there?

"Get out of my way!" she shouted, whipping her revolver from her belt.

"Hand it over," he said, "And we'll let you live."

She felt cold steel against her back. She froze.

"Lower your gun, slowly," said the voice behind her. There was something familiar in the cadence of this man's voice, but it was muffled by the mask, and she couldn't place it. Still, she felt certain that she knew this man.

She lowered the gun, shoved it into its holster.

"The package," he instructed. "No sudden moves."

She nodded, slowly. She bit her lip in frustration. She was practically trembling with helpless rage, as she reached inside her vest pocket. She looked out into the sea of faces. Most were masked, though many had lowered their masks. Pressed against the wall in fear, the gentlemen had their arms wrapped protectively around their ladies. Even amongst the crowd, she was helpless. No one here would risk intervening.

Annabel reached into her pocket and withdrew the small yellow envelope she'd taken from Connor's safe. Until now, she hadn't given much thought to what it contained. A diamond necklace, a family heirloom, an artifact from a foreign land--these were the kinds of things Annabel was accustomed to stealing. But this was something different, its value measured not by the number of diamonds it contained or by the karat of the gold, but by the significance it held for the would-be buyer. Whatever it was, it had driven them to desperate measures to ensure they received it. She held out the envelope, and it was immediately snatched away by the plague doctor.

"What now?" she asked.

He handed her an envelope in return. "Your payment," he explained.

She was surprised. She hadn't expected they would still pay her, after all this, but she supposed they wouldn't want her trying to track them down. Easier to appease her with a wad of cash.

The man in the plague mask didn't wait to open the envelope, but immediately began tearing open the package. Annabel lingered, watching intently as he reached into the envelope. Straw spilled out of the envelope; it must have been used to pack the item. It must have been fragile. At last, he withdrew his hand, the item enclosed in his fist. He opened it. A small glass vial sat on his palm, filled with murky green fluid. All this fuss for something so small, so seemingly insignificant. It almost looked like a vial of absinthe, but Annabel knew it could be nothing quite so mundane.

Another one of the men in the plague masks came up behind him, and he handed over the empty package, in exchange for a large mechanical bird. The bird was a brass-winged raven, its mechanical components half-hidden beneath black feathers that had been glued to it. Like a wind-up doll, the bird had a key on its back, which the plague doctor began to wind, causing the bird to spring to life. It fluttered its wings, and spun its head. The craftsmanship reminded Annabel of her own clockwork eye.

A hole in the raven's back, just beneath the key, was the perfect fit for the glass vial. The plague doctor slid the vial into it, and pressed a hidden button, causing a hidden panel to slide shut over the hole. He gave the key another turn, and opened his hand. At once, the raven took off, winging above the crowd.

The sound of mechanical wings and hissing gas resounded through the stunned silence of the ballroom. A cloud of green and yellow gas trailed behind the clockwork crow. It spread quickly as the raven circled the ballroom, filling the room with a yellowish green haze. As it dispersed, it disappeared into the air, becoming invisible.

Annabel tried not to breathe. She covered her mouth with her sleeve and ran. She couldn't be sure she hadn't inhaled whatever vapours he'd released, but she prayed she hadn't.

The plague doctor stepped aside to let her pass, but by the time she reached the door, her lungs were aching. When she finally allowed herself to breathe, the air smelt of death.

Chapter Six

Chapter 6

"What was the meaning of that, do you think, Bailey? Comparing me to Sherlock Holmes, really!" Roderick Steen scoffed. "I cannot understand the comparison. Was the implication that I am an alcoholic? That I have a predilection for narcotics? Or was there an accusation of homosexual tendencies?"

Roderick was standing before a canvas, making long brushstrokes in light colours and occasionally pausing to gander at his subject. Rémy was handsome, fair of skin and hair, thin but tall. He was also naked, as was Roderick, with the exception of his painter's smock.

Rémy gave him a strange look. "Do you and Bailey often discuss literature?" he asked. His accent was thick, but his command of English was strong. "I'm sorry, by the way. I only meant that you are perceptive, like Holmes in the stories. I meant it as a compliment."

Bailey, meanwhile, tilted his head, quizzically, to one side, listening to the conversation but not participating in it.

"Constantly," Roderick answered, answering the question and disregarding the apology. "Now, hold still. It's difficult enough to capture your face without you moving about."

He tore his eyes from his subject for a moment to notice the sardonic expression on Bailey's face.

"Oh, come now," said Roderick, "Don't tell me you failed to detect the homoerotic subtext in The Hounds of the Baskervilles? Sherlock and Watson? You really thought their relationship was entirely platonic?"

Bailey raised his eyes in what must have been surprise.

"What? Oh, you're thinking of my own relationships?" Roderick protested, somewhat annoyed at having to defend himself, even if he did have a young naked man in his loft even as they spoke. His attention was half focused on the painting and half on the conversation.

"Well, yes, perhaps there have been a few gentlemen in my life with whom I may have entertained somewhat of a romantic friendship, but these were mere trysts--with the possible exception of mon chere Rémy. Still, that's hardly the same as the epic romance of Sherlock and Watson, is it? No offense, Rémy. Besides, I'm an artist, not a detective."

As he said this, he renewed his efforts at painting Rémy, with a fury of brushstrokes as if to hammer home his point. The annoying thing was that Sherlock Holmes, in A Study of Scarlet, complained when Watson once compared him to Dickens' Inspector Bucket. So when Roderick objected to being compared to Holmes, even his objections helped to solidify the comparison to the fictional detective. But Roderick couldn't help it.

And so, he took Bailey's tacit silence as a reply. Turning around to look at Bailey, he leaned over, allowing his companion to give him a small kiss on the cheek.

"You're a good boy Bailey," he said, rubbing Bailey's head. "Yes, you are," he said with affection. "Yes, you are."

He stood up and wiped his face. "Although you're a terrible kisser," he added. Then, raising his voice an octave in impersonation of Bailey, he protested, "No, I'm not."

A poor act of ventriloquism really, but Rémy giggled appreciatively. Perhaps it was Bailey's facial expression that amused Rémy.

Bailey was a Yorkshire Terrier, a particularly inquisitive breed if not a handsome one, with a shaggy coat and an impressive moustache that far surpassed his master's. While the breed was not generally preferred by the upper or middle classes, but was bred to catch vermin, Roderick had fallen in love with Baailey's exuberant personality. Not to mention his ridiculous facial expressions.

Roderick scolded Rémy for moving. It was difficult to paint while the boy kept laughing whenever Roderick said something mildly amusing. Silly lad.

Roderick regarded his painting. Rémy's complexion was that of an ivory statue, with soft rose coloured lips--not unlike that of Oscar Wilde's famous Dorian Gray. Like Basil Hallward, Roderick hoped to capture Rémy's very soul in this painting. Roderick had a remarkable eye for detail, and he wouldn't be satisfied until the likeness on the canvas was a perfect match for the beautiful young man posing on the divan. The painting was still only half finished, but Roderick was not remotely satisfied just yet. Roderick sighed, as he began packing up his painting supplies.

"I believe we're finished for the day," he told the model, who looked relieved not to have to sit still any longer, but saddened to be departed from Roderick's company. He gathered up his clothes and began to throw them on. He tried to steal a glance at Roderick's work. Roderick distracted him by kissing him, full on the lips. It seemed to do the trick.

"Admit it," said Roderick, when the kiss ended. He raised his voice an octave in impersonation of Bailey, "Best kiss you ever had."

Rémy stifled another laugh. A knock came at the door, and Rémy looked at Roderick in surprise and--if Roderick didn't know better, he'd have said--jealousy.

"Are you expecting someone?" he asked.

"No," he said, looking as suspiciously at the door as if it had just sprouted fangs and attempted to bite his neck. He went to answer it--Roderick refused to employ any household staff, given his preference for privacy.

"Clothes?" prompted Rémy.

"Ah, good point," said Roderick, patting his bottom and not finding any trousers there. "What would I do without you?"

#

Without a suitable location to dock the Penny Dreadful, Jonathan had been forced to disembark via rope ladder, while the ship remained floating above. With a sense of vertigo made worse by a head dizzied by absinthe, he'd climbed down to the ground below. He'd signalled to the ship, then made his way on foot.

Distance, time, and drink had already managed to calm Jonathan's nerves, and although he'd had a gun pointed at his head and jumped out the window to escape a gang of masked men, he was beginning to feel that he'd overreacted. In a city as big as London, it was unlikely the Resurrectionists --other than Grundy--knew who he was. He had escaped. He might sleep with a pistol by his bedside for the next few days, but as far as he was concerned, he was in the clear. What he should do now was go home, and climb into bed. Still, he was here now. It was not out of the ordinary for Jonathan to drop in on his friend, even unannounced.

"Roderick, open up, it's me!" he called at the door.

He heard Bailey yipping in excitement. The door swung open, revealing a familiar, friendly face. Roderick Steen wore a painter's smock, and, so far as Jonathan could tell, nothing else. A young, smooth-skinned man stood a few paces behind Roderick, looking mortified.

"Jonathan!" Roderick exclaimed happily, greeting him with a hug and a kiss on the cheek. Bailey upped the ante by whining with excitement and dancing in circles.

"Roderick," Jonathan replied. "I'm sorry to come calling at this hour, and without sending a card."

Roderick dismissed the apology with a wave of his hand. "Nonsense!" he said. "What use are such formalities among old friends? Come in, make yourself at home. Rémy here was just leaving."

"I was?" asked the French model, but with a withering look from Roderick, he picked up the remainder of his things, gave Jonathan a look of furious jealousy, and stormed past him.

Roderick put a hand firmly, but gently, on Rémy's wrist, halting his progress at the door. With a whisper, he promised that they'd pick up where they left off soon enough. "And I'm not speaking entirely of the painting," he said with a wink.

Rémy went beet red at that, but he smiled and allowed Roderick to plant a kiss on his cheek. He swept past Jonathan, apparently now satisfied that Jonathan did not represent competition.

When he was gone, Roderick gave a weary smile and said, "Sorry about that."

Roderick turned on his heel and swept into his living room, giving Jonathan a glimpse of his posterior. Jonathan made no comment; they'd been friends long enough that Jonathan wasn't exactly shocked by the view. He watched as Roderick lifted a small wooden box from his bookshelf, and offered him a sampling of its contents.

"Is that snuff?" he wondered.

"Cocaine," Roderick explained with a roguish grin, and put a bit up his nose by way of demonstration. He inhaled sharply and let out a whoop of exhilaration. "Sigmund Freud swears by it, you know. Calls it a magical substance. And indeed it is! Wonderful. No side effects, and not at all addictive--though I can't seem to give it up," he added with a laugh. "Are you familiar with Freud, by the way?"

Jonathan indicated that he wasn't and declined the offer of the magical substance with a shake of his head. Roderick set the box back on the shelf. He took a seat on the divan, while Jonathan settled into the settee.

Roderick's tastes inclined towards the excessive, the decadent, and the ridiculous. His furniture was ornate, decorated in brightly coloured floral prints, not to mention an excess of tassels. His walls were papered in a yellow and red striped pattern. An enormous chandelier hung from the ceiling, spilling candlelight across the wide expanse of Roderick's sitting room. Furs were draped over the furniture. Roderick was a loud proponent of the aesthetic movement. Though Jonathan was well acquainted with this fact, he still managed to be overwhelmed by Roderick's decor and boisterous manner whenever he called on his friend.

"Sarah Bernhardt uses it as well, which--truth be told--was my real reason for giving it a go. Do you know Sarah Bernhardt?" Roderick continued, speaking rapidly. "Fabulous woman, you simply must meet her. I'll introduce you, but you must first promise me you won't fall in love with her. Most men do, it seems, and I'm afraid she'd be a bad influence on you. Given your own reputation, that is saying something."

"Very well then," Jonathan replied, winking. "I promise."

"Somehow I don't believe you," Roderick said. "But listen to me ramble. You've just returned from Prague, haven't you? I was so sorry to hear about your father."

"Thanks, Roderick," he said. He sighed. He should have called upon Roderick sooner.

Roderick crossed one leg over the other, patted the empty space on the divan, inviting Bailey to leap up beside him. He scratched his dog's head and studied Jonathan's face. He quieted, and said, suddenly grave. "Something tells me this isn't a social call."

Jonathan started. "What do you mean? Of course it is."

Roderick scoffed. "You're a terrible liar, Johnny, old boy. Now, tell me, what has happened?"

Jonathan sighed. It was one of the problems with associating with a man as perceptive as Roderick. Nothing slipped past him.

"Must I?" he protested. "There's a new opera playing this evening. I believe it's still early enough to catch the late showing if we leave now. Or perhaps a night of gambling at my club?"

Roderick had brightened at the mention of the opera, but he shook his head.

"I'm afraid my interest in gossip outweighs my inclination to attend the opera. I must insist--"

"Alright, alright," Jonathan said. "But it's really nothing worth fretting over."

Roderick listened intently as Jonathan summarized the events of the evening. He began with the pair of letters that Jonathan believed tied Connor to the Resurrectionists, and ended with his narrow escape through the window. Roderick, for his part, listened attentively, his meticulously plucked eyebrows furrowed with concern as Jonathan explained.

Roderick, Jonathan knew, had often been called in to advise the police on particularly difficult cases. This arrangement had begun with the theft of an obscure piece of art, Roderick being generally considered an art expert, and had continued when the police had discovered that Roderick's expertise was not in any way constrained to the art world. Roderick was a true polymath. He had made a study of a broad number of subjects, his interests changing temperamentally. He had a practically eidetic memory.

A few years ago, a series of gruesome murders made headlines, and the police had called on Roderick to help them find the culprit responsible. Roderick had been unable to catch the killer, but he had been useful, at least, in narrowing down the list of subjects. The killer, he had told the police all those years ago, was most likely a member of the scientific society known as the Resurrectionists.

Before these murders, there had been a number of rumours going around about a few prominent scientists; none of these rumours were ever proven, and after it came to light that a Resurrectionist was to blame for the murders, they went underground, abandoning the gentleman's club that once served as their base of operations. As Roderick had once told Jonathan, this only served to confirm their guilt.

After relating his story to Roderick, Jonathan watched his friend's face for a reaction. They sat in silence for a matter of minutes, while Roderick's face ran through a variety of expressions ranging from worried, to thoughtful, to downright frightened.

"So," Roderick said at last. His tone was neutral. Jonathan was unaccustomed to such gravity in his friend's voice. Frankly, it worried him. "The Resurrectionists most likely believe that you are responsible for Lord Connor's death."

"That seems likely,"Jonathan said. "Of course, they might not even know who I am. I was masked, after all."

"Jonathan, the Resurrectionists are not to be underestimated. They will come after you, kill you if they can, discredit you if they can't. We can't be certain they didn't recognize you; we can only assume they do know who you are."

Jonathan frowned. "In a city as big as London? You flatter me; I'm not that famous."

"Jonathan, you fly around in an airship with your family's name on it," said Roderick. "And what about Grundy? He saw you with your mask off. You introduced yourself by name."

Jonathan shrugged. "Well, yes, there is that. So we track down Grundy, make sure he didn't tell the other Resurrectionists about me."

Roderick said nothing. He had that look on his face that he often got when he was lost in thought. Jonathan knew that look all too well. A minute passed in silence as Roderick continued to stare blankly. Suddenly, he sat up.

"Not just Grundy," he said. "We need to learn the names of each of the Resurrectionists, and turn them in to the police."

Jonathan let out a guffaw. "Oh, is that all?" he said, and sighed. "Thanks, Roderick, you do know how to cheer me up. So, there isn't any hope for me, then? I'm a dead man walking?"

"I'm serious," said Roderick, and if Jonathan didn't know him better, he'd have believed it. "I know, I know. But this isn't the sort of thing one takes lightly. We are going to unmask the Resurrectionists, once and for all. Each and every last one of them."

Jonathan gave Roderick a doubtful look as if to say, you're high, and to be fair, he was. But Roderick returned the expression with a critical expression of his own, all arched eyebrows and neck angled so as to ensure he was looking down his nose at Jonathan.

"What else are you going to do?" Roderick demanded. "Sit back and wait for them to come after you?"

Jonathan let out a sigh. Sometimes it was easier just to humour Roderick when he was like this. He should have known Roderick would be dramatic about this whole nasty business. Eventually, Roderick would lose interest and turn to some other pursuit. In the meantime, Jonathan could learn what he could about the Resurrectionists, not because he felt they were after him, but because he still wanted to write his article.

"Fine," he said. "Where do we start?"

"Ah!" Roderick exclaimed, startling Bailey out of his seat. The terrier began barking excitedly, pursuing his own tail as if it was the source of all the commotion. "Ah! Now there's a good question. Where do we start?" After a moment, then said, "I suppose you'll have to consult an expert."

"But you're an expert," Jonathan countered, as Roderick left his seat again and disappeared into the adjacent room. "You're the expert.

"Not really. When I consulted for Scotland Yard on the Resurrectionist murders, I consulted an expert of my own. A fellow eccentric with an exceedingly keen interest in murder. Parson Sinews," Roderick explained, calling to Jonathan, who remained in the sitting room.

"Sinews is a collector. He keeps broadsides and other memorabilia from famous crime scenes, and visits the sites of all the worst murders. When he can, he arranges to meet with the villains themselves, before they're sent to the gallows. The more gruesome the murder, the keener his interest. He is said to own a ledger, made from the skin of William Burke. How's that for ironic? He has a length of the gallows rope used to hang Mary Ann Cotton. Supposedly he has an original Ripper letter in his possession."

"And you want me to meet this, this, murder enthusiast?" Jonathan called.

"Yes, well, he knows more about the Resurrectionists than anyone else in London, myself included. If we hope to mount a war against them, we'll need Mr. Sinews' assistance, I'm afraid."

With that, Roderick returned to the sitting room, dressed now, as if he was going out. He wore a brightly coloured blue ascot, an ivory frock coat with blue buttons and embroidered with silver thread, and a pair of blue kid gloves.

Jonathan got up.

"We're not going now, are we? Surely we'll wait till morning?"

"You're going now," Roderick told him, selecting a top hat from a rack containing numerous options; the one in question was made of dark plum felt, with a blue ribbon. He placed it on his head and checked his reflection in the looking glass. He nodded his approval, snatched up an umbrella from its rack, and added, "Mr. Sinews keeps strictly to night hours. If you wait till morning, he'll be in bed."

"And I'm to call on him unannounced?" Jonathan asked.

"I'll write you a card," said Roderick. "He'll be more than happy to receive you, I'm sure. You have a gun, by the way?"

Jonathan's eyebrows went up.

"My father has a gun collection on the Penny Dreadful, remember?" he said, alarmed by the question. "Should I expect to need one?"

"No, of course not," Roderick said, laughing off the question, "But you might want to take one, just in case."

When Jonathan assured him that he would, Roderick relaxed. He armed himself with a revolver and headed for the door.

Roderick paused to write up the calling card; he had stationary on the credenza by the door. He pressed the card into Jonathan's hand.

"I've introduced you by your pseudonym," he said, meaning that he'd written Mr. O on the card.

"Wait, where are you headed? You're not coming with me?" Jonathan asked.

"I had planned to attend Lord Connor's masquerade ball, you know, but time got the best of me. It often does, you know? Still, better late than never, as they say. I'm sure my friend the detective will be there by now. I'll do my best to make sure your name doesn't come up in conversation. One more thing..." Roderick added.

"Yes?" Jonathan prompted.

"This Mr. Monday you mentioned. Where does he fit in?"

"I don't know yet," Jonathan admitted, "I'm not even sure he does. He didn't seem to know of Connor's connection to the Resurrectionists. He might have just been in the wrong place at the wrong time. Whatever the case, if the Resurrectionists were to learn that he was there when Connor died, they will likely come after him as well."

"Then Monday may be a useful ally," Roderick suggested.

"I don't think so," Jonathan told him. "Monday is dangerous. Unpredictable. And honestly, a bit frightening."

Roderick grinned. "Tell me more. I think I might like him."

Chapter Seven

Chapter 7

Annabel stumbled onto the street, gasping for air. She didn't know if she'd inhaled whatever vapours had been released into the air, but she might have. She had a strange taste in her mouth and the smell of death still lingered. She felt disoriented. She heard a rumbling sound from above and looked up to see Mr. O's airship pulling away from the window. She felt a breath of relief to know that he'd made it out.

She took a moment to catch her breath while she gazed up at the airship. If she'd been anyone else, she would not have been able to make out the details from here. The name printed on the airship's blimp, for instance. Most people couldn't have read it from this distance. But Annabel wasn't just anyone; the concealed poison dart was not the only advantage of her mechanical eye. From the angle she'd seen the airship at from inside the house, she hadn't been able to see it, but from here, she could just make out Grimmer and Sons Publishing Inc. She wondered what Mr. O's connection to the Grimmers might be. He might be an employee, a journalist, or perhaps an editor. It was even possible that he was Jonathan Grimmer. Was he the same man whose invitation she'd swiped on the way in to the masquerade? She couldn't be certain. Either way, she now had a trail leading back to him.

She glanced back at the house. Through the open front door, she could see men and women writhing on the floor, succumbing to fits, drool escaping their lips. Amid the chaos, the crow-faced men wandered the crowd, unaffected by the deadly gas.

She swore. She'd been in dangerous spots before, but very few like this. She'd barely gotten out of there alive. Annabel knew her work was dangerous. Her associates were criminals, and if she was being honest, she was one herself. She knew the dangers. She knew the risks. The truth was, it was danger she enjoyed most about her work. But suddenly it had ceased being fun. Suddenly it was real, it was visceral. The most frustrating thing was how helpless she felt just now. She hadn't felt that in a long time. Not since the day her eye was plucked out.

She wanted to go back in there, stab each and every one of those bastards in the guts for for this. But she couldn't even breathe the air inside the mansion. And she was outnumbered, and they were better armed. All she could do was watch in horror as wealthy gentlemen and high society ladies collapsed, coughing and hacking until their lungs gave in and their faces turned purple. Really, she ought to do as they said and just walk away, leave this place. Well, she ought to summon a policeman, really, but what good could the police do now? The poison was spreading throughout the house, and the police would be ill equipped to deal with it. Besides, Annabel couldn't recall a time when she'd ever done what she ought to do.

She distanced herself from the entrance of the house, circling around to the west wing, where she could see inside through one of the house's grand windows. She could still hear screaming from inside the mansion, as the Resurrectionists paced around the halls, spreading fumes. She could see a drifting haze through the curtains, the fog was so thick.

She wondered if anyone else had escaped. She couldn't imagine why they were doing this. Why had they felt it necessary to rob her, when they could have just bought the stolen goods from her once she'd safely infiltrated Connor's safe and gotten away? The first crow-masked man she'd encountered had even said he would still pay her! And why the toxic gas? Were they merely covering their tracks, eliminating witnesses? She wondered if it even had anything to do with the package she'd taken from Connor. As for that, the package was still safely stashed away in her hidden pocket, but this was only a small comfort. She felt sick, for whatever part she'd played in this. If she'd known, if she'd only known who her buyers were, and what lengths they would go to to get their merchandise...

She never would have agreed to sell to them.

The question still remained, what now? Her lungs burned, and she strained just to breathe, even now with fresh air all around her. Had she breathed in those toxic fumes? She couldn't be certain. But her head ached. It was hard to think. To go to the police and summon help, or to linger here, watching through the windows in the hopes that she might get some chance to sate her thirst for bloody vengeance. The longer she waited, the more evident it became that she'd already made up her mind.

She continued to circle around the mansion, until she found herself amongst tall rhododendrons, lilies and hibiscus. Rose bushes and ferns. A tall statue, a fountain. It was too dark to make out the details, but the flickering lights from nearby windows cast shadows across a stone walkway that led through the lush rear garden behind Connor's enormous house.

The screams from within the house began to subside, and the night grew disturbingly quiet. Those who might have escaped had already done so, or failed to do so. The rest had already succumbed to the poisoned air and either lost consciousness or died. Annabel was not sure of its effects, but the only comfort she had was that she had not inhaled enough to be so afflicted as those inside.

She wondered how many had gotten out, and was surprised to realise that she was grateful that Mr. O was among their numbers. Well, he was handsome, after all, and he'd proven useful, so that might have accounted for the sentiment. He was a witness, though; it would have been more prudent to wish him dead, but she just couldn't bring herself to wish for that. For the second time that night, she wished she could be just a bit more ruthless.

As she continued creeping forward, keeping close to the walls of the house, she wondered if anyone had gone to the police, if not a survivor of the poison gas then perhaps a neighbour, having heard the screams. She didn't want to be here when the police arrived. But she did want to see what was going on inside, and she couldn't see the ballroom from the windows on this side of the house. There was the balcony nearby. She would get a clear view inside if she could climb up there somehow, if she could find a ladder or just a foothold in the brickwork of the house.

Before she had a chance to search for one, a loud crash came from nearby. Glass shattered, and with an inhuman roar, something tumbled out of the house. A blur of shadow, it landed hard, on the ground below. It stopped moving. Heart pounding, she knew she ought to run now. Every instinct, every nerve in her body was telling her to run, just run! Instead, ignoring her racing heartbeat, Annabel crept through the garden towards it, looking intermittently between the dark shape on the ground and the shattered glass of the window above.

"That was quick," said a muffled voice. The sound originated from the broken window.

"Incubation period varies," said another voice from above. She spotted the first now, sticking his head between the broken glass and looking down. She kept low to the ground, out of sight in the thick shadows of the garden. "Some turn almost instantly. Others take minutes, hours even. Nobody's really sure why."

Annabel looked back at the shape on the ground. It was moving again, getting up. She could see broken limbs now that she was closer. It was a man. A gentleman, perhaps, but there was nothing gentle about him now. His clothes were in tatters, his hat missing from his head. And though his bones were broken, his form twisted so unnaturally he hardly looked human, he hardly seemed to have noticed the state he was in. He was looking at Annabel, sniffing at the air, and staring at her with hunger in his eyes. The same way Lord Connor had looked at her. She reached for her gun, ready to shoot if he came at her. But she kept still and watched, knowing she would give away her position if she fired. She tried to quiet her breathing, and kept statue-still.

Suddenly, the man started charging. She whipped out her revolver, but before she could even get her hand on the trigger, a gunshot rang out. The man fell to the ground, a hole punched straight through his head.

"Nice shot," said a muffled voice from the window.

Annabel whipped around. She looked up at the window. The men in the plague doctor masks seemed not to have seen her yet. They were looking out the window, but their focus was on the man they'd just shot. They were probably making sure he wasn't going to get up again. So Annabel took her time, aimed, and pulled the trigger. She hit the first of them. He dropped, right through the window he was leaning out of, and landed in the rose bushes below.

The second man yelped in surprise and drew his own weapon. Annabel didn't hesitate to put a bullet in his neck. She holstered her revolver and crossed the walkway to the rose bushes where the first of them had fallen. He was groaning, so that was good. She wanted him alive. But he was reaching for something, a gun maybe.

She stepped closer, seized his hand before he reached it, and looked into his eyes.

"Who do you work for?" she asked. Her tone was calm, and her face was impassive. Even if inside she was shaking, she gave no outward signs that she was frightened. It was time to be ruthless.

He shook his head and coughed. Annabel frowned at him. Well, there were ways of making people talk, weren't there? His vest was wet with blood, a hole ripped through it where she'd hit him. She reached out and with a gloved hand, thrust her fingers into his wound. He screamed, but she didn't let up. Just kept her fingers digging into his chest until sweat dripped down his brow. It was a bit disturbing, feeling her fingers inside his wound, but what disturbed her most was that on some level, she felt deep satisfaction. How's this for ruthless, she thought.

He muttered something.

She withdrew her hand, peeled the straps off his mask, and revealed his face. She was surprised to see how young he was. And how handsome. For a moment, she felt a horrible sense of guilt. He was about to die, and she was literally torturing him. Then she thought of the piles of corpses that even now lined the halls. She remembered who he was. She leaned in close to his face so she could hear what he had to say.

"Resurrectionists," he coughed.

She narrowed her eyes. She knew a thing or two about the Resurrectionists. She knew he wasn't just talking about body snatchers, either.

"What was in the vial?" she demanded. "Some sort of poison?"

For a moment, it looked like he might not answer. Stubborn, even now, as he lay dying on the rose bush. But then, he coughed up a bit of blood, and looked up into Annabel's eyes. He was almost smiling when he answered. "Lazarus," he said, coughing.

"What is Lazarus?"

"Virus," he said.

Annabel nodded. This filled in one piece of the puzzle. The man who'd tumbled out of the window after inhaling this Lazarus Virus, had been afflicted with the same thing as Connor. And if the virus could be spread by poison gas, it was possible Connor had been infected deliberately. She thought of what Mr. O had said about Lord Connor; he had dangerous friends. Was it possible that Connor's friends were the ones who infected him?

She stood up, fished around in her pockets for another bullet. Finding one, she reloaded her revolver, fired it, and walked away. She would have loved to linger, to shoot every last one of these damned Resurrectionists one by one. But the police would be coming soon, and she had only so many bullets.

Chapter Eight

Chapter 8

Jonathan had grown tired of traveling by airship and had therefore given the ship's captain and crew the rest of the night off. Captain Merrick had provided him with a flare gun, in case he needed to summon the ship after all.

With the flare gun tucked safely in his belt, and one of his father's guns on the opposite hip, Jonathan flagged down a passing fly carriage. He gave the driver the address Roderick had printed neatly on the calling card. While not as quick as the airship, a fly was at least quicker than a hansom, and unlike the airship didn't have the disadvantage of wearing at Jonathan's nerves. He had enough to worry him already. He patted the pistol at his hip for courage. Roderick had assured him he wouldn't need his gun, but on the other hand, had been quite adamant that he take one.

So, it was with caution that Jonathan got out of the fly, casting an auspicious eye on the old, gothic house belonging to Parson Sinews. According to his friend, Sinews was an expert on the Resurrectionists. This itself was enough to make Jonathan suspicious. Roderick was not quick to give out praise, especially when it came to intellect. For Roderick, an intelligent person might earn the description not entirely idiotic, and in Roderick's estimation, this would be high praise. In all the years he'd known Roderick Steen, not once had Jonathan heard him use the word expert to describe someone other than himself. This fact, in consideration of the subject at which Mr. Sinews was an expert, was unsettling. After all, Sinews was a collector of paraphernalia related to the most gruesome murders throughout history. Jonathan shivered as he turned to pay his driver. The man thanked him, but didn't linger. The horse clopped along the cobblestone street until Jonathan stood alone on the sidewalk. London in this part of the city, at this time of night, was eerily silent.

Not for the first time, Jonathan thought about simply going home and climbing into bed. He expected he would wake up the next morning, feeling like all of this had been a bad dream, and continuing on as if nothing had ever happened out of the ordinary. After all, it was unlikely the Resurrectionists were after him. That was probably just Roderick being dramatic, which was to say Roderick being Roderick.

Then again, if they did know who he was, he needed to know what he was up against. He needed to arm himself with information. Jonathan's father had often reminded Jonathan that information was a weapon, and one to be wielded like a sword. In that regard, Jonathan was currently unarmed.

He walked up the steps to Mr. Sinews' house. There was a brass knocker on the door in the shape of a serpent eating its own tail. An ouroboros. A curious thing to have on one's door, Jonathan thought. He used the brass serpent to knock firmly on the door. A minute passed, and Jonathan thought about turning around and heading back down the steps. It was not too late for him to abandon this fool's crusade against the Resurrectionists. He decided to knock again, and without bothering to wait, began heading back down the steps, when he heard someone coming.

The door swung open, and a man stood in the doorway. The first thing Jonathan noticed about him was his scars, which lined his face from forehead to chin, intersecting his dark skin with harsh lines of pink. The man's thickly muscled neck was adorned with a necklace of brass-painted bone. His right eye was red as blood. The left was a vibrant ocher.

Jonathan handed him Roderick's card. After a moment, he stepped aside to admit Jonathan into the house.

"Right this way, Mr. Grimmer," he said in a deep baritone. He had just the hint of an accent, Haitian if Jonathan guessed right.

Following him inside, Jonathan noticed that while the man was physically fearsome, he was impeccably dressed, in a perfectly tailored suit and a well-tied cravat. For a moment, Jonathan wondered if this man was Mr. Sinews. After all, Jonathan considered his own family; while they had no titles, the Grimmer family had earned a begrudging amount of respect from at least some members of the aristocracy due to their wealth and business status. Even so, the man who stood before him was dressed better than even Jonathan. But somehow, Jonathan was beginning to think that this was Sinews' servant, and Mr. Sinews' wealth eclipsed even the Grimmer family's fortune.

Once Jonathan was inside, a quick glance around the foyer was enough to confirm this. While the house was in a gothic style, it was clearly a reproduction; the gothic manor was brand new. It was polished, clean, and expensively decorated with foreign imports. Egyptian statues, Persian carpets, and so on. Mr. Sinews' tastes were both exotic and bold.

The sound boomed and resonated throughout the house as the Haitian closed the door behind him.

"If you'll wait here, Mr. Grimmer, I'll let Mr. Sinews know you're here."

As the doorman disappeared down the hallway, Jonathan looked around the entryway. It was rude of him to snoop, but his upbringing as the son of a newspaper man, had taught him to be unapologetically nosy. So he looked at paintings on the wall, picked up items off the shelves.

There was a touch of the macabre in every item of Sinews' collection. The Egyptian statues were of Anubis and Osiris, gods of death and the afterlife. He had specimens in jars and animal skulls on display. Even the rug on the floor featured a motif of skulls. There were broadsides in frames mounted on the walls. There was a lone book on one shelf, and Jonathan recalled that Sinews was supposed to own a book wrapped in the skin of Henry Burke. He allowed himself to wonder if this might be the book in question.

When the Haitian returned, Jonathan was holding a tall jar of clay with hieroglyphic carvings on its lid. He frowned at Jonathan.

"Mr. Sinews has quite the collection," Jonathan said. "Bit morbid for my tastes, but still, impressive."

"The world craves the grotesque. Those who pretend otherwise deceive no one but themselves," said a voice from down the hall. Following a set of soft footsteps on hardwood floor, the voice resolved into a man.

This was Parson Sinews. Jonathan was sure of it from the moment he stepped into the room. He had the bearing of an aristocrat, if not a very god. Frankly, he was the most beautiful man Jonathan had ever seen. Jonathan had a bit of a reputation as a rake, and was guilty of taking too much pride in his own image in the looking glass, but in Sinews' presence, he felt a bit like Quasimodo in the presence of Adonis. Jonathan's preference was for women, but he wasn't blind.

"Mr. Sinews, I presume?" said Jonathan. "You're not quite what I expected."

Sinews had all the lean, agile grace of a predator. He was tall, Jonathan noted, only a little shorter than Jonathan. He had dark hair, sable and swept back neatly. He was clean-shaven, and hadn't a blemish on his milky white skin. But most striking in Jonathan's estimation were his eyes. They were bright, and wide, almost youthful, for lack of a better word. It was as if an adolescent stared out of the eyes of a man; the effect was unnerving. They were jade in colour, and at the moment, they were amused.

"You were expecting some dusty, old Professor type?" said Sinews.

"I'm not sure what I was expecting," Jonathan told him.

Jonathan noticed that while Sinews was expensively dressed, he wore his clothes with a certain disregard. His vest and shirt were both buttoned only partway up. His collar was not ironed. His sleeves were rolled up. Definitely not what Jonathan had been expecting.

"But Roderick Steen credited you as an expert. And given your expansive collection of antiquities and cultural artifacts, I suppose your description of a dusty, old Professor does match my expectations better than the reality."

The Haitian handed Sinews' Jonathan's card, saying, "This is a Mr. O, according to his card. An acquaintance of Mr. Roderick Steen."

Sinews' mouth twitched into a semblance of a grin. "A pleasure to meet you, Mr. O," he said. "I enjoyed your report on Isembard Kingdom Brunel's latest work of engineering. Very insightful."

Jonathan gaped at Sinews in surprise. Given how few articles Jonathan had written and published, he was astonished that Sinews recognised the deliberately vague pseudonym.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Sinews," Jonathan managed.

"Please, call me Parson. That is, Parson by name, not profession."

"Then you're not of the religious persuasion?" he queried, with irony enough in his inflection to counter Parson's own.

Parson seemed charmed by the banter. "This gentleman is Henry Charles Ocelot."

Again, Jonathan looked at him in surprise. To refer to one's doorman as a gentleman was incongruous to say the least. Then again, to judge by Mr. Ocelot's attire, he could have been a gentleman. It was all very strange.

The introductions apparently over, Mr. Sinews turned on his heels and headed down the hall, Mr. Ocelot gesturing for Jonathan to follow. He took Jonathan's coat, then followed behind Jonathan as they headed into the adjacent room.

The scale of the gothic-styled household was disorienting in that it made naming each room appropriately near impossible. What might have been a hallway was in Sinews' home an antechamber. A room that was functionally a den was in Sinews' home an atrium. His living room, an amphitheatre.

As they entered a broad, circular room with a domed ceiling, Jonathan smelt cinnamon and cardamom, and all manner of exotic scents. Incense and candles filled the room with scent and smoke. The floor was littered with huge, plum-coloured pillows in Oriental style. On each of the pillows sat a young man or woman. Their faces were drained of colour, their eyes bloodshot. They were thin as if starved. They stared out at the world groggily, as if drugged, drained of animation; not one of them looked up as Jonathan and Sinews entered the room, Mr. Ocelot at the rear.

Jonathan stared at them in alarm. On one occasion, Jonathan's father had tasked him with paying a visit to an opium den for the sake of an article. It had been a lot like this, seedy and dark, its occupants blind to their surroundings. Their only thoughts were of the poppy. But this room unsettled Jonathan in a way the opium den never had. Somehow, an opium den--for that must have been what it was--in a gentleman's home was more disturbing than the den on a dark street in Chinatown. There, at least, it was somewhat expected. More disturbing still, some of these waifs were very, very young, barely older than children. Jonathan also noted that there were no signs of the opium itself. Jonathan couldn't guess what drug it was they were using, but it was not opium. Jonathan could see puncture wounds on their necks, signs that whatever their poison was, it was taken via injection.

Sinews said nothing by way of explanation, and merely carried on toward the next room, apparently expecting Jonathan to follow. Mr. Ocelot watched impassively as Jonathan hesitated. He felt compelled to say something by way of protest. He should have stormed out of Sinews' house in moral outrage, refusing to accept the man's help. Instead, he took a few halting steps backwards, then at last let out a long and guilty sigh, and hurried after Sinews.

#

The ride to Lord Connor's mansion was not long. Roderick arrived shortly, exited the cabriolet, and walked the rest of the way up the long drive to the mansion. He had attended last year's masquerade, and so was familiar with the mansion.

He stepped inside and had to cover his mouth with a handkerchief to avoid gagging. He was unprepared for the overwhelming stench, and nearly lost his lunch. He'd been expecting just one dead body, Connor's, but there were bodies littering the floor. Dozens of them, in an advanced state of decay. There were a couple of policemen standing in the hallway, examining the bodies, and a couple of burly men helping load the bodies onto carts and hauling them away. The policemen looked up at Roderick in surprise. One of them left off his examination and came over to greet Roderick.

"Detective," said Roderick.

"Mr. Steen," he said, a tone of surprise in his voice, "What are you doing here?"

"I came for the masquerade. Have I missed it?" he said, facetiously.

The detective wasn't amused. "Anyway, it's good you're here," he said seriously. "Perhaps you can be of some assistance."

Roderick followed the detective, pausing briefly to remove his shoes and socks, a habit which drew stares from the other policemen. Detective Taggert had grown accustomed to Roderick's eccentricities, and seemed willing to put up with them, so long as he was useful. Roderick had never failed in that regard. As he gradually grew accustomed to the smell, the handkerchief helping to muffle the potent rot, he began to smile cheerfully. There was a puzzle to be solved here, that much was certain. Roderick was delighted. Well, looking around at all the bodies, he was also horrified, but mostly delighted.

"This way, Mr. Steen," said Taggert, leading the way inside.

He led Roderick down the hallway. Stepping around the bodies, Roderick followed the detective haltingly, pausing to visually examine the corpses. They were stiff and wide-eyed, flies buzzing around them, many of them beginning to rot as if they'd been dead for some time.

"When did this happen?" Roderick asked.

"Earlier this evening, at Connor's masquerade ball," Taggert told him.

"Impossible," Roderick protested. "They're in a far advanced state of decay. They look like they've been dead for weeks."

"All the same, Mr. Steen, this happened last night. As I said, it's a good thing you're here. Frankly, I'm stumped. Perhaps you'll be able to at least tell us something useful about what happened here."

Taggert's men were still busy carting off the bodies, but Roderick was startled to see the sheer number of dead. Jonathan hadn't said anything about this atrocity, so it must have happened after his friend fled out the window. In a way, he was lucky to have been scared off by the Resurrectionists. Otherwise, he might have been among the bodies lying on the floor. Roderick stepped past them, following Taggert closely as he made his way to the ballroom. While the hallway floor had been littered with dozens of corpses, here the body count was in the hundreds.

"My god," Roderick said in stunned horror. "What happened here?"

"A plague of some sort," said Taggert, deeply serious as they surveyed the scene.

Roderick nodded. Perhaps some sort of plague had swept through this ballroom, killing everyone in a matter of minutes. The bodies certainly had the look of those afflicted with a vile illness. They were blemished and had pustulant sores and garishly discoloured skin. But for a plague to act that quickly, to kill everyone here in a matter of minutes, it seemed very unlikely.

Roderick's mind worked quickly. He wondered if the Resurrectionists were somehow involved. Could whatever infection had spread through the ballroom have been cooked up in a laboratory? If so, the Resurrectionists must surely be to blame. After all, he knew they'd been at the ball. It was the first time they'd surfaced since they'd gone into hiding, and if this plague was born of science, it was a remarkable--if abhorrent--scientific achievement. Few scientists would have been capable of the achievement, and fewer still both capable and willing to overlook the moral quandaries of this sort of scientific pursuit. A plague that killed its victims in a matter of minutes...

"Have you questioned the survivors?" asked Roderick.

"Unfortunately, only one survivor has come forward so far. We're still working on identifying the victims. Once we've done that, we have a guest list; we can use that to identify the other survivors, if there are any. It's slow going, though. There are a lot of bodies, and many of them are almost completely unrecognisable."

Roderick could see that. Some of their faces were bloated by the disease, and some of their faces were malformed by rot, their skin sloughing off and turning to mush. Just looking at the bodies made Roderick want to gag all over again. The one aspect of his hobby that Roderick didn't enjoy was looking at dead bodies. Roderick was a bit squeamish.

"And the one survivor who did come forward?"

"The young lady who made the initial report of what happened here," said Taggert. "You'll love this."

Roderick was already interested. He found himself leaning in towards the detective, hanging on his every word.

"She says that she saw a man in a plague doctor's mask. He apparently used a clockwork bird to spread some sort of poison gas. Upon inhalation, the victims began to cough violently. Within a matter of moments, they were dead."

Roderick gasped. So he was right! This plague was man-made. And the man had worn a plague mask. Taggert and Roderick both knew what this meant. Their suspect was a Resurrectionist. The fact that the witness had mentioned that the mask was old was even more telling. Could they have at last found their man, the mad scientist harboured by the Resurrectionists when they first went into hiding? Anthony Tidkins.

"This witness," said Roderick. "I'll want to speak with her."

Taggert twirled his moustache in what Roderick felt was a guilty manner, if it was possible to twirl one's moustache guiltily.

"Miss Karnstein had been through quite an ordeal," he said. "She wanted to go home and rest. We felt that would be advisable. She was quite young, after all--"

"Did you at least get an address?" Roderick said, cutting off the detective. "Did no one think to ask why she wasn't affected by this plague like the others?"

Taggert frowned twirled his moustache. This seemed to answer Roderick's question.

"Of course not. Why do I always expect you to demonstrate even a minute amount of competence, when I continue to be disappointed?"

"Before you work yourself into a fit, there's more," said Taggert, recognising from Roderick's tone that he was struggling to control his temper.

Perhaps he had been a bit too overzealous with the cocaine, he thought, forcing himself to take deep breaths. He gestured for the detective to continue.

"Miss Karnstein was able to identify the culprit. She believes she recognised him. We've sent a dozen Black Marias to apprehend the man. We've got him, Roderick," said Taggert vehemently. "We've got him at last."

"You really think this could be Anthony Tidkins?" Roderick asked. "The Resurrection Man?"

Taggert nodded.

"It's him. I'm sure of it. I should mention, the suspect named by Miss Karnstein..." Taggert hesitated. "He's an acquaintance of yours."

"Spit it out, man, please," said Roderick, a bit more forcefully than he'd intended.

"Parson Sinews."

Roderick swallowed.

"Sinews? Really? The man's a megalomaniac, an eccentric, a crook, a reputed vampire, and worse still, he's Irish. But a mass murderer?"

The Inspector looked as if he had his own doubts.

But Roderick wasn't as certain as he let on. If Parson Sinews really was the Resurrection Man, Roderick may have just sent his closest friend to his death. He tried not to look worried, gave the detective a forced smile and a shrug, and hoped that Jonathan would keep his wits about him. At least, Roderick thought, he had insisted that Jonathan bring his revolver.

#

They settled into another vast space with a ceiling high enough to have allowed the Penny Dreadful to float around the room with ample space. The room was supported by marble columns and decorated with ancient greek statues that looked like they belonged in a museum. Continuing along the lines of the theme of the rest of the house, the series of statues depicted Hades binding Persephone to the underworld, Persephone raising a piece of pomegranate to her lips while Hades looked on eagerly; Hades dragging his wife down into the underworld. The statues were towering, each one's head high enough to look down from the top of the spiral staircase, which led to the second story.

Jonathan had taken up a seat on the chaise longue, while Sinews chose a chair in an ornate French style. The chair hardly looked comfortable, but it was remarkably stylish, with brocade upholstery. As they settled in to converse, Henry Charles Ocelot lit a cigarette for Sinews, who smoked using a long smoking stick, blowing perfect rings of smoke that drifted up and dissolved.

"Cigarette?" Mr. Ocelot offered Jonathan.

Jonathan declined, instead choosing to fish one out of his own pockets. He allowed Mr. Ocelot to light it, and drew on the cigarette with pleasure.

It was only because of Roderick's acquaintanceship with Sinews that Jonathan trusted the man at all. His own instincts told him Sinews was not to be trusted. But Jonathan trusted Roderick, and Roderick had sent him here. He forced himself to sit still.

"Tea?" asked Sinews. "On second thought, are you an absinthe drinker, Mr. O?"

At this, Jonathan looked up eagerly. This time, when he wanted to decline, his words just didn't come out right. "I could use a glass," he said impulsively, regretting it the moment the words were out of his mouth.

"Excellent," said Mr. Sinews. "Henry Charles, if you would?"

The large Haitian nodded and disappeared into the adjacent room, returning a few moments later with the green liquor and the accompanying accessories on a rolling cart. Setting his cigarette stick into a holder, Sinews joined Jonathan in preparing his glass, pouring just a trickle of water into his glass. The drink louched beautifully, remaining a strong green even as the sugar water dissolved into the glass, releasing an intoxicating smell into the air.

"Have you had visions, Mr. O?" said Sinews, referring to the drink's reputation as a hallucinogen.

Having Roderick Steen for a friend, Jonathan had absorbed a fair bit of trivial knowledge over the years. "Our mutual friend, Mr. Steen tells me that that aspect of absinthe is a myth. Absinthe is no more hallucinogenic than any other liquor."

"Then our friend has been drinking the wrong absinthe," Sinews told him. "Speaking of Mr. Steen, what did he tell you about the nature of our relationship?"

Jonathan didn't know what to make of this question. "I understand you consulted on the Resurrectionist case?"

To Jonathan's surprise, this response elicited a laugh from Mr. Sinews. "True, I suppose, but that's not how he and I know each other."

Mr. Sinews sat back, pontarlier glass in one hand, cigarette stick in the other. He gave Jonathan a meaningful look, and Jonathan considered the man's good looks, his gracefulness, and his friend's taste for such things. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

"I see," said Jonathan.

"It's been a while since I've seen our mutual friend. You and he aren't..." Mr. Sinews began.

Jonathan spluttered, almost spilling his drink. "Me and Roderick? No," he said, "God, no. Roderick and I have simply been friends a long time. That's all. Not that I take issue with Roderick's inclinations."

Mr. Sinews sipped his drink thoughtfully. Finally, he set his glass down.

"So, you want to know about the Resurrectionists?" he said, changing the subject. "Forgive me if I dredge up details with which you are already familiar. This will go more smoothly if I make the assumption of your ignorance..."

A fair assumption, thought Jonathan.

"A few years ago, a small, unassuming brick building in Whitechapel was home to a gentleman's club. It was unmarked, aside from a small symbol painted on the back door. A crow. It was known as the Murder Club--murder, as in a murder of crows. The club's windows were blackened, its list of members a closely guarded secret. Occasionally, witnesses were supposed to have seen gentlemen coming and going from the club's rear entrance, but they wore masks whenever they visited the club."

"Plague doctor's masks," Jonathan guessed.

"Just so," Sinews told him. "The club's members were prominent scientists, so it is understandable that they wished to keep their association with the Murder Club a secret. After all, the club's scientific pursuits often blurred the lines of ethics, law, and even physics. As you likely know, some of their studies were published. They used pen names to hide their identities. The club's member roster therefore reads like the cast of a penny dreadful. Spring-heeled Jack. Francis Varney. Sweeney Todd. The most famous of the Resurrectionists used the appellation Anthony Tidkins."

"The Resurrection Man," said Jonathan.

Sinews' knowledge far exceeded Jonathan's own, but Jonathan was not entirely ignorant on the subject. After all, his father had covered the story extensively in each of his newspapers; even the society papers had made mention of the Resurrection Man's horrific murders. And of course, he was friends with Roderick, who had helped the police with their investigation into the Resurrection Man.

"The truth of the Resurrection Man's origins is widely disputed," Sinews went on. Once more, he paused to take a drag of his cigarette, inhaling with pleasure and puffing out a tight ring of smoke. "Tell me, Mr. O, what do you know about zombies?" he asked.

Jonathan shook his head. He wasn't familiar with the word.

"There were stories of men being raised from the dead by bokors--vodou priests reputed to have the god-given power to perform miracles. Like Jesus raising Lazarus, these priests claimed to be able to raise the dead. There were some stories of men who, having succumbed to some sudden illness or another, were buried, only to be seen weeks later working on a farm with no recollection of their former lives. The word zombie was given to these resurrected men."

"And what does this have to do with Anthony Tidkins?" Jonathan asked.

Sinews grinned. "Everything," he said. "A number of scientists, having heard of these so-called zombies, visited Haiti to investigate. Most of them reported that the supposedly resurrected men hadn't been dead at all. You see, the bokors were deceiving people to earn free labourers and gain fear and respect from the other villagers. In each case, the zombie had been poisoned with what turned out to be some compound derived mostly from some toxins found in pufferfish. This poison rendered the men temporarily paralyzed and gave them a death-like pallor. After the man was pronounced dead and buried, the fraudulent bokor would dig up the body, and the man would gradually regain consciousness, but not without damage to his mind and memory. These zombies were the ideal labourers, their brains slow and susceptible to suggestion. They had no memories of their former lives, so they believed they had no home to go back to. They were therefore entirely amenable to labouring on the bokor's farm, or being sold into slavery to the profit of the bokor. I mentioned earlier that this is what the scientists reported in most cases. There was, however, one scientist who found something different."

"Anthony Tidkins?" Jonathan guessed.

"Indeed," said Sinews. "Anthony Tidkins believed he had discovered another version of these zombies, their condition brought about not by some pufferfish toxin, but by a disease. He made it his life's work, studying these zombies and their strange affliction. Eventually, he returned to London and began to publish some of his findings, naming the affliction the Lazarus Virus and aiming to replicate it. At first, he was ridiculed by the scientific community. Then, he was invited to join the Murder Club, where he found support for his ideas. He published a few more papers, which were again shut down by critics as ridiculous. Apparently, he decided he could prove them wrong. Thus began his series of experiments."

"The murders, you mean," said Jonathan.

Sinews nodded. "He believed he could only revive a freshly killed subject."

"But he failed, ultimately, didn't he?" asked Jonathan. "His subjects didn't actually come back to life?"

"Nevertheless, Tidkins remained convinced he could raise the dead, so he kept on trying. Do you know how our mutual friend connected the murderer to the Resurrectionists?" asked Sinews, swallowing the last of his absinthe.

Jonathan shook his head. Roderick had earned some amount of fame for his revelation. Naming Anthony Tidkins, the Resurrection Man as the murderer--even if they had only a pseudonym to go on--had been the biggest breakthrough in the case so far, and it had forced the Resurrectionists to shut down the old Murder Club that Sinews had mentioned, and to go deeper underground. Since then, the murders had stopped, and the Resurrectionists hadn't been heard from since--until Lord Connor's masquerade, of course.

But while Jonathan knew of Roderick's breakthrough, he never knew how Roderick had made the connection. Jonathan was beginning to see why Roderick had sent him here; as promised, Sinews was proving to be extremely knowledgeable when it came to the Resurrectionists.

"It was a simple thing, as it turned out. Tidkins' experiments were funded by our own military. His name--well, his pseudonym--was signed to his grant application. Mr. Steen had the brilliant idea to go through grant and patent applications for any signs of the Resurrectionists; after all, they were scientists, and experimentation can be quite expensive. It stood to reason that they might have applied for sponsorship. The experiments described in the grant application were not so different from the murders, which in turn aligned with Tidkins' accounts of the zombification process described in his published papers. Of course, the approved grant application stipulated that Tidkins was meant to have used willing participants."

Jonathan looked at Sinews in surprise. "Willing participants? Who would consent to such experimentation?"

"Exactly!" Sinews exclaimed, tapping out his cigarette into an ash tray. "You're asking all the right questions. Yes, who indeed? And of course, if the Resurrection Man's experiments lacked scientific basis, why would he have received funding?"

"You believe there was some actual credibility to his claims?" Jonathan asked, smothering his own cigarette butt in the ash tray.

"The military certainly believed so," Sinews answered dismissively. "And imagine how our army might benefit from Tidkins' work, if his experiments proved fruitful. If the British military could raise the dead, we would be undefeatable. Not only that, but we could wage wars without needing to risk even a single life. Even so, the experiments would not have been sanctioned without evidence to suggest Tidkins might actually be successful."

This was all news to Jonathan. It was unsettling to know that the military had actually approved of Tidkins' work. Of course, they couldn't have known just how Tidkins had planned to conduct his experiments. Could they? Was it possible that the military had been turning a blind eye to his murders, so long as he wasn't caught? After all, they must have known he would never have been able to find willing participants to his brutal experiments.

Lighting a new cigarette, Sinews continued his explanation.

"Tidkins had an assistant, a man to bring him subjects, an Irish Giant, who stood at over eight feet tall according to the penny bloods. They called him Mr. Hyde. He would bring Tidkins fresh bodies, and Tidkins would conduct his experiments in a vain attempt to bring them back to life. Eventually, the body count began to stack up. Hundreds of subjects died to the Resurrection Man's experiments. Quickly, the military cut off his funding, and when Tidkins name came to light thanks to Mr. Steen's efforts, the military denied any knowledge of Tidkins' experiments. Given their association with Tidkins, the Resurrectionists either went deep into hiding or disbanded altogether. At any rate, they haven't been seen since."

Jonathan thought of Lord Connor, and the scrap of paper he'd found in his father's fireplace. Lord Connor is Francis Varney? Jonathan considered, briefly, showing it Sinews, but decided against it. He still didn't trust the man.

"Until tonight," Jonathan said.

"What do you mean?" demanded Sinews. For the first time, Sinews seemed rattled.

"I had reason to believe that Lord Connor was a Resurrectionist. He used the alias Francis Varney," Jonathan told him, leaving out how he'd made that discovery. "I was writing a paper--"

"For your father's journal," Sinews said, cutting him off.

"My father?" Jonathan stammered.

"Yes. Charles Grimmer," Sinews said, his tone suddenly altered. "I know who you are, Jonathan."

Jonathan stared at him in alarm. How in the hell did he know that? Roderick had written Mr. O on the card. Jonathan was unsettled. He almost got out of his seat, but tried to keep his composure. But suddenly he realised what a fool he had been. Sinews' knowledge of the Resurrectionists was beyond extensive, his home showed a deviant interest in death and resurrection--Hades, the orouboros, Anubis and Osiris--and his acquaintanceship with the frightful Haitian, Henry Charles Ocelot. He looked at Mr. Ocelot and couldn't help but think of Sinews' description of vodou priests. His hand drifted to the pistol at his belt, hidden beneath his vest.

"My father died," he said coldly. "In a tragic accident."

"An accident?" asked Sinews, meaningfully.

"What does that mean?"

"Your father had made a study of the Resurrectionists; after all, the Resurrection Man must have sold a lot of newspapers. He could probably have been considered an expert, don't you think? Then suddenly, he turns up dead. And now, you come here saying they have surfaced again."

"You think the Resurrectionists had something to do with my father's death?"

"Perhaps your father learned something about them that they didn't want to come to light. Now, tell me, what did you mean when you said they had resurfaced?"

Jonathan hesitated.

"I know what you're thinking," said Sinews, "But I assure you, I am not the Resurrection Man. Look around you, Mr. Grimmer. If I were the Resurrection Man, do you think I would have had to apply for funding from the military?"

Jonathan shook his head. No, of course not. He didn't say so aloud, nor did he let his guard down. Perhaps Sinews was not Anthony Tidkins. That didn't mean he was not a Resurrectionist. It certainly didn't mean Jonathan had to trust him.

"Lord Connor died last night in his own home. He was sick. He attacked someone, and wound up shot dead. But the Resurrectionists were there."

Sinews stood up, looking pale.

"Did you see them?" Mr. Sinews demanded in a tone of startling urgency.

Jonathan nodded. "I did. In fact, I believe I met one of them, a man called Solomon Grundy."

"Born on a Monday," Sinews muttered.

"Beg your pardon?"

"It's a nursery rhyme," Sinews explained. "Solomon Grundy, born on a Monday, christened on Tuesday, married on Wednesday, took ill on Thursday, grew worse on Friday, died on Saturday, buried on Sunday. That was the end of Solomon Grundy."

"I thought the Resurrectionists took their names from penny dreadfuls?"

"There was a penny story based on the rhyme. I'm sorry, Mr. Grimmer, but if the Resurrectionists were at Connor's last night, I need to check up on somebody. My fiancée attended Connor's ball last night."

Jonathan stood up too, surprised by this development for a number of reasons. First, because he was suddenly less convinced that Sinews was a Resurrectionist. His concern seemed legitimate, which meant that he couldn't have known the Resurrectionists had been at Connor's. Second, because Sinews hardly seemed the marrying type. He ventured to say so.

"Your fiancée?" he said simply.

Apparently taking no offence, Sinews answered with good humour, though he was still clearly troubled by Jonathan's news. "Love changes a man. Unfortunately, I have succumbed to its effects."

"Unfortunately?" Jonathan repeated.

"I'm all for romance," Sinews told him, even as he strode through his hall towards his coat room, Henry Charles Ocelot and Jonathan in his wake. "But I am firmly against love. Love makes moths of us all. We are all drawn to its flames."

A curious outlook. They passed through the opium den where the drug users looked up expectantly at Mr. Sinews, who swept past them, paying them no attention. Jonathan felt a pang of guilt as he walked past, keeping pace with Sinews, who paused in the next room.

"You think your fiancée may be in danger, simply because the Resurrectionists were there? Are they all as dangerous as Anthony Tidkins?"

Sinews shook his head. "They weren't always. At one point, they were nothing more than a gentleman's club with an interest in science. But since Tidkins joined them, their interests began to align with his, their own pursuits forgotten in favour of bringing the dead back to life. They called their endeavour the Dead London Project. They believed they needed more test subjects in order to test Tidkins' theories. They seemed to believe that if they could find a way to distribute the Lazarus Virus throughout London, with over a million people in this city, they might at last be able to bring the dead to life. After Mr. Steen outed Tidkins as a Resurrectionist, I believed they had given up. It seems I was wrong; they hadn't given up. They were merely hiding. If they've made a public return, it can only mean one thing."

"And what's that?" Jonathan asked.

Without his usual sardonic smile, without any hint of humour, Sinews replied. "They mean to begin the Dead London Project."

He turned to Mr. Ocelot, as Jonathan gaped at him in stunned silence.

"If you could show Mr. Grimmer the door?" said Sinews, turning and heading down another hallway. "Good night, Mr. Grimmer. It has been a pleasure."

Chapter Nine

Chapter 9

Annabel stifled a cough as she marched up the walkway to the door of the gentleman's club. She had a membership here, under the assumed name of Mr. Monday, so it was convenient that she was already dressed in masculine garb. She'd been half tempted to head straight home, change out of her blood-stained clothes, and climb into bed. Instead, she had decided to pay a call on the gentleman--if gentleman was the appropriate word--who'd informed her of a potential buyer for a mysterious package, inconveniently located in Lord Connor's safe.

At the time, he'd made no mention of who the buyer was. Of course, she'd since learned that they were Resurrectionists. She wanted to know if Melbourne had known the danger he'd put her in by setting her up with such an unpredictable buyer, or if he'd made the arrangements with good intentions. If he was as surprised as she'd been by what the Resurrectionists had done, perhaps he could be forgiven, provided he was more cautious in the future. On the other hand, if he had known they intended to rob her, or if he'd known what she was stealing, she would have to have strong words with him. Very strong words indeed.

Annabel had taken the underground railway to Chancery Lane Station. It was only a few blocks from the station to the gentleman's club. She now stepped up to the premises and rapped firmly upon the door. It creaked open, its rusty hinges yielding to the force of her right hand. She stepped back in surprise. Cautiously, she put her head through the doorway and peered inside. It was dark, but that was not unusual for the Melbourne Club, its tables lit by oil lamps. But it was quiet, which was unsettling.

Typically loud with the gossiping voices of gentlemen and the clack of billiards, the Melbourne Club was now as quiet as the grave, its door unmanned and unlocked. The door still swung easily on its hinges as Annabel stepped inside and surveyed the club's dimly lit quarters.

It was not entirely deserted after all. Standing behind the bar, a rictus grin on his stiff face, was the very man she'd wanted to see. Bertram Melbourne.

"Bertie," she said familiarly, approaching him warily. She could see, even in the dim light, that something was gravely wrong.

He inclined his head at the sound of her voice, but his movements were unnatural. She stepped back in a panic, drawing her pistol, but he made no further movement toward her. When her heart settled, she turned to the nearest table, reached for the oil lamp, and adjusted the dial until it brightened.

The sudden illumination revealed the gruesome horror that had been hidden in the darkness. Annabel covered her mouth with her hand and repressed the urge to let out a scream. Melbourne had been disemboweled. With surgical precision, his gut had been cut open. Around the opening, a porthole, like that on a steamship, had somehow been affixed to his flesh like a window into the man's insides. Hollowed like a jack o' lantern, Melbourne's insides had been stuffed with clockwork parts, which ticked behind a pane of glass.

No stranger to the fusion of flesh and machinery, Annabel's eyes were not drawn to Melbourne's clockwork stomach, but to his face. The blood had dried, but that made it no less gruesome. His eyes had been plucked out. The sockets were stuffed with black marbles. Black feathers had been stuck to his skin with a sticky resin. His nose and mouth were hidden beneath a beak made of brass. Gears were affixed to the joints of the beak.

She thought immediately of the Resurrectionists and their plague masks. When Annabel was a little girl, an orphan on the streets, stealing from men's pockets, one of her victims had been a rich gentleman.

Although she'd gotten away with his coin purse, she had the distinct feeling he'd let her get away. The next time she met him, he'd come to her rescue, after she'd been caught red-handed stealing. After that, they'd become thick as, well, thieves. In fact, there was a time when Annabel had thought of him as her brother.

He had often worn an old, weathered plague mask. At the time, she didn't know what the mask was for. Now that she did, she felt sickened by the memory.

Not that Annabel was squeamish. Of course, she did feel a healthy amount of nausea at the sight of Melbourne's disfigurement, but her curiosity overpowered any sense of discomfort.

While Connor had been a zombie, Melbourne was definitely dead. He couldn't harm her. His legs were affixed to the floor, pinned in place by metal stakes, meant to keep him upright after death.

She noticed he had a set of clockwork gears affixed to his face. She wondered if the gears did anything. After all, what was the point in clockwork if not to operate some kind of machine? Annabel reached up, put her hands on the gears attached to Melbourne's brass beak. The gears wouldn't turn. Her brow creased. She leaned in for a closer look, and saw that there was a keyhole. If there was a keyhole, there had to be a key.

I wonder, she thought, drawing the brass key she wore around her neck. She almost chided herself even for thinking it, ridiculous as it seemed, but she decided there was no harm in trying. She slid the key into the lock; it was a perfect fit.

She had little time to consider what this meant, as the gears rotated, and Melbourne's crow-like mouth opened. But a thought did occur to her. It was a notion she'd been trying to avoid, but the evidence was damning. Anthony Tidkins, the Resurrection Man, who had turned Melbourne into an automaton, must have been the same man who'd given Annabel her mechanical eye all those years ago. Otherwise, how would he have designed the keyhole as a perfect match of the key she kept around her neck?

A recording began to play. It began with the sound of a crow cawing. This was the first time Annabel had been witness to the marvel of auditory recording technology. There must have been a tiny phonograph, hidden somewhere within the brass mouth.

The crow sounds gave way to a man's voice. It was impossible to discern whose voice it was, given the quality of the recording. It was tinny, thin, without any weight to it.

"The angels, not half so happy in heaven, went envying her and me. Yes, that was the reason, as all men know, in this kingdom by the sea, that the wind came out of the cloud by night, chilling and killing my Annabel Lee."

She shrunk back, startled by the message's use of her own name. Annabel was hardly a student of poetry, but she was familiar enough with that verse, about the death of a beautiful woman. The message was clear; it was a warning.

The wind came out of the cloud, she thought. The Lazarus virus had been an airborne cloud, chilling and killing Lord Connor's guests. Annabel had only just escaped that fate.

Annabel hadn't wanted to admit it, but she kept coming back to the same horrific conclusion. She knew who the Resurrection Man was.

#

Detective Taggert guided Roderick through Lord Connor's house. Roderick took in the scene without saying much, simply observing the state of the bodies, trying to put names to some of the faces. Roderick was good with names, and read all the society papers. He recognized a good number of the faces, having once seen their engravings in print.

"And Lord Connor? Where is he?"

Taggert looked at him in mild surprise. He looked around, as if he might suddenly discover the man's body among the others. It seemed that Taggert hadn't even thought to look for the man of the house. To be fair, the detective did have a lot on his plate.

"This was his party. He must be here somewhere," said Roderick. "Have you been through Connor's private apartments yet?"

Taggert admitted that he hadn't, and gestured for a party of officers to join him. With Roderick trailing behind them, they marched upstairs. They found the gate to Connor's private quarters unlocked and opened. They headed through it, each of the policemen opening doors along the side and peering in. Each of the rooms upstairs proved empty, with no sign that anyone had been there, until they reached Connor's study.

The policemen shared a look of alarm from the very moment they approached the door. It appeared to have been kicked in. The policemen entered the room first.

Detective Taggert held the door open for Roderick to enter. Roderick had a certain way of entering a room. The bare feet and foppish attire tended to draw attention, but it was really his ego that drew attention. He was, after all, a famous artist, and carried himself accordingly. He couldn't help but be dramatic.

His eyes swept the room, taking in every detail; even the movement of his eyes was a performance. He stripped off his gloves, fished into his pockets and retrieved a piece of soft candy. He shoved the toffee into his mouth and chewed thoughtfully. The officers looked at him in bewilderment; not all of the police were accustomed to Roderick's eccentricities.

He handed the candy wrapper to a nearby policeman, who seemed at a loss as to what to do with it. He turned to Connor's desk, perused the stack of papers atop it, pulled open the drawers, slammed them shut.

Of Connor's body, there was no sign. So far, the intelligence Jonathan had provided had been outdated, which meant that quite a lot had happened here after Jonathan's timely departure. Connor's body, of course, had been in this room when Jonathan left it. It should have been there still. But Roderick couldn't admit this knowledge to the police without giving away the fact that his friend had been here. He had to come up with the knowledge on his own.

It was a bit like being asked to show one's work for a math problem after solving the equation in one's head. It was also the opposite of the way Roderick usually worked; he had to work backwards, knowing that Connor's body had been moved, and appear to come to the same conclusion based on the evidence around him. Unfortunately, the evidence was slim. Best to simply throw himself into it with all that he had, he decided.

"Connor died in this room," he proclaimed. "His body must have been moved, probably by the Resurrectionists, perhaps by the Resurrection Man himself."

Roderick chuckled nervously once he realized that all eyes were suddenly on him.

Drawing him aside, Taggert said under his breath, "Don't you think you're leaping to conclusions? We don't have a body. There's no way you could know that Connor died here, let alone that he was even in the room during the party."

"Perhaps you're right," Roderick said loudly, for the benefit of the other policemen. Roderick was not to be deterred, and he worked better under pressure. "In the absence of a body, I shall defer to the other clues."

"Which are, what precisely?" asked one of the policemen.

Roderick let out an exaggerated sigh.

"Is yours a practiced stupidity, or does it come naturally to you?" he asked. "Very well then. The clues. First, there is the handle of the door, which as I'm sure you noticed, had a crimson stain on the handle. On its own, this might be considered quite innocuous; it could be wine or paint, but given that a massacre occurred in this house this very evening, it does seem a bit ominous, doesn't it?"

The policemen, Taggert included, shifted their focus to the bloodstained door. They took in the splintered wood and the loose hinges.

"There is also the fact that the door has been kicked in--you can't have failed to notice that. Either the killer broke in to Connor's study, or the killer himself was intruded upon while finishing up his work. This seems most likely, as the killer went out the window."

The police officers turn to the window, then back to Roderick for an explanation: there seemed little to indicate that someone had gone out the window. Roderick glanced at the window, wondering if he'd just put his foot in his mouth. After all, he hadn't actually found a clue to back up his version of events. He knew someone had gone out the window, because Jonathan had told him so. He went to the window, and looking it over, improvised.

"The window was opened in a hurry, as any schoolboy could surely tell you. Note the deep grooves in the wood, here. Also consider that it is very chilly this evening. Why would Lord Connor have been working in his study with the window open on such a cold evening?"

The police gaped at Roderick in stupefied silence, their mouths opening and shutting like goldfish.

"Sometimes it is the most innocuous clues that are most telling," he said to divert them from how very silly his so-called evidence was. Before they had a chance to consider, he soldiered on.

"Next, there is the bullet hole in the ceiling," Roderick said. Perhaps he should have begun with that one and left out the bit about the window entirely. The policemen, for their part, seemed very impressed by the bullet hole. He decided, therefore, to focus on that detail. "If Connor's guests were murdered with poisonous gas, then why is there a bullet hole in the carpet, and why is his body not among the others? It stands to reason that Connor was not killed in the same manner as his guests."

Taggert was twirling his moustache, a habit that Roderick was having difficulty ignoring. Roderick turned away in order to regain his concentration. He wasn't sure what to make of this evidence, but just talking about the clues aloud had gotten his brain into gear.

"Why were Connor's guests murdered?" he asked rhetorically, thinking aloud. "Was it an attack on the upper class? Or was there a single target, the rest merely collateral damage? Is it possible that the masqueraders were murdered only to cover up another murder?"

Taggert said nothing, but he seemed to be following along well enough. He was nodding thoughtfully, even though Roderick was talking at a dizzying pace.

"There is also the fact that the desk has been moved," Roderick went on. "Note the indentation on the carpet, left by the legs of the desk. We can easily deduce that the desk was moved, likely during a struggle, either between Connor and his killer, or between the killer and whoever broke down the door. Later, the desk was moved back, but it sat there long enough to indent the carpet. The fact that it was moved back seems to suggest that somebody went to some amount of trouble to cover up the evidence. The Resurrection Man has never covered up evidence before, so we can deduce that he did not work alone."

Roderick paused to reflect on this. It was a revelation to him as well. Sometimes he seemed to speak more quickly than he could think, and occasionally, he managed to surprise even himself with his deductions.

"Here, the carpet is damp. You might not have noticed it, which I suppose can be forgiven, as you're all quite strangely wearing shoes," he said, regarding their footwear with suspicion. "But I assure you, it is quite damp; somebody did a rather remarkable job of washing the blood out of the carpet, but it has not yet completely dried, and it still smells musty, stale, but with a trace of iron. It might not be blood, but what else has that telltale metallic scent? Of course, perhaps the most revealing clue is that Connor's safe has been robbed."

For a moment, nobody spoke. The policemen looked about the room, dumb expressions on their faces. One of the officers stooped over and touched the carpet. He put his nose close to it and sniffed. He nodded, confirming that the carpet was damp and had the blood-like smell of copper.

"His safe?" asked an officer with a distinctive and thoroughly waxed moustache.

"Yes," said Mr. Steen, "You failed to notice that as well."

It wasn't a question. The policemen looked about the room, all of them refusing to meet Mr. Steen's eyes. Silence reigned. Finally, Roderick pointed it out.

"That's a tea trolley," Mr. Taggert protested.

"Oh, really? In that case, assam."

Taggert snorted. He marched across the room to the trolley. Which is when he realised that it wasn't a tea trolley at all. Beneath the cart, a locked box had been worked into the design of the furniture. The door was cracked open.

"Eat your words, Mr. Taggert," said Roderick. A triumphant grin curled up on his face, enjoying the detective's reaction.

"Gloating does not become you, Mr. Steen," Taggert said flatly.

Roderick puffed up his chest. It was true, besting Taggert in a battle of wits was a bit like beating an infant at chess, but Roderick was nothing if not fickle.

Taggert stooped over and pulled the door open. Within the box, a large, steel safe was concealed. Its door too, was cracked open. He swung the door the rest of the way open and peered inside. Empty.

"I don't suppose you know what was in the safe?" asked Mr. Taggert.

"How would I possibly know that?" asked Mr. Steen, incredulous. "I'm not a psychic."

"Please," said Taggert. "Focus, Mr. Steen. I believe we're just beginning to form a picture of what happened here. Just tell us what you think happened here."

"Very well," said Roderick. He broke off as an awful sound cut through the silence of the household. The sound of screaming.

Roderick looked down at the floor, then exchanged a look with the detective. The sound was coming from downstairs. The screams continued, and were joined by the sound of a loud bang and the shattering of glass, as if a very heavy piece of furniture had been knocked over.

They heard footsteps pounding up the staircase. Taggert went to the door, as somebody called out his name. A young officer appeared in the hallway, clutching his neck as if wounded. Taggert stepped aside to let him into Connor's study.

"The dead," he stammered, "The dead..."

"Spit it out, boy," Taggert commanded. "What's going on down there?"

The injured officer looked up at the detective, his face pale.

"The dead are waking up."

With that, he collapsed. As soon as he let go of his wounded neck, a thick puddle of blood spilled onto the floor.

Roderick stepped back, not wanting to get blood on his feet. He stared at the young man in alarm. The back of the young man's neck had been ripped open and there were what looked like tooth marks in his flesh.

#

Jonathan stepped out into the rain. He had no umbrella to unfurl, as he hadn't been expecting rain when he'd headed out. Of course, in London, he should have been constantly prepared for inclement weather. He scanned the sky for his ride home, but it was difficult to see in the rain and darkness. He thought he saw a light flickering from above, its light refracted by the falling raindrops and the mist rising off the cobbles. It might have been the Penny Dreadful's lanterns, but he wasn't sure. He supposed he could always hire a carriage, but he figured he'd try signaling the ship first. Although the crew was expecting a night off, the captain had told him to send a signal if the airship was needed after all. With this weather, though, Jonathan didn't know how visible the flare would be. If the ship was circling nearby somewhere, the crew might happen to see it; otherwise, they might not.

He made his way to the gate and pushed it open, hoping for a clearer view from the street. Jonathan could barely see his own two feet as the rain began to fall in earnest.

Before he had a chance to fire the flare, a deep, low voice resonated through the fog from behind him.

"Mr. Grimmer."

It was Henry Charles Ocelot. Jonathan spun around to face him and was surprised to see the man's face so close to his own.

"Mr. Ocelot," said Jonathan, having to speak up to be heard against the noise of falling rain and crashing thunder.

"Sorry if I startled you, Mr. Grimmer," the large man replied.

"Shouldn't you be seeing to your employer?" Jonathan asked, unsettled by the large man's presence.

"This will only take a moment," he said, opening an umbrella. He gestured for Jonathan to take it. Jonathan accepted it, though his gratitude was tempered with suspicion. "I saw that you were concerned about the people in Mr. Sinews' den. You seem like a good man, Mr. Grimmer. But don't concern yourself over their fates."

Jonathan looked up at him, swallowing a knot that was forming in his throat. "Are you threatening me, Mr. Ocelot?" he asked, more timidly than he'd intended.

To his surprise, Ocelot let out a laugh. He grinned, and it was a surprisingly warm smile. Jonathan had always been good at reading people; perhaps this was something that had passed on to him from his father. But he was starting to wonder if he'd misread Henry Charles Ocelot. He stared at the man curiously.

"No, Mr. Grimmer. I'm not threatening you. I'm only trying to tell you that you may have gotten the wrong impression of my employer. Things, with him, are not quite what they seem."

Jonathan shook his head. He could see that Ocelot truly believed that. He saw only the best of Sinews' qualities. To Mr. Sinews' credit, he was undeniably intelligent, and he had been more than willing to help Jonathan, which Jonathan did appreciate. But that didn't mean Sinews was a good man.

"I think that things are exactly as they seem, Mr. Ocelot. I can see why you would want to defend him. He was very helpful, however. I am not ungrateful. As a measure of my appreciation, I won't look into Mr. Sinews' opium den. I have more pressing matters on my plate as it is."

Ocelot said nothing, but Jonathan could see that he was deep in thought. After a while, the rain beginning to soak through his coat, he continued.

"Think what you will of Mr. Sinews," he said. "My employer may be a great resource to you," he said. "I wasn't threatening you. I was offering you his services. If you wish to call upon Mr. Sinews again, you are welcome to do so. He may continue to be useful to you. He is obsessive, utterly addicted to the grotesqueness of the Resurrectionists's activities, Anthony Tidkins in particular. He followed the Ripper case with similar interest. The case of Dr. Palmer. Burke and Hare."

Jonathan blinked at that. How could Sinews have followed the Burke and Hare case? It was well before his time. That would have put Sinews at over seventy years of age.

"He has a difficult personality, I know," Ocelot continued, heedless of Jonathan's confusion. "To say that he has unsavory interests could be considered a vast understatement. I have known him for many years, however. You can trust him."

Jonathan remained unconvinced.

"How do I know I can trust you, Mr. Ocelot?"

"What do your instincts tell you?" Mr. Ocelot asked him.

Jonathan had to admit, there was something about Ocelot's warm demeanor that made him want to trust the man, though his appearance was frightening, and his association with Parson Sinews was damning.

"When your world is crumbling around you, you should trust your own instincts. But if you really want my advice, Mr. Grimmer..." Ocelot trailed off. He was looking in the opposite direction.

"Yes?"

"Someone's coming," he said. "Quickly."

Ocelot grabbed Jonathan's arm, and roughly dragged him from the sidewalk to the adjacent alleyway. They hid beneath a tall tree, and Jonathan watched in breathless silence as a procession of black carriages drove into sight and rolled to a stop in front of the house. The passengers began to climb out of the carts, wearing bobby hats and brandishing truncheons. They surrounded the house just as its front door opened.

"What's going on?" Jonathan whispered.

They must have been looking for him, he thought. They probably wanted to question him about the events at Lord Connor's masquerade. How had they found him here? It didn't even occur to him that Roderick might have given the police his whereabouts. Perhaps they'd spotted the Penny Dreadful and followed it. He scanned the sky again for any sign of it, but still couldn't see it.

"Quiet," Ocelot whispered back.

"Mr. Sinews," they heard the police officer call. "Or do you prefer your alias? Anthony Tidkins."

Jonathan's heart pounded, worried the police would spot them despite their hiding spot. At least the police weren't here for him.

He couldn't make out Sinews' reply from where he stood. Thunder continued to crash, and rain hammered down on the cobblestone, as cacophonous as a rushing river.

"You are under arrest for the murder of Lord Henry Connor," said the police officer loudly. His voice resonated, even against the noise of the storm.

Jonathan watched in stunned silence as the policemen surrounded Parson Sinews, drawing their guns and aiming them at Sinews.

Chapter Ten

Chapter 10

Roderick hated to get blood on his feet, but he put his discomfort aside and stepped forward to put his fingers on the fallen policeman's neck. He felt for a pulse.

"He seems quite dead," Roderick announced.

"God!" said Taggert, "Nichols...he was just a boy, really."

Roderick thought of what the man had said before he died. From downstairs Roderick could hear voices. Inhuman moans, which resonated through the floorboards.

"The dead are waking up," he repeated the dead policeman's words. "It seems evident that the dead were not dead at all. Merely unconscious."

"What?" exclaimed Taggert, not following. "Never mind. What could have done this to him?"

"The recently awoken dead, I'd wager. You said that our witness saw the Resurrectionists spreading poison gas, which seemed to kill its victims in a matter of minutes."

Taggert nodded. "Seemed to?"

"Unless you believe they are the resurrected dead. No, I think it more likely that those who inhaled the gas did not actually die; they became sick. This sickness caused paralysis, rendered them unconscious, and brought on a death-like state that looked rather convincing."

He glanced down at the police officer whose neck had been torn out, quickly forming a hypothesis.

"When they woke up, they were no longer themselves. This sickness--whatever it is--seems to cause abnormally aggressive behaviour. Well, it did so in at least one of the afflicted, I should say."

"Whoever attacked Nichols, you mean?" Taggert asked.

Roderick nodded.

"Let us assume for now that this condition affects everyone equally, however, and shut the door," he said, looking at the wounds in Taggert's neck with worry. "If my assumption is correct, we may be in imminent danger."

Roderick could hear footsteps now, amidst the sound of moaning voices. The sounds gradually drew closer, up the stairs. Roderick could smell the rotten stench of this sickness, growing stronger as the sick approached.

"Quickly now. A barricade!" Roderick shouted, spurring the policemen into action.

As the door had been kicked in and it had not yet been repaired, it would not shut properly. Furthermore, it had no lock. The best they could do was to build a makeshift blockade, by dragging furniture into the doorway. They had to move the fallen officer's body out of the way. Some of the officers had fallen into a stunned silence; evidently the death of the officer was shocking. As for Roderick, he could hardly care less. There was a much more pressing concern.

Already, the sick were banging on the door, even as Roderick and the detectives slid the furniture into the doorway. The infected were surprisingly strong, given their condition, and Roderick feared the door would not hold.

"What now?" asked Roderick.

Taggert looked at him with astonishment.

"You tell me!" he exclaimed. "You're the genius, aren't you?"

Roderick's eyes went wide.

"I'm an artist!" he cried. "You're a policeman."

Taggert didn't argue. Neither did he offer a suggestion of their next move, but continued to look to Roderick.

"I may be educated, observant, and incredibly well dressed, but that hardly means I'm the one to turn to in a crisis!" He swallowed. "Then again, being pragmatic, better to trust myself to get us out of this than you lot."

Taggert snorted. For a moment, he looked like he was forming a retort, but apparently he thought better of it.

"Ammunition," Roderick said, suddenly energized as he assessed the situation aloud. "How much do we have between us?"

"Ammunition?"

"What do you do with rabid dogs, Mr. Taggert?"

"Put them down," Taggert replied, stammering, "But these aren't dogs."

The door rattled fiercely, drowning out Roderick's reply. The wood began to splinter as the sick began to pry apart the door, seizing hold of its weak point where it had already been kicked in. The makeshift barricade began to shake as the door banged against it.

Roderick bent down next to the fallen policeman and began to loot through his pockets.

"What are you doing?" said the officer with the distinctive moustache.

Roderick withdrew a revolver and a fistful of bullets. He loaded the chamber as reply. The officer nodded. At least, thought Roderick, one pragmatist amongst them.

"They might as well be dogs," said Roderick. "They tore open the throat of your fellow officer, and I imagine they'll do the same to you given half the chance. We don't know what sickness afflicts them, or if a cure exists, but I'm afraid we won't have a chance to find out if we don't defend ourselves."

Taggert had been edging closer to the door, trying to peer through the cracks and to see what loomed on the other side. He jumped back suddenly.

"This door won't hold," he said.

"No," said Roderick. "Be ready. When the door comes crashing down, you mustn't hesitate."

"Roderick!" Taggert exclaimed, interrupting him.

Roderick whirled around. Nichols, the wounded officer, had already awoken. The sickness had taken him, and he was inches from Roderick, his mouth open, moaning hungrily. Already, he seemed transformed by the sickness, no longer human, stinking like something rotten, moving with a clumsy, lumbering gait.

Roderick stumbled back.

"Shoot him!" he cried.

The officers hesitated to shoot one of their own.

"For god's sake!" Roderick shouted, drawing his own weapon, and firing it at him.

Nichols stumbled backward, then a moment later, regained his stride. Roderick shot him again, twice, in the chest. Nichols' step faltered with the impact of the bullets. But only for a moment. Then he resumed his pace, staggering towards Roderick as if the bullets through his heart were no more irritating than the buzzing of a fly.

#

"You think I'll make it so easy for you?" Parson Sinews shouted back.

The sleet and fog blurred Jonathan's vision. He couldn't be entirely sure what he was seeing, but Sinews was a blur of motion, in one place one moment, in another the next. The policemen opened fire, the gunshots echoing along the empty street, but Sinews was too quick.

Jonathan's breath escaped him as a policeman flew ten feet into the air and landed hard upon the pavement, unmoving. He hadn't even seen Sinews hit him, but he must have been hit hard.

Another officer cried out, and a cloud of blood shot out of his neck like perfume from a bottle. His body fell to the gutter, and Sinews practically flew from him to the next man, a blur of motion and surgical precision. More blood hit the gutter. Necks snapped.

Jonathan remembered what Sinews had said about the absinthe: if he thought that absinthe didn't cause hallucinations, he was drinking the wrong kind of absinthe. Was he hallucinating? Sinews seemed to be everywhere at once, a trail of ghost images where he had been a tenth of a second before.

There were bullets flying, and as fast as Sinews appeared to be, even he couldn't outpace bullets.

Blood painted the street crimson, and suddenly, there was Parson Sinews again, no longer a blur of motion. Just a crumpled form on the ground, heavily wounded. Drenched in his own blood, Jonathan could hear him laughing, and suddenly he was sure he was hallucinating.

Sinews carried on laughing, even as the remaining policemen cuffed Sinews and carted him off into a black maria. In a few moments, they had rounded up their dead and wounded and were off again.

The street was empty, save for Jonathan and Mr. Ocelot. Stunned into silence by what he'd just witnessed, he wandered out of his hiding place and came to a halt on the sidewalk. Blood ran along the cobbles, the rain washing the streets clean, red lines spreading out like veins. In a matter of moments, the street was washed clean, and any evidence of what had just happened was gone.

"You still think your friend is innocent?" Jonathan asked. His version of events might have been colored by hallucinations, but he was sure that Sinews had indeed been arrested.

Ocelot's massive shoulders heaved in a sigh, confirming this.

"Believe it or not, Mr. Grimmer," he said. "Yes. I do still believe Mr. Sinews is innocent in this."

Chapter Eleven

Chapter 11

Roderick had already fired three of the little six-shooter's bullets. Each bullet had hit its mark, leaving a gaping wound through the policeman's heart. Each bullet should have killed him, but Nichols was already dead. Roderick had checked the man for a pulse and had felt nothing. The man's flesh was already beginning to rot, though he'd been dead only a minute and though he was still walking. Something was keeping Nichols on his toes, but it wasn't blood pumping through his veins.

Roderick stumbled backward as Nichols lunged forward with a staggering gait. Roderick hit the floor, landing hard on his back, while Nichols crawled after him, spittle and drool falling from his rotting lips. Roderick felt a cold hand on his leg, its grasp tight, threatening to tear through the fabric of his trousers and dig into his skin.

The sounds the creature was making were unnatural. Rasping, wheezing, predatory snarls and growls, not quite human, not quite animal. The sound of breath flowing through dead lungs. His teeth snapped, aiming for Roderick's hand. Roderick just barely managed to avoid being bitten.

Suddenly, violently, there was a sickening crunch, the hard hammer of a billy club striking the dead man's skull. It exploded in a spray of rancid blood and brain. The tight grip on Roderick's leg relaxed, and Nichols fell face-first onto Roderick's chest. Roderick yelped.

"Get him off me," he whined, "Get him off! Get him off!"

As Taggert wiped the blood from his baton on his trousers, the other policemen helped Roderick to drag the now unmoving body off him.

"Thank you," he said, addressing the policeman with a moustache, who had offered a hand to help Roderick to his feet. "Detective Inspector," he said to Taggert.

"What is it?"

Roderick was looking at Nichols, his skull caved in by the Inspector's heavy blow to the head, and at the ceiling, a bullet hole in the plaster. He couldn't say this with certainty, but judging from the angle, he believed that whoever shot Lord Connor had been lying on the floor with Connor pinned on top of him. Again, he couldn't be certain, but he imagined Connor had been shot in the head. He looked back to Nichols, contemplating the holes he'd put in the man's chest, which had done nothing at all to stop him. It had taken a blow to the head to put him down, just--he suspected--as it had with Connor.

"I believe I know what happened to Lord Connor," he muttered, almost to himself.

"Roderick?" said Taggert.

"Never mind. Inspector, I've come to understand something about these dogs scratching at our door, and it is imperative that you understand it as well. I was wrong about one thing. They do not merely seem dead. They are dead."

"What?" spluttered the other policeman, a tall, bulky man with greasy black hair and a dark complexion. "How can they be dead if they are still walking? What are they?"

"I'm not sure. Vampires?" Roderick posited.

Then, recalling a conversation he'd once had with Parson Sinews, he thought of another word that seemed to fit. Sinews had once told him a story about the dead being brought back to life by vodou sorcerers. The resurrected dead in Sinews' stories weren't truly dead, but poisoned. Still, the dead outside the door reminded Roderick of them. Mindless husks of their former selves, the dead brought back to life by vodou were called zombies. The dead that were sitting outside, banging at the door without any hint of the civility they'd had in life, they were no different. This affliction had robbed them of their capacity for rational thought.

"No," he said. "Not vampires. Zombies."

He looked at Nichols' unmoving corpse. The bullets he'd put in Nichols' chest hadn't killed him. "Ordinary means may not kill them. Aim for their heads."

"Zombies?" Taggert repeated. Even if he was unfamiliar with the word, he seemed to grasp the way that Roderick had meant it. It was a dehumanizing word. Roderick meant that these men were no longer men, but monsters. Taggert gaped at Roderick, wide-eyed and frightened. "Are you mad, Steen?"

Roderick answered by reloading his pistol and aiming it at the door that was splintering under the pressure of the creatures outside, slamming their bodies and fists against the wall until it threatened to cave in.

"It took all three of us just to deal with one of them," Roderick said, gesturing at the dead policeman. "How many, do you think, are on the other side of that door, Detective?"

"Hundreds."

"I concur. And I think, unless you have some idea of how to deal with this situation, that you had better trust me."

Roderick could understand Taggert's hesitation. This was a political nightmare. The zombies outside had been ministers, barons and baronesses, military figures, all of them Taggert's societal betters. If it turned out that they could have been cured of their affliction and Taggert had killed them, to say that it would be career-ending would be an understatement of vast proportions.

"Your life is at stake," Roderick reminded him.

His words were drowned out as the door finally gave in, the barricade toppled over, and the dead came spilling into the room.

In top hats and cravats, in bustle skirts and corsets, with silk ribbons in their hair and gloves on their hands, a hundred dead aristocrats shuffled forward, spluttering and moaning as they gnashed their quickly rotting teeth.

Roderick opened fire, squinting as he took aim at the closest of them, and put the creature down. A bullet through the skull, the first of the zombies hit the floor. The undead mob kept coming, stumbling over their fallen comrade as Roderick turned to the next closest creature and aimed his gun.

Finally, the policemen understood. At least, so Roderick assumed, as their gunshots joined Roderick's own, and the zombies fell in quick succession. Still, the creatures were pouring through the doorway more quickly than Roderick and the policemen could put them down. Already, Roderick's gun chamber was empty. He fished through his pockets for more bullets, found them, and swung the chamber open.

In those few moments, a dozen more of the dead had hurled themselves over the broken doorway and fallen barricade and tumbled into the room. They crawled, staggered, and shuffled forward. Roderick resumed firing into the crowd but they were coming so quickly now, he barely had time to aim.

He retreated further into the room, backing his way towards the far wall as he emptied his chamber yet again. He reached for more bullets and found that only three remained.

"Inspector!" he shouted, fumbling to reload, "How fares your supply of ammunition?"

He finished reloading and emptied the gun a moment later, the dead landing just a few feet from where he stood. Still, the dead were flooding into the room as if there numbers were unlimited.

The din of gunshots quieted until all that could be heard was the snarling, growling of the shambling dead. Taggert holstered his gun.

"I'm out," he said.

#

Jonathan aimed at the sky and fired the flare. An arc of green light illuminated the clouds, trailing smoke. The sudden burst of bright light was brilliant, like a flash of lightning, but it quickly dissipated.

The police carriages had all gone, and he and Henry Charles Ocelot left the darkness of the alley for the darkness of the street where the flare had landed. The faint glow of Jonathan's flare still lingered, subtly illuminating the sky.

"My offer still stands, Mr. Grimmer. I may not have quite the expertise of Mr. Sinews, but I have picked up a few things regarding the Resurrectionists. Should you ever need anything..."

"Thank you," said Jonathan.

He thought of what Parson Sinews had told him, and felt sick. He thought of his father's death. Jonathan had been told it was an accident, but in light of what he'd just learned, he thought of his father's death with a new outlook.

"Why do you suppose the police believe Mr. Sinews is the Resurrection Man?" Jonathan asked.

Jonathan had narrowed it down to two possibilities. One, that Mr. Sinews really was Anthony Tidkins. The other...

"He was set up," Mr. Ocelot said.

It was true that Sinews hadn't been the one to put a bullet through Connor's skull. That dubious honor went to Mr. Monday. That didn't prove Sinews wasn't Anthony Tidkins, but it did prove that the police couldn't have evidence to support their accusation.

"Given Mr. Sinews' eccentricities and his reputation, it would not have been difficult for the Resurrectionists to blame him for Connor's death," Mr. Ocelot continued. "All it would take was for one of the Resurrectionists to claim they'd seen Sinews at the site of Connor's death."

At last, Jonathan spotted his ship, its hanging lanterns cutting through the heavy rain. Shivering, he waved at the ship with his umbrella, not certain the captain could see him any better than he could see the ship. He kept his eye on it, until it began to descend.

He returned his attention to Mr. Ocelot, and nodded thoughtfully. If he could learn the name of the witness who provided Sinews' name to the police, he might have the name of one of the Resurrectionists.

"I hate to bring up your father's untimely death, but there may have been some truth to Mr. Sinews' suggestion that his death was not an accident. Your father was an expert on the Resurrectionists, and he met his untimely end. Mr. Sinews was an expert as well, and he was neatly disposed of," said Mr. Ocelot.

The airship continued to descend, its propellers whirring noisily, until Captain Merrick's face came into view. He saluted. Jonathan returned the salute, and the aeronaut lowered a rope ladder.

"Be careful, Mr. Grimmer. It seems that anyone who poses a threat to the Resurrectionists is being eliminated."

Jonathan was forced to agree. Since escaping the Resurrectionists, Jonathan had been trying to convince himself that they were no longer after him, that they didn't know who he was. For the first time, he realized that it didn't matter whether or not they were coming after him. He was coming after them. They had killed his father. They were planning to spread a deadly virus throughout the city. There was too much at stake to let them get away with it.

It wasn't just about writing an article for his newspaper any more, either. It was about saving his city. It was about catching his father's killer.

Jonathan also had Roderick to consider. As far as Jonathan knew, Roderick was the leading authority on the Resurrectionists, especially now that Sinews had been arrested. If Ocelot was right and his employer really wasn't Anthony Tidkins, then Roderick was in danger.

#

Taggert had taken to striking with his baton, but not all of the zombies fell to his blows as easily as had Nichols. Not all of the dead had decomposed so quickly as he had.

The rotten ones, their brains bashed in easily enough, beneath Taggert's baton, but the rest had thicker skulls. Roderick could see that Taggert was exhausted already. His officers, having likewise expunged their limited supply of munitions had taken up Taggert's strategy, battering the undead with their batons. Roderick wished for a baton himself. He found a small letter opener among the contents of Connor's desk drawers; it was all he had to defend himself with.

Some of the dead were on their hands and knees, crawling their way forward. These, Roderick dealt with himself, jamming the letter opener into their brittle skulls, or stomping on their heads with his bare feet. Their heads caved in beneath his feet as easily as squashing insects. He felt bile rise up in his throat, but he swallowed it and returned to his gruesome work. Thick blood spilled from the zombies, dark and rotten. Roderick's feet were drenched in the vilest gore, and he worried there might be shards of bone cutting into his skin. He worried this affliction could be passed on through the blood.

Like Taggert, Roderick was quickly becoming exhausted. He couldn't keep this up for long. Soon enough, he'd tire, and when he did, the dead would be on him in an instant. They were slow, clumsy, and easily dispatched with a blow to the head, but they were relentless. And there were hundreds of them.

Roderick didn't know what the dead wanted. Would they eat his flesh, or simply kill him and move on to the next victim? One thing was clear, though; they were intent on hurting him. They wanted to sink their fingernails into his skin or to tear open his throat with their teeth. They lunged at him with their mouths open, swatted at him with their hands, and there was hunger in their otherwise dull eyes.

Finally, an opening presented itself. It was not the opening Roderick would have hoped for, and it took all of his wits for him to see it that way. But it was an opportunity. The gnashing teeth of the dead had found their prey. The tall, dark-haired policeman. Roderick couldn't even remember the man's name, if he had bothered to learn it. Now he was watching the man die.

He let out a piercing scream as his throat opened, gushing blood. In a moment, the rest of the dead had turned their attention to the fallen officer, sticking their hands with such force into him, as to rip his clothes to shreds and tear into his flesh with their nails and their teeth.

Roderick watched, distracted by the horrific scene, as the dead bloodied their lips and pulled lengths of the man's intestines from his body.

Silently, he grabbed Taggert's arm, dragging him away from the scene. Like Roderick, the man had fallen into silence and inaction. At first, he resisted Roderick's attempt to drag him away. He was fixed on the scene. At last, he turned to Roderick, and with wide eyes, nodded.

Taggert turned to the other remaining policeman, and called to him, his voice barely a whisper.

"Hargrave!" he called. The man didn't answer. "Richard!"

At last, Hargrave turned away from the scene, horror written across his face, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"We have got to go," Taggert told him.

Hargrave hesitated.

"Now, Hargrave! Taggert hissed.

Distancing themselves from the dead, the three remaining men backed quietly away, leaving the zombies to their feast, taking advantage of the distraction to let the remaining dead into the room. For the moment, they were invisible. The zombies were blind to all but the dying man, his flesh exposed, his meat quickly being stripped from his bones. They walked past Roderick, Taggert, and Hargrave as if they weren't even there.

Finally, when the dead were no longer crawling through the doorway in droves, they left the room, careful not to make a sound lest they distract the dead from their feast.

They encountered a few stragglers on their way out, but dealt with them with their billy clubs. When they eventually stepped outside into Connor's garden, Roderick had never breathed a fresher breath of air in London in all his life. It was short-lived.

"Roderick, there are more of them out here!" Taggert cried.

Roderick gaped at the scene in front of them. Taggert was right. There were zombies everywhere. They were roaming the street. Their inhuman moans reverberated across Lincoln's Inn Fields. Roderick heard distant screams, and knew that somewhere nearby the dead were attacking the living, as they had attacked the slain policemen. The zombies moved as one, turning their dead eyes on Roderick and the two policemen.

"They must have gotten out of the house," said Taggert.

Roderick shook his head.

"Look," he said, "Over there."

Roderick was looking at one of the zombies: a child, poor, dirty, his feet bare, his clothing ragged and spattered with blood. Even as Roderick stared at the zombie child in horror, he grasped what it meant.

"This boy wasn't at Lord Connor's ball. He couldn't have been," he hissed to Taggert. "This incident was not confined to the masquerade."

#

In the distance, factories belched black smoke from their chimney stacks. It oozed throughout the city, thick and black. It blended into the fog, until the fog and smoke were one, a thick haze of yellow grey that roiled along the streets, choking the lungs and clouding the air. This was the famous London Particular the city was famous for. Jonathan could see crows circling across the sky, but their movement seemed unnatural somehow, almost mechanical. Tendrils of fog seemed to linger in their wake. In the haze of rain and the shrouds of The Particular, there was a figure lying dead on the road.

"What is it?" Mr. Ocelot asked. He raised a hand to his brow to shield his eyes against the rain.

Jonathan signaled to the Penny Dreadful to wait, and looked to Ocelot. The bigger man's expression was impassive, but he followed Jonathan as he hurried over to take a look. As they drew closer, Jonathan realized that he recognized the man. It was the cab driver, who'd taken him to Mr. Sinews' house from Roderick's. There was no sign of his fly.

It was clear that the cabbie was indeed dead. For a moment, Jonathan had wondered if he might merely be unconscious.

The man's flesh was festering, rotten, the meat already beginning to slough off his bones. Raindrops struck his eyes, which were open to the elements. They were also vacant, grey and lifeless. Jonathan thought immediately of Lord Connor's body. Monday had said that Connor had been sick. Was that what had happened to this man?

Then, the dead man blinked. Jonathan started. He reminded himself that he was under the influence of Mr. Sinews' hallucinogenic absinthe.

He looked to Mr. Ocelot, who nodded.

"I saw it too," said Henry Charles, and Jonathan realized he wasn't hallucinating.

The dead man blinked again. This time, Jonathan was certain of what he saw. The dead man was waking up.

"Zombie." Henry Charles' voice seemed to echo, the word lingering in the air, as Jonathan gaped at the dead man. He recalled his conversation with Mr. Sinews, about the Resurrectionists, and their experiments with raising the dead. And their latest undertaking: Dead London.

"They've done it," Jonathan breathed. "They've brought the dead back to life."

"God help us," said Henry Charles Ocelot. He staggered back as the dead man sat up, suddenly, and lunged toward them. "We're too late."

Part Two: Day Two

Chapter Twelve

Chapter 12

Morning struck Annabel like a brick wall. She sat up in a violent jolt, gasping for air as if she'd been under water, holding her breath. She'd slept with the curtains open, and light hit her eyes so hard it was blinding, painful. She'd been so tired when she climbed into bed that she'd fallen asleep with her prosthesis still strapped in, which was like sleeping with one eye open. She had no way of blinking that eye, or closing it, except to remove the straps and unclasp it.

She did that now, not just to keep the light out, but also because it needed to be cleaned regularly, its clockwork needed to be wound, and its hidden compartment reloaded with a poisoned dart. There was a hiss of air and the clicking of metal clasps as she took it off. While the eye itself was clockwork, the clasps that held it in place relied on pneumatics. She set the device on her lap.

There were times when Annabel felt tempted to remove all the mirrors from her bedroom. She caught a glimpse of her reflection in the vanity, just now, and that temptation resurfaced. She hated seeing her own naked eye socket with its bits of gleaming surgical steel implanted in her flesh. She hated looking at the wicked scar that ran down her face. She could practically feel the fingernails gouging into her flesh all over again, and she felt sickened by it. But she didn't turn away.

She took the key she wore around her neck, fit it into the mechanical eye, and used it to turn the device. She heard the sound of clockwork turning. It was comforting, somehow, like hearing the sound of her own heartbeat. She could see perfectly fine without the clockwork running, but she couldn't control what she was looking at, just stare straight ahead. The clockwork allowed her to look from left and right. To focus. To do the sort of things she could do with her real eye, and more.

Once it was wound, she cleaned it, polished the brass until it shone, and fit another dart into the concealed compartment. She wound each of her clockwork parts. Finally, she strapped the eye back on her face and could look at her reflection a bit more easily. With that part of her morning ritual complete, she got dressed--in her own attire this time, rather than the disguise she'd worn last evening--and used a bit of powder to reduce the appearance of her scars. Then she set out for London's streets.

She sensed immediately that something had changed while she'd slept. Normally bustling, her neighbourhood was now quiet, the windows of the houses shuttered or even boarded up. A number of houses had broken windows. She stared across the street at a house whose door swung on its hinges, the wood splintered as if it had been broken down. It looked like an earthquake had hit, or a storm had ravaged the city. Shattered glass and rubble littered the sidewalk. She saw smoke in the distance.

In the quiet, she heard the sweet young voices of a group of girls playing a game on the street corner, skipping and singing a nursery rhyme.

"Burke's the butcher, Hare's the thief, Knox the boy that buys the beef," they sang.

"Cheerful tune," Annabel muttered.

As she stared, a woman in tattered clothing came tearing down the street towards the children, tears streaking down her face, blood staining her dress. When she reached the girls, she scooped one of them up in her arms, hugging the girl so tightly it must have been painful.

"Thank god!" she kept saying. "I'm so sorry, loves. I got back 'ere as soon as I could. Get back in the 'ouse, loves. Quick now, grab what ye can, then we're leavin'."

Annabel blinked at them in confusion, trying to make sense of what was going on.

The woman noticed Annabel looking at her and staggered back in alarm.

"Get back in the 'ouse, now, girls!" she said, more urgently now, putting herself between Annabel and the girls. Her eyes went wide as Annabel stepped closer to her, hands up defensively. Once the girls were inside, the woman turned and ran, not looking back once. She slammed the door shut as Annabel shook her head in wonder.

What had happened while Annabel slept?

She continued along the street, gaping at the changed landscape. Annabel's neighbourhood was on the lower end of middle class. She could afford a nicer house in a nicer neighbourhood, but having grown up dirt poor, Annabel was honestly happier on her humble little street than she might have been in a wealthier part of town. Besides, she didn't want anyone asking questions about where she got her money. Following whatever storm had struck last night, it felt more like a slum.

On a corner, a dirty young boy stood peddling papers. He looked ready to bolt at any moment. He eyed Annabel with suspicion as she approached.

"Attacks throughout London!" he cried. "Read all about it!"

Annabel stopped in front of him.

"What sort of attacks?"

"You look like a lady wiv' an appreciashun fer fine literature," he said, giving her a wink. "Ye'll 'ave ter buy a paper if ye wanna know."

She grinned.

"Cheeky lad," she said, her own well-practiced accent slipping as she spoke to the youngster. She fished a few coins out of her pocket, and handed them over. He grinned and gave her the paper.

"Bit morbid, innit?" he said, while she flipped through it.

She scanned the headlines. Reading wasn't one of the things she excelled at, but she could do it passably. She read the headline.

"Ordinary Citizens Rampage Throughout London. Something In The Water?" she read.

She scanned the article. It described a number of seemingly unrelated incidents, in which ordinary citizens seemed to lose their minds and brutally attack their loved ones. The writer guessed at the number of isolated incidents being close to one thousand, each of the attacks taking place all throughout the city. The article encouraged people to stay indoors and not to let anyone inside. It speculated as to the cause of the incidents. The headline's suggestion of there being something in the water was just one possible explanation. The author also considered that the attackers might have been stricken with some sort of illness.

She continued reading. The article went on to state that in a number of cases, the attackers were described as cannibals. They were crazed and could not be reasoned with. Furthermore, the attackers could not easily be harmed; the article described the attackers being shot, stabbed, and even set on fire, without seeming to feel any pain.

She thought immediately of Lord Connor, and the aristocrats stricken with the Lazarus Virus at the masquerade. She considered the man who'd fallen from the window at Connor's mansion. She remembered what the Resurrectionist had told her. This was the Lazarus Virus.

She wondered if it could have spread beyond Connor's. She'd only seen the one vial in the package from Connor's safe, but it was a big envelope, and the vial was small. If this virus had spread throughout the city, there must have been more.

She felt sick. This was her fault. She had unwittingly stolen a deadly virus from Connor's safe and given it to the Resurrectionists. And this is how they used it, she thought, looking around her broken neighbourhood with its boarded windows and panicked citizens.

She thanked the boy for the newspaper and strode down the street, hoping she could still find a cab. She eventually found one.

The driver drew a gun and squinted as he pointed it at her.

She held up her arms and halted.

"You one of 'em?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"No, sir. Just an ordinary lady with someplace to be."

For a minute, he just stared at her, neither pulling the trigger nor lowering the gun. Eventually, he seemed to decide that she was telling the truth. He lowered the gun.

"You oughta get out of town," he said, "City's a dangerous place fer a lady like you."

"Seems like it's a dangerous place for anyone," she said.

"That it is," he admitted.

"I'm lucky to have found you," she told him. "I'm guessing there aren't too many drivers willing to brave the streets right now."

"Ye'd be surprised," the driver huffed. "A man needs to make a livin'."

"Even when the world is falling apart?"

"'specially then," he said.

"What's happening?" she asked him. If anyone knew what was going on in this city, it would be the carriage drivers.

"Don't rightly know, Miss," said the driver. "Seems a bunch o' folks 'ave lost their minds. Attackin' perfectly decent folks wivvout rhyme or reason."

"Were they sick? Did they look dead?" Annabel asked.

"Don't know, Miss. Only know what I've 'eard."

"You haven't seen them yourself, then?"

"No, ma'am, thank the Lord. Expect we'll be seein' 'em along the way. You sure you need to make this trip?"

Annabel nodded. "I'm sure."

"Alright then," said the driver. "Where to?"

"Do you know the way to Grimmer and Sons?" she asked.

"Does the pope wear a funny hat?"

Annabel grinned. Without hesitation, she got into the hackney. "I'll take that as a yes," she said.

The sidewalk was wet from last night's rain, and a light fog had settled over the city, casting the deserted streets in a hazy grey light. Annabel looked out the window as the carriage rolled along.

London was Annabel's city. She'd lost her parents at such a young age she could no longer remember their faces. With no remaining family, she'd slipped through the cracks of society and landed on the streets. London was an enormous city, each brick built upon layers of history. Her city had seen the fall of Rome, it had survived the black plague, and it had endured the great fire of 1666. Beneath its streets were forgotten graveyards of ancient bones, bricked over and buried beneath the new. New streets, new tenements, new warehouses. New factories, which belched black smoke from their chimneys.

As the carriage rattled along the cobbles, Annabel watched as her city's familiar streets passed through the window. The streets didn't look the same now. As in her own neighbourhood, windows were either boarded up or broken. A hanging sign to a tea house on the corner had been torn off. There were shards of broken glass and planks of wood littering the streets. She saw a pile of something lying on the road. As they drew near, she saw crows picking at it, and realised what it was. A dead body.

The cab carried on, past the blacking factory. As a child, Annabel had broken into it and slept on its bare floor; she'd awoken with nearly a dozen rats crawling over her. She managed to catch one of them, and had sold it for a penny to old Mr. Shorehill who owned the pie shop across the street.

As an adult, Annabel had stalked the city's underground. There were entrances, if you knew where to find them, which descended into hidden tunnels that ran through the city; some of these tunnels had been discovered when Bazelgette built his sewer system, others when Brunel built the Thames Tunnel. When Annabel had stolen a painting from the British Museum, she'd gotten into the basement via a passageway known only to her. She thought of that now, as the carriage trundled on, past the museum, not far from Lord Connor's.

As they passed Lincoln's Inn Fields, she stood in her seat to see if she could spot Connor's mansion, but she couldn't.

Suddenly the horses whinnied, and they came to a sudden, jerking stop. Annabel turned around. She slid open the window at the front of the carriage and called out to the coachman, who sat on a seat at the front of the vehicle.

"What's going on?" she called.

"Sorry, Miss," he answered, "Gonna have to take a detour."

As they turned, Annabel got a better view of the situation. The street ahead of them was crowded with people. She adjusted the settings on her mechanical eye; the lens shifted until she could see the mob more clearly. As they shifted into focus, she saw that they were infected. They seemed to move as one, staggering forward on limbs wet with rot, staring hungrily with their dead eyes.

There were hundreds of them.

#

Henry Charles' words rang in Jonathan's ears. We're too late.

The creature standing before Jonathan was one of the zombies Parson Sinews had spoken of, a product of the Dead London Project. The Resurrectionists had succeeded. They had brought the dead to life.

The big Haitian was first to react. Jonathan just stared blankly, watching in fascinated horror as the zombie got to its feet. It was growling at him, spit running down its chin like a rabid dog. Suddenly, it went quiet.

It lunged, snapping its teeth at Jonathan's neck. Henry Charles moved, blindingly quick, slamming his fist into the side of the zombie's skull. The creature hit the ground hard. Jonathan's heart pounded; if Henry Charles hadn't intervened, the zombie would have torn into his throat with its teeth.

The creature didn't stay down long. Almost immediately, it staggered to its feet, undeterred. Again, it tried for Jonathan's neck again. This time, Jonathan snapped into action. He grabbed the zombie by the cuffs of its shirt, keeping its snapping teeth at bay. He shoved the zombie away from him, causing it to stagger back. Then he drew his pistol.

He aimed it at the zombie.

"Stop right there," he warned. "We're trying to help you."

Again, the zombie staggered forward. Jonathan stepped back and cocked the pistol. "Step back or I will shoot!"

The zombie snarled and continued toward him. Jonathan looked at Ocelot.

"Shoot him," Ocelot urged.

Jonathan hesitated.

"He's just disoriented. He needs our help."

Ocelot snorted. "There is no helping him, Mr. Grimmer. He is a dead man walking."

Again, the zombie lurched toward Jonathan, this time trying to grab hold of him with rotten hands. Ocelot hit the creature again, hard, this time striking at the base of the zombie's skull. Blood spilled as the zombie hit the pavement. Ocelot wiped his hand on his coat, leaving a trail of blood and brain.

This time, the zombie didn't get up.

"You killed him," Jonathan said, breathless.

"He would have killed you," Ocelot told him.

"He was sick," Jonathan said.

Ocelot looked up at Jonathan's airship, then back at Jonathan. "Yes, Mr. Grimmer. He was sick. And I don't think you'd want to catch what he's got. If he'd managed to bite you..."

Jonathan sighed. "You're right," he admitted at last.

"Get to your airship, Mr. Grimmer. Get out of the city if you can."

Not a bad idea. In fact, there was nothing Jonathan would have liked to do more than to climb back to the safety of his airship, pour himself another glass of absinthe, and set off for Paris, or Madrid, or anywhere just to get out of this god-forsaken city. The old Jonathan would have done exactly that. But this Jonathan? This Jonathan had a responsibility to this city.

There were probably only a handful of people who knew about the Lazarus Virus--what it was, why people had been infected with it, and how. He was also among the few who knew who was responsible. The Resurrection Man, who he believed was still at large in spite of Parson Sinews' arrest. Not only that, Jonathan had only just learned that the Resurrectionists had probably killed his father. He couldn't leave. Not now. Not with so much at stake. He needed to find the Resurrectionists. Solomon Grundy. Mr. Hyde. Anthony Tidkins. They had unleashed this experiment. Perhaps they could put an end to it. And if not, at least they could be brought to justice for their crimes.

"You should come with me," he said.

"I need to find Mr. Sinews," Ocelot replied.

"Right. Well, I suppose you would. Take care, Mr. Ocelot."

He signaled to the airship, and started off as the crew lowered the rope ladder.

"You too, Mr. Grimmer," Ocelot called.

Without looking back, Jonathan grabbed a hold of the first rung of the ladder, and without a word, he began to climb.

#

"Take the next left," Annabel told the driver.

They were driving at a breakneck pace, the horses barely controlled as the driver urged them down the narrow street. On both sides of the road, the dead tore into human flesh, eating noisily and single-mindedly. As the hackney approached, some of the dead looked up from their meals, mouths dripping blood. Then they either returned to their meals or joined their brethren in the chase. An army of zombies staggered after horse and carriage.

Annabel spotted a pair of eyes looking at her from a shop window--the eyes of a living person--but they couldn't afford to stop and help.

The dead weren't quick enough to catch them, but Annabel feared the cab would lose control and topple over. Then it would all be over. Annabel would sooner put a bullet in her own head than be a meal for zombies. She hoped that it wouldn't come to that, but the horses were panicked. They were surrounded on all sides by predators, which drove them to greater and greater speeds. They would never make the turn at this speed.

"Whoa!" the driver called, pulling desperately at the reigns.

The horses screamed and galloped on, heedless of their master. Meanwhile, the dead turned their heads as one, distracted from their meals by the racket. Annabel held on to the seat cushions as the cab rattled hard. It hadn't been built for these speeds.

"Left!" Annabel called again.

They had to make this turn. Ahead, the road led into the heart of London. They needed to stay in London's outskirts. If they made it into the more densely populated areas, the roads would be too crowded. There would be nowhere to run if they came across zombies. Crowded streets meant death.

"Make the turn!" she shouted.

The driver answered with the crack of his whip. Annabel felt the left side of the carriage actually lift off its wheels. It rattled and shook, threatening to topple onto its side as they tried to make the turn. They were going way too fast. They were going to crash.

Annabel leaned hard to one side. It was all she could do to balance the carriage. The wheels on the left side hit the pavement again, but only for a second. Then they lifted off again so they were only on two wheels, leaning hard to one side. The wheels screamed, grinding against the cobblestones.

Annabel braced herself for the crash. She held her breath and waited.

At last, they rattled around the corner. The wheels slammed back onto the road, kicking a few screws out of place. Miraculously, the carriage stayed upright. The cab strained against the pressure brought on by the breakneck pace, but it held.

"Nearly there, Miss," the driver called.

She reminded herself to give him a generous tip. He had earned it. She just hoped there were no zombies where she was going.

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter 13

Roderick brandished his blood-encrusted letter opener like it was a sword. It was all that stood between him and a city full of zombies.

"What now?"

Inspector Taggert was still looking to Roderick for answers. This didn't seem the appropriate time to remind him that Roderick was an artist and Taggert a Police Inspector. Roderick swept his eyes across the scene, making a quick mental calculation.

"We need to know how far this thing has spread," he said.

Even now, the dead were standing up and closing in on them, drawn to the living men like moths to the flame. The little boy was quickest; his flesh had barely begun to rot, so he was almost as quick as a living child. At first, he began walking towards the three men, but as he drew closer, he began to sprint. His mouth was dripping with blood.

Taggert and Hargrave shrank back, startled by how quickly the child was closing in on them, probably too afraid to kill a child. But Roderick saw gristle and meat in the boy's teeth, and the blood that stained his chin, and readied his letter opener.

When the child reached him, he trust the blade into the soft spot beneath the boy's chin. The boy stopped moving. Roderick slid his blade free, as the child hit the ground.

"Quickly now," Roderick said, not allowing himself to dwell on what he'd just done. If he allowed himself to feel guilty, he wouldn't survive. The policemen were still frozen in place. Hargrave was shaking. Roderick worried the man might actually soil himself.

"Follow me," he said, taking his eyes off the slain child.

He began to run, his footsteps echoing across the square. Attracted to the noise and to Roderick's motion, the zombies left off whatever they were doing and staggered after. He zig-zagged around them, dodging their clumsy attempts to grab him. He leapt over a half-eaten corpse, and sprinted past a crowd of zombies that were limping after him.

He ran on, until his lungs burned. At each turn, the zombies were in evidence. He turned onto a sidestreet and nearly collided with a man in a top hat.

"Sorry," he wheezed.

The man turned around, snarling, his eyes dead and hungry. Roderick shoved him back, and kept on running. At last, he found a vacant street, and slowed to a halt, gasping for breath.

Holding his side and struggling to breathe, Taggert ran up and came to a halt beside him.

"Where's Hargrave?" Roderick asked.

Taggert looked over his shoulder, apparently surprised Hargrave wasn't there. He looked back to Roderick and gave him a worried look.

"I don't know," he said, "We've got to go back."

Roderick ran a hand through his hair. It was damp with sweat. He couldn't remember having taken his hat off, but he wasn't wearing it now. He was barefoot. He felt a few drops of rain, and then all at once, the sky opened up. It began to pour. Roderick might have laughed, but he was still out of breath.

He couldn't think. This street wouldn't be safe for long, though. Soon enough, a zombie would stumble its way down this street and find them.

A clockwork bird had apparently been used at Connor's mansion to distribute a poison gas that infected those who breathed it. The gas killed its victims quickly, then undid its work by bringing them back to life, as zombies. Roderick considered his many conversations with Parson Sinews, about the Resurrectionists. Anthony Tidkins had been obsessed with bringing the dead back to life, ever since he discovered the zombies of Haiti. Ever since, he had been trying to replicate a sickness that he called the Lazarus Virus.

He had done it, Roderick realised. He had finally managed to replicate the Lazarus Virus, and he had unleashed it at Lord Connor's, killing the aristocracy in one fell swoop.

They were several blocks from Lincoln's Inn Fields. One small clockwork bird couldn't have spread the gas this this far. Which meant there must have been more than one of these clockwork birds. And since Roderick had no idea how many, he had no idea how far the virus had spread. For all he knew, all of London might have been infected.

"We need to find the Resurrection Man," he said.

"Now? That's what you're worried about?" asked Taggert

"He unleashed this virus. If there is a cure, he may know."

"And what about Hargrave?" Taggert demanded.

Roderick sighed. "Fine. We'll double back to Lord Connor's, see if we can find him."

"No need," said a voice.

Taggert and Roderick whirled, and found Hargrave stumbling out of an alleyway, looking a bit worse for wear.

"Hargrave, thank god, man," Taggert cried with relief, "What happened?"

"Sorry, sir," he said, "A few of those rotters got in my way. I managed to fight my way free, but I lost sight of you. I'm lucky I found you."

"Are you hurt?" Roderick asked.

Hargrave shook his head. "I'm fine."

Roderick narrowed his eyes. Hargrave's shirt was stained with blood, and his hands were scraped and bloody. Might not have been his own blood, though. He nodded. "Right then. It's time we caught the Resurrection Man."

"We've already caught him," Taggert said.

Roderick raised an eyebrow.

"Parson Sinews," Taggert reminded him.

In all the chaos, Roderick had forgotten that Sinews was Taggert's chief suspect and had been arrested.

"We sent the Black Marias to arrest him earlier. He'll be at Newgate by now."

"Assuming Newgate isn't compromised," Roderick said.

"Zombies, you mean?" asked Hargrave.

"Zombies," Roderick confirmed.

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter 14

The Penny Dreadful was afloat above Hyde Park, looking down from a grey sky upon the deserted park-grounds. Fog roiled across the ground, casting the city in a drab, sepia palette. The rain had cleared some time in the morning, but left the thick pea soup fog in its wake. In a way, it was the perfect cover. Working in shifts, the captain and his crew had kept the Dreadful afloat throughout the night, giving Jonathan Grimmer a chance to sleep. At first, he'd resisted the idea of sleeping while the city was being overrun by zombies, but eventually, fatigue and drunkenness had persuaded him to lie down, just for a few moments.

The Dreadful, kept aloft by a dozen ballonets filled with hydrogen, encased in a long blimp that was torpedo-like in shape, could sleep half a hundred passengers comfortably, not to mention the crew. Like an overgrown ornithopter, it had huge leather wings attached to its sides. Propellers lined the ship's gondola, and sails were mounted beneath its underbelly and along its spine. Jonathan had worried about keeping the ship floating during the rainstorm, but the captain had assured him that unless lightning struck, they would be safe enough. If it looked like the storm would worsen, they would find somewhere to land.

But Jonathan awoke to find that they were still afloat. He looked out the porthole in his bedroom, and saw that it was no longer raining. The sun was out, although it was hidden by a veil of fog.

"Captain," he said.

There was a telephone in Jonathan's bedroom, with a thin tube running from the small brass mouthpiece into the wall. His voice travelled down the tube and--with some scientific explanation beyond Jonathan's comprehension--reached the captain. He cradled the earpiece against his shoulder, and listened.

"Sir?" came Captain Merrick's voice, distorted and tinny through the brass earpiece. It reminded Jonathan of the way voices sounded when played through a gramophone.

"Take me to the Grimmer Company headquarters, please," he said.

"Yes, sir."

He hung the brass can back on its stand, as the ship answered with a groan of straining wood and rope, the grinding of gears, and a blast of steam. The ship lurched and Jonathan stumbled and grasped one of the many railings that lined each room throughout the airship. The ship pressed on and settled into a steady rhythm.

Jonathan made his way to the lounge and settled into an armchair.

The lounge was lavish, even by Jonathan's standards. Furnished with antique furniture that was surprisingly comfortable and apparently quite expensive, at least according to Jonathan's mother. There was also a fully stocked bar. But Jonathan rang the bell for tea. He needed to keep a clear head, and he was still recovering from last night's overindulgence with the green faerie.

The tea arrived with a few slices of lemon and a couple of biscuits. Jonathan stirred the lemon into his tea, as he watched the darkness of London pass by through the window. It seemed, from where he sat, that it was the city that was moving and not the airship. The ship was steady enough that his teacup barely rattled as it sat on the table at his side.

Setting his tea aside, Jonathan moved to the window, and surveyed the wreckage from above. There were parts of the city that looked like war zones. Shattered glass, broken-down doors, scattered pieces of furniture, and debris of all sorts were strewn about the streets. Only in those parts of the city afflicted by the zombie plague. The rest of the city looked as it always did. Oddly, the afflicted areas seemed to spread outward from a central point. It was as though the virus began from single points of origin and spread out from there, the damage being heaviest at the centre-point. Hyde Park Corner, St. James's Square in Pall Mall, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar Square. All high-traffic areas, Jonathan realized.

As they crossed the Thames, Jonathan squinted against the glare of the sun on the glass, and saw that Borough Market had likewise been affected by the zombie outbreak. South of that, to Jonathan's relief, there were no signs of the Lazarus Virus. But if the plague spread, it would soon reach the Grimmer Company. The Resurrectionists may have killed Jonathan's father, but they had also studied the Lazarus Virus. If there was anyone who knew of a cure, it would be the Resurrection Man. Jonathan needed to find him.

The ship slowed suddenly, announcing they'd reached their destination. Jonathan swallowed the last of his tea and set the cup down.

"Now arriving at Grimmer Company headquarters," the captain's voice resonated through the ship, coming from the speaking tubes, which wound through the ship, amplified by a set of brass cans like the one in Jonathan's bedchamber.

Jonathan headed towards the bridge, as the Dreadful began to expel hydrogen, allowing it to lower its altitude. He ducked under a wooden strut and stepped into the noisy engine room. A wave of heat rushed over him. The engineers were busy tending to a wall of complicated machinery and shoveling coal into the furnace, goggles on their faces, drenched in sweat.

Jonathan hurried past, heading out the opposite door and grasping a railing as the ship jolted suddenly. After a moment, it settled enough that he could continue.

Before leaving the ship, he tracked down one of his crewmen, intending to ask a favor. The man stood to attention and saluted.

"That's not necessary, Mr--"

"Lockwood, sah. Kipper Lockwood. But most folks call me Kip." He took off his hat and wiped sweat from his brow.

Jonathan nodded thoughtfully.

"A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Lockwood," he replied. "I'm Jonathan Grimmer."

"We've met before, sah," said the crewman.

"We have?"

"I've known you since you was a li'l boy, sah. I've been a crewman for years."

"Right, of course," said Jonathan, making a mental note to pay more attention to his crew. After all, it wasn't his father's ship any more. It was his. "Now, Mr. Lockwood--"

"Call me Kip, sah."

"Kip, then," Jonathan said. "I wonder if you might be amenable to completing a bit of extra work for me while the ship's aground? I'd pay you for it, of course."

"Yes, sah. Of course, sah," he said. "Only, what sort o' work is it, sah?"

"A friend of mine was arrested. I need you to get a message to him."

"Sorry to 'ear 'bout yore friend, sah," Kip replied.

"An acquaintance, really," said Jonathan.

"All the same, sah. Ah'll get 'im the message, no problem, sah. Which prison is it?"

Jonathan shrugged. "I'm not sure."

"Shall I start wiv Newgate, then, sah?"

"I should think so," Jonathan said. "Thank you, Mr. Lockwood," he said, and corrected himself, "Kip."

"The, uh, the message, sah?" Kip asked.

"Right," Jonathan said. He fished into his pocket for a pen, and being a newspaper man, found one. He took out a pad of paper and quickly jotted down the message.

He gave the message to Kip, and shook the man's hand. Apparently happy to have a bit of extra coin coming in, Kip turned to leave. Jonathan stopped him.

"Sah?"

"Be careful," Jonathan said.

#

The horse let out a huff of exertion as it cantered up a winding, gravel driveway. The entrance to the driveway was marked by a wooden sign, which hung smartly from a tall signpost, set between two tall statues of horses. Grimmer and Sons Publishing Inc, the sign read in a plain font carved into the wood.

Annabel was relieved to learn that the zombies weren't as widespread as she'd first feared. Some areas of the city were overrun, while other places still remained utterly untouched. Fortunately, the Grimmer Company was in a part of the city that had not yet been ravaged by the living dead.

Annabel had chosen to follow a hunch. She knew that the Grimmer company owned several newspapers, as well as a number of imprints for penny bloods, society papers, and magazines. Many of these newspapers and imprints had their own offices. This was the company's head office, and it was here, she suspected, that she would be most likely to find the mysterious Mr. O.

She thought of what he'd been wearing at Connor's ball--a well-tailored suit in the latest fashion. She considered his manners, and the fact that he had received an invitation to Lord Connor's ball in the first place. She thought of his airship. That he had been entrusted with the company airship suggested he held one of the top positions at the company. He was someone important, then. In all likelihood, therefore, he worked at the head office. It was possible he was one of the heads of the newspapers, which would mean that he probably worked at one of the smaller offices, and not here. Still, this was her best bet.

She hopped out of the hackney, paid the driver generously, and marched up the driveway. The Grimmer Company building was a broad, stern-looking building, all geometric lines and rigid, unshakeable brick. A broad staircase of white marble led to the front door. Annabel noticed a couple of tall, rectangular windows, which looked out onto the wide courtyard. Through the windows, she could make out the bustling workers hauling stacks of paper, working at typewriters, and operating the printing machines. She thought of the little boy in her neighbourhood, peddling papers in the zombie-infested streets. This would be a busy day for the newspaper company.

Annabel straightened out her dress, feeling suddenly self-conscious. She had worn her best for the visit. An ivory and olive corset imported from France, silk gloves trimmed with lace, an ivory blouse, and a jet black twill jacket with a shawl collar trimmed with lace ruffles. Too many ruffles, by Annabel's estimation. She wore silk riding skirt--not that she expected to ride, but she felt that a divided skirt afforded her more maneuverability than a traditional skirt--and as usual, a gun belt, hidden from view. Annabel had a number of aliases aside from Miss Monday--including, of course, Mr. Monday--but she'd chosen to stick with the persona of a high society belle for this occasion. It would have been odd for a woman of a lower class than Mr. O to inquire after him, but for the well-to-do Miss Monday, it might be somewhat acceptable. She should have had a chaperone, but on a day like today, a lady without a chaperone hardly counted as gossip. She doubted it would even raise an eyebrow. Still, she felt more than a bit overdressed as she climbed the stairs and let herself in the front door.

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter 15

A murder of crows wheeled overhead, a hundred raucous voices cawing noisily. Roderick had never seen so many crows in one place. They circled gracefully, black shadows against a grey backdrop, and perched on trees and archways. One of them swooped down and tried to land on one of the zombies, whose clumsy fists caused the bird to retreat to the prison roof.

The prison stood at the corner of Newgate and Old Bailey. It originally served as a gate in the Roman wall, but had served as a prison now for centuries. It had been expanded and rebuilt over the years. Now, it was built around a central courtyard, an awful building of heavy bricks and few windows. Its walls were reinforced with iron. Blatant symbols of imprisonment were carved into the bricks around each door and window: chains, shackles, the scales of justice. A crow perched on the ledge above one of the windows. The towers of St. Paul's loomed in the distance.

Roderick sized it up, and shared a look with Detective Inspector Taggert and Mr. Hargrave. There was no time to hesitate. They had encountered hundreds of zombies on their way here. They were out of breath. There were zombies trailing behind them. Ahead, there were even more. They had nowhere to go but the prison.

Only a few zombies stood by the door to the prison. Roderick raised his letter opener, but Taggert stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

"I'll do it," he said, and headed over to clear the path to the front door.

A few quick blows to their skulls, and the zombies hit the ground and lay motionless. There was a flurry of wings as crows took flight and circled over the corpses.

"You're becoming quite efficient, Detective Inspector," said Roderick, heading after him.

Taggert snorted. "If I didn't know better, Mr. Steen, I'd say that sounded a bit like praise."

"Don't read into it," Roderick said, giving him a wink.

Hargrave taking up the rear, they headed into the infamous prison, a few zombies trailing distantly behind them. Hargrave shut the door.

The prison was lit by gas. Its stark walls of brick seemed to swallow up the light, so the halls were dark and bare. Roderick had half expected to be greeted by a guard upon entering the prison, somehow feeling that the great brick building was impenetrable and unsusceptible to the zombie plague. That feeling was gone now.

They found what was left of the guard within moments. Gore and blood stained the walls behind him. His organs spilled out of his body and onto the floor. Somehow he had been decapitated. There were rough bite marks along his neck. Inspector Taggert appeared to be having trouble keeping his lunch down.

Roderick shrugged. He was getting over his squeamishness rather quickly. He felt, rather pragmatically, that he had seen much worse on the way here. Roderick could be hysterical when there was just cause, and a decapitated prison guard certainly qualified, but someone needed to keep it together.

Other than the remains of a single guard, the hallways was deserted. He motioned for the officers to follow him, offering a handkerchief to Taggert, who used it to wipe the bile from his chin.

"It should be easy to find Mr. Sinews," he whispered. "I understand the prison is divided into common and state sections?"

"That's right," Taggert confirmed.

"Then we'll find him in the state section."

"Why are we whispering?" Taggert whispered back.

"Because I don't want the dead to hear me," Roderick replied.

"Do you think there are more of them in here?" Hargrave asked.

Roderick paused a moment to look back at the ravaged prison guard, and gave a meaningful nod to Hargrave and Taggert.

"I don't think he chewed his own head off," Roderick answered. "Do you?"

#

The foyer of Grimmer and Sons Publishing Inc. was quite unlike the rooms Annabel had spied through the windows as she'd approached the building. A wide room with dark, hardwood floors, bright wallpaper, and furniture lined with gilt, the foyer was the company's public face. It stood apart from the printing and copying rooms that filled the rest of the building with the strong scents of glue, paper, and ink, and the the cacophonous din of printing machines and a hundred typewriters at work. It was quiet in the foyer; thick walls dulled the sound and the smell, but every now and then, a door swung open and one of the Grimmer employees headed through the foyer, and Annabel caught a glimpse of the printing rooms, and her ears rang with the thrum of machines.

A pretty, if bookish, young woman sat behind a desk, her hair tied in a neat bun atop her head. She stood up in alarm and made her way around the desk to greet Annabel as she came in. The poor woman seemed flustered by Annabel's sudden appearance. Annabel wasn't sure if this was because of the chaos caused by the zombie outbreak, or simply because Annabel was unexpected.

"May I help you, Miss...?"

"Monday," Annabel offered. "And thank you, yes. Or at least, I hope so. I'm looking for a man..."

"Aren't we all?" said the receptionist, and then caught herself. Her mouth widened in surprise, and she blinked in surprise as if she couldn't believe what she'd just said. She covered her mouth with her hand. "I mean...I, well, I..."

Annabel spared her with a conspiratorial wink.

"Not just any man," she said. "I'm looking for Mr. O."

"Oh!" the receptionist replied, adjusting her spectacles to look at Annabel properly. To her credit, she managed to look at Annabel without appearing to stare at her clockwork eye or seeming to notice her scars. "Oh, I see. Let me guess, you've read an article of his that interested you?"

Annabel smiled. So Mr. O was a writer; already she was getting closer to learning his identity. This was proving to be easier than she'd thought.

"Actually," she said, leaning in an putting her hand on the receptionist's arm, as if they were old friends sharing secrets. "He and I were recently introduced at a party. I'm afraid I didn't get his real name."

"Oh," said the receptionist, blushing. "Well, I can help you there. Mr. O is Jonathan Grimmer's pen name."

Annabel made an effort to keep her expression neutral as she took in the information. She'd been right about Mr. O; he was someone important within the Grimmer organization. He was a Grimmer!

"Does he have an office here?" Annabel ventured. "Would you let him know I'm here?"

The secretary gave a nod. She was ever so helpful, Annabel thought.

"Unfortunately, Mr. Grimmer hasn't come in yet, this morning," she said.

"I hope he's alright," Annabel said.

The secretary took her meaning. "People are being warned to stay in their homes, not to even open their doors," she said. "It was awfully brave of you to venture out today."

"Brave, or stupid," Annabel said in a tone of confidence. "I simply refused to believe my butler when he said I couldn't go out today. After all, how could I believe there were actually these hooligans and even cannibals roaming the streets in droves? I just put on my visiting dress and pouted until the poor man had no choice but to take me here."

The secretary nodded, understandingly.

"Would you mind double checking? Perhaps Mr. O--sorry, Mr. Grimmer--came in the back door?"

The lady shook her head. "There isn't any back door."

"All the same," said Annabel, "I'd hate to have come all this way for nothing."

"Let me just take a look in his office," she said, gesturing for Annabel to take a seat while she waited. There were a couple of chairs in the corner of the room, centred around a small coffee table with a couple of newspapers on top. "Can I get you something while you wait? Tea? Coffee?"

Annabel shook her head, but offered an appreciative smile. "Thank you, you've been very helpful."

Annabel took a seat and waited until the receptionist headed out through the door on the left. The foyer was a symmetrical room, with a door on the left and a door on the right. As soon as the receptionist was out of sight, Annabel was out of her chair. She took a moment to rummage through the drawers of the reception desk. She stuffed a set of keys into her pockets, just in case they might come in handy. Then she headed to the door on the left.

It opened to one of the printing rooms. The printers seemed too absorbed in their work to even notice Annabel. The noise of the machines disguised the sound of the door opening, and those who happened to look up at Annabel's entrance, quickly returned their attention to their work, too busy to bother with her. She looked down the hallway and saw the receptionist knocking on the door to one of the offices. She made a mental note of which door was Mr. O's.

Annabel headed through the printing room toward the hallway, taking care not to be seen by the receptionist; suddenly her fancy clothes seemed incredibly conspicuous, even if they'd proved effective only a minute ago. She headed into the hallway, leaving the printing room behind. There were a number of offices along the way, each marked with a nameplate with the name and position of the employer whose office it was. She ducked into an alcove as the receptionist turned in her direction. She didn't think she'd been seen, but she wasn't sure.

She glanced at the nameplate on the door. This office belonged to Abraham Palmer, Assistant Editor. Annabel hoped he wasn't in. It might be a bit awkward barging into his room unannounced, but better than being caught sneaking down the hallway by the receptionist. She tried the door, but it didn't open.

Annabel cursed under her breath. The hallway wasn't that long. If the receptionist was heading her way, she'd be on her in a moment. The alcove wouldn't be deep enough to hide her when the receptionist was right beside her. She remembered the set of keys she'd tucked away in her pocket and hoped that one of them would open Mr. Palmer's office.

She took out the ring of keys and tried the first. It didn't fit. She swung the key along the ring, and tried the next. This one fit, but it didn't turn the lock. She pulled the key from the lock. It was gold, had a round head, and was long. There were only three other keys on the ring that looked like it. She decided to try those next. She slid one of them into the lock. Again, it failed to turn. She could hear footsteps now, approaching. They must have been incredibly close, given that she could hear them above the din of the printing machines. She tried not to panic as she fit the next key into the lock. To her relief, it turned. She swung the door open, hurried into the room, and closed the door behind her, breathing heavily.

The room was dark, the lights off. Wherever Mr. Palmer was, at least he wasn't in his office. Annabel took a moment to catch her breath, then turned to head back into the hallway. As she put her hand on the latch, she felt it turn. Someone was about to open the door, she realised.

Before they could open it, she clicked the lock back into place. Without a moment to lose, she reached up to adjust the dial on her clockwork eye so she could see more clearly in the dark. A green lens slid into place, replacing the opaque one that she normally used in daylight. She took in the details of the room, and quickly settled on a hiding place. A closet. She slid open the door and stepped inside, as a set of keys jiggled in the locked door. She slid the closet door closed, just as the door to the room opened.

She could see only through a slender crack in the closet door, but she could make out two distinct figures. She guessed that one of them was Mr. Palmer. The other was a woman. They were deep in conversation. Annabel held her breath and listened.

"Don't say anything to Jonathan," said the woman. "I don't want him involved in any of this."

The lights went on in the room. Even so, it was difficult to see through the crack in the closet door. The woman was standing by the bookshelf. Mr. Palmer was standing beside her. Their voices were all but drowned out by the thrum of machinery. There was a mechanical clang of steel and a rumbling in the floor that seemed to be coming from below. Perhaps there were more printing rooms in the basement.

"He's already involved," said Palmer. He had an American accent and a bit of a gravelly voice. Annabel guessed he was in his late fifties, judging from the voice. The woman was probably around the same age. "Everyone in this damned city is involved. Tidkins made sure of that when he began spreading the Lazarus Virus. I never thought..."

"Neither did I," said the woman.

"Anyway, I have it on good authority that he was there," Palmer continued. "He escaped via airship, but he was in the room with Lord Connor. They would have killed him if he wasn't your son, you know."

Annabel covered her mouth as she realized they were talking about Mr. O. It was difficult to think of him as Jonathan Grimmer. The woman, she guessed, was Jonathan's mother, Mrs. Grimmer. And it sounded an awful lot like she was involved with the Resurrectionists. How else would she and Mr. Palmer know the Resurrectionists had seen Jonathan in Connor's study? And why else would they have spared Jonathan for being Mrs. Grimmer's son? How would they know so much about the Lazarus Virus, or Anthony Tidkins?

Annabel had come here to try to determine whether or not Mr. O knew anything else about Lord Connor. He had mentioned that Connor had dangerous friends. Annabel wondered if he knew who those dangerous friends were, as Annabel now knew they were Resurrectionists. She wondered if Mr. O--Jonathan--knew that his mother was also connected to these dangerous friends. She wondered if Jonathan was connected to them himself.

She couldn't make out what Mrs. Grimmer said next. Her voice was drowned out as machinery rattled and clanged. It sounded like the printing machine was right inside the room.

As the noise died out and Annabel still couldn't hear their voices, she realised they might have left the room. It became almost quiet, the only sound being the machinery from the adjacent room. Without opening the door, she couldn't be sure they weren't still in the room. But this might be her best chance to get out of here.

She counted to fifteen, then thirty, and still didn't hear their voices.

At last, she opened the door. To her relief, they were gone.

But now there was a wide gap in the floor, and a tall structure of steel and brass rose up out of it.

"What on god's green earth?" she muttered.

The structure was like a tall metal cage, cylindrical, with the missing section of the floor as its roof, beneath which was a dark shaft that must have led to the building's basement. A cable ran down the shaft from the top of the metal cage, seeming to operate on a pulley system. The cable was running even now, the pulley revolving as the machine worked.

She could hear the sound, loud even against the din of the printing press from down the hall, of enormous gears turning from somewhere well below. It was almost like the sound of a clock tower, or the turning wheels of a locomotive. The mechanical clang of an enormous machine in operation.

"A secret elevator," she realised, even as it descended.

#

Jonathan made his way up the driveway to the entrance of the building, as the Penny Dreadful rose into the air again after expelling some of the water from its ballasts.

He climbed the small flight of stairs and headed inside.

The almost-musical clang of the printing press resonated down the hall, signaling that the day's operations had already begun. There was a hum of activity, which shouldn't have surprised Jonathan. He swept through the lobby, giving a brusque nod to the receptionist as he headed toward the door.

"Mr. Grimmer," the receptionist called.

He paused at the door and turned around.

"Mrs. Thompson?"

"It's good you're here," she said. "We worried you had run into a bit of trouble."

Jonathan smiled. "I was aboard the Dreadful," he said.

"I trust you heard about the...well, the random acts of violence?"

Jonathan nodded.

"Yes," he told her. "I saw one of them, actually. A man tried to kill me."

He was thinking of the zombie he and Henry Charles Ocelot had encountered outside Mr. Sinews' house. The man had tried to kill Jonathan. Were these acts of random acts of violence connected to the Lazarus Virus?

Mrs. Thompson visibly paled. "Good god!" she cried, "And you're alright?"

"I'm fine," he said. To his surprise, he meant it. "How many of these random acts of violence have been reported?"

"Countless. Too many to report. Thousands, at least. Astounding acts of violence," she said, shuddering, "A father came home from an ordinary day at work. According to the maid, who hid herself in the scullery and witnessed the entire incident, said the man collapsed in a fit of coughing. When he recovered, he tore out his wife's throat with his teeth. He ate her liver. Then he killed both his sons and his newborn daughter."

Jonathan paled. Again, he wondered if this could be the work of the Lazarus Virus. Could this act of violence have been committed by one of the Resurrectionist's zombies? Was this their vision of a Dead London?

"God," he said, unable to find more words.

"That's just one incident of many," said Mrs. Thompson. "Just one."

"I need to speak with Palmer," he said.

As important was it was to keep the citizens of London informed by printing what they could, Jonathan's priority was still finding the Resurrectionists. He didn't know if they would have a cure for the disease they'd unleashed. He didn't know if it was already too late to save the city. But he knew he had to try. Palmer had worked closely with Jonathan's father. He might know something about the Resurrectionists.

Again, Mrs. Thompson stopped him in his tracks.

"There's one more thing," she said.

Jonathan turned around and inclined his head toward her. "Yes?"

"There was someone here looking for you," she said.

Jonathan felt a chill creep over his flesh. Had the Resurrectionists found him already? Were they still after him? He'd felt that since they had already begun their Dead London Project, they wouldn't bother looking for him. He suddenly realized he'd been wrong. After all, even with Dead London underway, they'd still felt it necessary to deal with Parson Sinews and Lord Connor. He felt foolish for coming here. Of course they would look for him here.

"Who was it? What did they want?"

"A lady," said Mrs. Thompson, and Jonathan felt a momentary relief. Then he realized that there might just as well be women among the Resurrectionists. "She didn't say what she wanted, only that she was looking for you. When I went to check your office, she left."

Jonathan nodded. It certainly sounded like suspicious behavior. He felt even more certain that this mystery woman was a Resurrectionist.

"I don't suppose you got a name?" he asked.

Mrs. Thompson nodded happily.

"Miss Monday."

#

The metal cage disappeared, replacing the missing section of the floor with a solid thump and the whoosh of air. The crease in the floor was just barely visible, and only then because Annabel knew what to look for.

She put her hand on the floor, and ran it along the length of the crease. There was no latch, no dial, nothing to indicate how to turn the elevator on.

She looked around the room. There had to be a switch somewhere, even it was hidden. She scrutinized the office, exploring each inch first with her eyes and then with her hands, picking up this item and putting it down, then picking up that item, looking behind it and putting it back where she'd found it again. Where in the blazes was the switch? She cursed in frustration, fruitlessly picking up books in order to check the wall behind the panel, just as one book suddenly stood out.

A penny dreadful publication called Tales of Dead London. Its author was unnamed, but the name of its publisher was printed along the spine. Grimmer & Grimmer Books. An imprint of the Grimmer and Sons publishing company, Annabel assumed.

Annabel had read some of the stories from the dreadful when she was first learning to read. If she recalled correctly, it had originally been published serially, each issue appearing in a periodical magazine, with a number of different writers continuing to write the stories after its original author passed away. Later, the stories were collected and reprinted in a thick paperback volume of nearly four hundred pages. In the stories, the dead rose from their graves and ate the flesh of the living.

Most of the books on the shelf had been collecting dust. But Tales of Dead London was not the least bit dusty. Which meant that unless it had only recently been added to the library, the book had recently been handled. Annabel picked it up now. As she did, the heavy mechanical sound of revolving gears and gyrating pulleys announced that the elevator had started up again.

She looked to see the floor begin to separate once more, the hidden panel lifting up to reveal the hidden cage into which the elevator would soon rise. In her hand, the book refused to lift from the shelf. It was affixed to the shelf, connected to a lever with little brass screws sticking into its spine. The book was no book at all. It wasn't even made of paper, she realized with surprise.

Finally, the elevator finished its ascent, and Annabel let go of the book. It snapped back into place with a slight clicking sound.

Annabel opened the door of the cage, and stepped nervously into the elevator. She looked around the inside of the cage for some sort of lever that would operate the machine, and eventually found it. She reached up to pull the lever. She gave a start as the elevator shuddered and began to descend into the dark elevator shaft.

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter 16

There was a ratcheting sound from above and a thunderous boom from deep below. It seemed as if the floor was rising, moving up with surprising speed with the grating sound of grinding metal and slowly revolving gears.

As the elevator shuddered and rattled, the floor continued to rise, and she plunged into near darkness, the only light being the gas lantern above her head, and it suddenly seemed as if she was descending into Hell. All that she could see was the cage-like walls of the elevator, and the machinery of its workings, which propelled her downward. She had no idea what she'd find at the bottom of the shaft.

She lost track of how many stories she'd descended. Her ears popped uncomfortably. She could see a distant light above her, from Palmer's office. At last, the elevator reached the bottom. She was in an office.

It was nearly identical to the one upstairs.

She managed to release the latch of the elevator's gate, and exited the claustrophobic space. Her hand hovered near her gun holster, which was concealed beneath a few layers of her skirt, but the office was empty. Her nerves began to settle as she looked around the office.

This office had curtains over the windows, like the one upstairs, though she suspected that if she were to pull them aside, she'd be looking at a bare wall. Still, they provided the comforting illusion that she was not several stories underground. The desk in this office was clearly used regularly. It was covered in scratches, tea stains, and loosely organised sheets of dog-eared and crumpled papers. Annabel skimmed through some of the documents at the top of the pile as she perused the office.

She headed to the door and peered through the pane of glass. The coast appeared to be clear, but she cracked open the door and was careful as she leaned out for a second look. A moment later, she was heading down the hall.

The hallway was brightly lit by lamps in sconces along the wall, and there were no alcoves and no supply closets for her to duck into if she was caught down here. There was a series of doors along the hallway, labeled, like the office doors upstairs, with nameplates.

Abraham Palmer, said the first nameplate. Mrs. Elizabeth Grimmer, said another.

Mr. O's mother, Annabel thought. She still wasn't accustomed to thinking of him as Jonathan Grimmer.

What was this underground hideout? Could she really have just discovered the secret hideout of the Resurrectionists? If so, what did the Grimmers have to do with the Resurrectionists? A shared agenda, perhaps? A zombie plague spreading through the city should certainly sell a few newspapers, she thought.

She passed another door. Solomon Grundy, Engineer. She tried the door; it was locked, like the others. Hastily, she tried the set of keys she'd stolen earlier, methodically trying each key in turn, but not one was a match for the lock. She could have tried picking it, but she'd already spent too much time out in the open. Better if she could find an unlocked door.

The next one over was not labelled with the name of any person. It was simply called Alpha Laboratory. She tried the door, and it swung open, much to Annabel's surprise.

The room was unlit, and appeared to be empty. Annabel entered the room, closing the door behind her. She began lighting the room's lamps. Even before she'd finished her task, she'd caught a glimpse of an image that would undoubtedly haunt her dreams that night and for nights to come.

She choked back a cry of horror as she stared at an enormous, cylindrical fish tank of thick glass, which stood on one side of the room, the contents of the tank becoming more clear as each new lamp cast light upon the room.

"Oh dearest God in heaven," she said under her breath, "What in God's name is that?"

#

Though he had never had occasion to visit Newgate, through his association with Parson Sinews, who had visited the prison to attend a number of hangings, Roderick had a vague understanding of its layout. This wasn't Taggert's first visit to the prison, nor Mr. Hargrave's. Still, Roderick led the way, the two policemen following close behind as they climbed the short staircase. He paused at the top of the stairs and motioned for the policemen to do the same.

Before rounding the corner, he took a moment to listen. It was eerily quiet. Roderick realised, in the silence, that his heart was racing. He half expected to round the corner and find himself face to face with another zombie. But so far the zombies hadn't proven to be stealthy hunters. They clumsily stumbled towards their prey. He should be able to hear them before he ran into them, so long as he was took his time and didn't rush in. Still, he couldn't shake the feeling that he was heading in to certain danger.

At last, certain that the coast was clear, he rounded the corner. No zombies loomed in front of him. He motioned for the policemen to follow, and headed into the passage. His footsteps echoed against the bare walls. The floor was cold and hard on his bare feet.

Proceeding slowly, taking care to pause and listen for signs of movement before rounding any corners, they encountered only a few zombies along the way. They dealt with these easily enough, though each time they came across one of the wretched creatures, Roderick's heart would pound so hard against his chest it was painful. At last, they reached the ward for male felons, and heard a mass of voices.

At first, Roderick couldn't tell if the prisoners were alive or dead, but as he listened, he began to detect the telltale signs--the inhuman moans, the gurgling sounds of creatures trying to speak with lungs blackened by rot, the snarling, animalistic howls of hunger.

"They might not all be zombies," Roderick said quietly, "But at least some of them are."

He took comfort in the knowledge that their prisoners were locked in their cells, and rounded the corner.

"Let's see if Mr. Sinews made it here in one piece, shall we?"

#

"Miss Monday?" Jonathan asked. "Not Mr. Monday? You're certain?"

"Positive," Mrs. Thompson confirmed.

Obviously, Miss Monday had some connection to the man he'd encountered at Lord Connor's, but who was she? Monday's sister? His daughter? Whoever she was, it was clear that Mr. Monday had sent her. Jonathan felt unsettled, knowing how easily Monday had tracked him down. Even if Monday wasn't a Resurrectionist, if he'd managed to find Jonathan this easily, the Resurrectionists could do the same. He wondered what Monday wanted with him.

"Thank you, Mrs. Thompson," he said. "If you could do me a favor? Don't mention to anyone else that I was at Lord Connor's."

After a nod from Mrs. Thompson, Jonathan headed for the printing room. He scanned the room for Palmer, his assistant editor, but there was no sign of him in the printing room. He hurried through the noisy space for the relative quiet of the hallway, and quickly found his way to Palmer's office. He knocked on the door.

Just as Jonathan was about to conclude that Palmer wasn't in, the door swung open.

"Jonathan!" the older man exclaimed, "It's good you're here. It's been quite the day for us here. Come in, come in."

Palmer's office was practically identical to Jonathan's father's--his--office. Desk on one side, shelves along the wall, a sturdy lamp in the corner. A gold and red carpet on the floor. Jonathan grabbed a chair and made himself comfortable, while Palmer shut the door behind them.

"I trust you heard about..." Palmer began. There simply weren't words for what was happening.

"Mrs. Thompson informed me as I came in."

Palmer took a seat in the chair facing him. The chair let out a wheeze of air as Palmer settled into it, the old chair creaking noisily.

Jonathan had known Palmer for most of his life. He had been with the Grimmer Company for so long now that Jonathan practically considered him family. Palmer was in his fourties, had dark brown hair that was quickly becoming more and more speckled with grey, and spoke with an American accent. Jonathan often wondered when Palmer had come to London, and why.

"Dreadful business," he said, "I hope you don't mind my going straight to the press without waiting for your approval."

Jonathan dismissed his concern with a wave of his hand.

"I'm sure our competitors were just as quick to catch wind of what happened."

"Precisely so," Palmer agreed, "We couldn't afford to stand idle while the other papers hit the streets this morning. We should have a special edition ready for this evening."

"Good," said Jonathan idly. "That's good."

He had to give Palmer credit. The man was practical, reliable. Even in crisis, he could be depended upon to keep the company running.

"Mr. Palmer, I trust you to do what's right for this company," Jonathan told him.

"Thank you, Mr. Grimmer. I appreciate that."

Jonathan decided to cut to the chase. "I'm going to leave running the company in your capable hands, for now at least. I need to concentrate on finding the Resurrection Man."

Palmer nearly spat out his coffee. He set his cup down on his desk, leaving a ring of coffee on the topmost sheet of paper on the pile.

"What do you mean? Why?"

Jonathan chewed on his lip, giving the question some thought. He wasn't sure he wanted to go into the details. "I'm working on a story," he said simply. "I want to interview Anthony Tidkins."

"Jonathan," said Mr. Palmer, in the stern tone of a father speaking to his son. "Our focus should be on reporting these acts of violence that are happening all throughout the city."

Jonathan shook his head. He stood up so that he was looking down at Palmer. Mr. Palmer might be Jonathan's senior, but Jonathan was the head of the company now. He needed Palmer's cooperation, not his advice.

"Mr. Palmer, I believe Anthony Tidkins is central to these acts of violence."

"What do you mean?"

"The Resurrectionists were studying a disease. Tidkins called it the Lazarus Virus. You may have heard about it; Tidkins apparently published a paper on the subject before he went into hiding."

"Yes, I remember," said Palmer, "If I recall correctly, the virus is supposed to bring the dead to life, as zombies. But what does that have to do with these acts of violence?"

"I believe these acts of violence are being committed by zombies," Jonathan said.

Palmer scoffed. "That's quite the theory," he said. "Look, sit down, won't you, Mr. Grimmer? I'll tell you what I can about the Resurrection Man, if that will get you to calm down. But first, tell me, where is this coming from? Surely you must know how that sounds. I mean, really. Zombies, Mr. Grimmer? You must know we can't go to print with that."

"I don't care how it sounds, Mr. Palmer," Jonathan replied, but he sat down. "Just tell me what you know about Anthony Tidkins."

Palmer sighed. "You seem quite determined," he said.

"I am," Jonathan assured him.

"And you're sure you can't be persuaded to give up looking for the Resurrection Man?"

Jonathan shook his head. "No."

"Very well," said Palmer. "I'll tell you what I know about the Resurrection Man."

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter 17

The tank was filled to the top with dark, murky water, completely sealed to prevent the creature within from escaping. Pressed against the glass was a set of lifeless, rotten fingers.

The skin on those rough hands had begun to slough off and reveal a set of yellowed bones. The zombie's naked, sinewy flesh had slowly begun to rot and fall away, filling the tank with drifting bits of rotten meat, a macabre snow globe. Within a ribcage bare of flesh, was a heart turned black and grey by rot. Un-beating.

But it was the creature's face which truly filled Annabel with unshakable terror, and from which she could not tear away her gaze.

Its jaws, still gnashing, its yellowing teeth--many of which lay on the floor of the tank, leaving only a few, randomly placed in its mouth--ground against the glass walls as if to gnaw its way free. The zombie stared at Annabel through the glass.

She could see her own face, reflected in the glass, and knew that her expression was one of utter horror. But still, she stepped closer to the tank, looking in amazement and repulsion at the once-human thing that swam within the confines of its glass prison.

Its nose, decomposed so thoroughly that Annabel could see the wretched creature's skull through its nostrils. Its ears, tattered and torn like scraps of old cloth. And its eyes, its dreadful eyes. White and lifeless, unblinking, as the creature moved its head to stare alternately at Annabel.

Suddenly, she saw another face, reflected in the glass. She whirled around. There was an old man, bespectacled, dressed in a lab coat, coming from a door at the back of the room. She'd been so taken in by the creature in the tank that she hadn't even seen the door until just that moment. She relaxed slightly as she saw that the man who'd startled her was an old man, but her hand still hovered at her gun belt.

Seeming not to notice Annabel's distress, he flashed her a smile and bustled into the room, and busied himself with his work, entirely ignoring her. After a while, he looked up, and seemed to notice for the first time that she was still there.

"What is it?" she asked, looking back and forth between the zombie in the tank and the old man.

"It's an experiment," he said.

She turned back to the tank. Her skin crawled.

"An experiment?" she repeated, horrified, but managing to keep her voice calm.

"We wanted to see if they could breathe underwater," he explained.

"And?" she asked

"And it turns out they don't need to breathe," he said. "To clarify, most of them do breathe, but I suspect that's out of force of habit, rather than necessity. After all, they were human once, and breathing is part of human nature."

"So, they do retain some aspects of their human nature?" she concluded.

She stepped back as the thing inside the tank moved its head and looked at her, unblinking.

Annabel shook her head in disgust as she forced herself to look away from the hideous creature in the tank. This creature had once been a man, a living man. It was pitiable, really, but she could not bring herself to feel pity. All she could feel, even as she turned away to stare at the scientist, was dread.

"This isn't the first one I've seen," she told him. Her voice was quiet, lacking its usual tone of confidence and danger. There was fear in her voice, and she knew it, the moment the words tumbled out of her mouth. She forced herself to swallow the fear, to get control of herself. Her hands were sweating. She could feel the zombie's eyes on her.

The scientist was staring at her, waiting for an explanation.

"Lord Henry Connor," she said, keeping her voice firm, steady. "Among others."

The scientist nodded.

"Ah, yes, Lord Connor," he said. "So, you were one of those sent to the masquerade, yes?"

Annabel nodded. Best to go along with it, she thought.

"He was one of us, you know."

"A Resurrectionist?" said Annabel.

The scientist nodded again, both confirming what she had suspected about Lord Connor, and confirming that this was a Resurrectionist hideout. Just as she thought. At least the scientist seemed to think Annabel was one of them. As long as she could maintain that illusion, she might get out of here alive.

"Do you know why Connor was turned into one of...these?" she asked, pointing at the creature in the dank water. She noticed that he was right about the creature. It wasn't breathing.

A dark look crossed over the old man's face. "Anthony Tidkins," he muttered, almost under his breath. "Before he came along, we were free to pursue whatever scientific interests caught our fancy. Now, we do what Anthony says. Anyone who crosses him..."

"Right," she said, as if this wasn't news to her, but her mind was spinning.

Lord Connor had betrayed Tidkins. Annabel considered the package she'd taken from Connor's safe. The vial of Lazarus. The Resurrectionists had arranged for Annabel to steal it; Connor's betrayal, she thought, was that he'd refused to give the virus to the Resurrectionists. For his betrayal, Tidkins had killed him. No, not killed, she realized. Connor had been turned into a zombie. Her brow furrowed. If Tidkins had infected Connor with Lazarus, that meant he already had access to the virus. Why did he need to steal it from Connor's safe?

"What's your field of study?" asked the scientist. "I haven't seen you down here before."

Annabel tensed. She knew nothing about science, but she couldn't afford to give herself up. She took a stab at it, latching on to something he'd said earlier.

"Oh, well, I used to be an anatomist," she said. "Only now..."

The old man sniffed.

"Now you study the unliving," he finished. He walked around from behind his desk, hobbling a bit on his cane. "I was a surgeon."

Annabel smiled tightly. A surgeon would certainly know plenty about anatomy. Hopefully he didn't ask too many questions.

"Dr. Henry Jekyll," he said, holding out his hand. She shook it. "Firm grip you have, Doctor...?"

She noticed his use of an alias. She remembered that the Resurrectionists took their names from literature, from penny bloods and Newgate novels. This wasn't exactly common knowledge, but Annabel had once lived in the home of Anthony Tidkins, the most famous of the Resurrectionists. She knew a few of their secrets.

"Dr. Musidora Sinclair," she answered.

Dr. Jekyll nodded his approval. Apparently Annabel had passed the test. Musidora Sinclair was from The Necromancer. Annabel thought it appropriate, considering the Resurrectionists were supposed to be raising the dead.

"So what are these things exactly?" she asked, tapping her fingers on the glass.

"Fascinating specimen, isn't it?" Dr. Jekyll replied, excitedly hobbling over on his cane.

He was staring into the tank now, too, but his expression was not one of horror. He was fascinated.

"They're infected," he said at last, turning away from the zombie to look at Annabel. "It's a sickness. And a rather unpredictable one at that. From what we can tell, it's passed from one victim to another via bodily fluids: blood, saliva, and so forth. Once infected, the victim quickly begins to die. But it is in death that the disease truly takes its toll. After death sets in, he wakes up. It's called--"

"The Lazarus Virus," Annabel finished.

"That's right," the scientist confirmed. He offered her a broad smile. "So you do know a bit about it already?"

Annabel nodded. "I know they're dangerous," she said. "And I know the infection is spreading throughout the city. There was a vial of green liquid--"

"Ah yes!" Dr. Jekyll exclaimed, "Yes, Francis Varney's contribution to the Dead London Project. See, we had already managed to replicate the virus, and we were able to spread it via injection. Varney's solution was a bit neater, of course. The green liquid you mentioned, a solution containing the Lazarus Virus, is easily converted into a gaseous form. This gas, once inhaled, causes infection." Jekyll smiled. "Very effective, especially when combined with Anthony Tidkins' mechanical ravens."

Annabel forced a smile, and gave him a quick nod.

"But why?" she asked. "Why spread the virus at all?"

Jekyll frowned, and tilted his head. His bushy eyebrows narrowed suspiciously. "You mean you don't know?"

Annabel shook her head.

Dr. Jekyll decided to take pity on her. He patted her shoulder. "Dr. Sinclair," he said grandly, "We're trying to cure death."

He narrowed his eyes and focused on the zombie in the tank. He waved a finger in front of the glass and watched, fascinated, as the zombie tracked his movement with its dead eyes. He seemed to forget that Annabel was still there, he seemed so lost in his fascination with the thing in the tank. Annabel felt revolted, yet Dr. Jekyll seemed to have answers. And Annabel still had questions.

"Anthony Tidkins believes that somewhere, in this vast city, someone will be exposed to the virus and not become one of these creatures." He tapped the glass, and the zombie snapped its teeth ineffectively against the glass. "He believes that the human race is resilient, that we may be naturally immune to some viruses. If just one person proved to be immune to Lazarus, their blood might be used to create a cure."

Annabel gasped. So they were working on a cure. They didn't have it yet, but there was still a chance to save the city.

"So you spread the disease just to find a cure for it? That's insane."

"Cure Lazarus, cure death," he said simply. He stared into the dark glass tank, Annabel's face and his staring back at him in the reflection. "Lazarus isn't an ordinary disease," he elaborated.

Annabel snorted dismissively. Clearly, she thought.

"For the infected, death is a metamorphic process, transforming them from humans into predatory beasts. They do not speak, they do not think. Indeed, they do not seem to possess any sort of capacity for reason or logic. They act only on their predatory instincts and their incredible hunger. And of course, they eat the living." He paused, coughed violently into his handkerchief, staining it red with blood. He cleared his throat and continued as if nothing had happened. "But while their bodies are decaying, these creatures have effectively evaded death. They cannot be killed, except by a severe blow to the brain; they will live forever."

"You call this a life?" she said, meaningfully indicating the moldering creature that floated before them, hungrily grasping at them through the glass. Again and again, it struck its hands against the glass. Like a bird flying into a window, it didn't seem to understand that it couldn't pass through the glass.

"You're right, of course. But if there was a cure..." he said, trailing off. He coughed again, hacking up blood. When he was finished coughing, he said with renewed energy, his eyes alight with passion. "Suppose we could eliminate the side effects--the cannibalistic instincts, the rotting flesh, the loss of intelligence--while leaving the benefits of the metamorphosis--eternal life."

"You think that's possible?" Annabel asked.

Turning away from the glass tank, he fixed his eyes on Annabel, and seemed to notice her brass eye for the first time. He narrowed his eyes.

"What do you think?" he asked, coldly.

"I'm not sure," she said, nervous but managing to keep her voice even.

"Speculate."

Annabel's mouth became dry. She felt suddenly very cold. She forced a smile, and a laugh.

Her hand drifted to her gun belt. She would shoot this old man here and now if she had to, but she worried the gunshot would draw more Resurrectionists. Better to talk her way out of this if she could.

"Yes, I suppose it's possible," she said.

After a moment of tense silence, as the scientist stared at her clockwork eye, narrowing his eyes and studying her, he clapped his hands together, startling her.

"Well," he said, "That settles it then. There's someone who's very anxious to meet you."

Annabel felt a cold sweat running down her back. He knew who she was, she was sure of it.

She reached for her gun, but before she had a chance to draw it, she felt something sharp and cold pierce her skin. A prick, like a mosquito bite. She felt cold, and then numb, and then incredibly tired. It became hard to see, and difficult to hear, and then everything went black.

#

Although the zombies of Newgate were locked in their cells, Roderick continued to proceed with caution. He peered into each windowed cell with the vague hope that the prisoner inside might still be alive, and each time, he was disappointed. He peered into face after face, and saw greyed and blackened flesh, tight, drawn skin, and hungry, dead eyes. Many of the creatures had fetid sores that leaked pus and thick, black blood.

Others had subtler signs of their symptoms -- dry, flaking skin that could almost have passed for a sunburn, mild discolouration around the eyes, or stiffness in their movements. In these cases, it took Roderick a few moments to determine whether or not they were afflicted.

At each cell door, his anxiety continued to increase. It didn't feel safe being among this many of the zombies, even with them in captivity. On one occasion, he peered into a cell and found it empty. He was about to open the door and have a look inside, when suddenly the horrid face of an unliving creature loomed in front of him, behind a pane of glass but only inches away. His heart pounded like mad, and Roderick's breath caught in his throat. The creature must have been slumped against the door, just out of Roderick's view. His mouth felt suddenly dry.

"Let's hurry up and get this over with," he said, hand against his racing heart. "The sooner we find Sinews, the sooner we can get out of here."

Taggert nodded in agreement, twirling his moustache, a nervous habit Roderick had caught him at often lately.

"When we find him--" Taggert began. He paused to check the next cell, and recoiled when he found its occupant. "Do you think he'll still be alive? Or do you think this whole bloody prison is infected?"

"I've no idea," Roderick said. "The virus can be distributed using infectious gas; we know that from the incident at Lord Connor's. But we don't know how far this gas is able to spread. Perhaps one of those mechanical birds was sent into the prision, or somewhere nearby. If this plague is airborne, even breathing is dangerous."

"Then how do we know we won't be infected just by being here?" Taggert asked, checking the next cell.

"We don't," Roderick replied. He sniffed. "And to be frank, we don't know that your officers managed to get Sinews here safely. They might be digesting in the belly of a zombie as we speak. Or they might be zombies themselves, and be prowling the streets in search of human brains to consume."

"Brains?" Hargrave repeated.

"Or kidneys, intestines, livers. I'm not sure the dead are picky eaters. Anyway, until we've checked every last cell, we won't know for sure."

"We could check the log book," said Hargrave, as he took his turn to peer into another cell.

"Beg your pardon?" said Roderick.

"He's right," Taggert said, "The prison has records of its inmates. We can use that to determine where Mr. Sinews is being held."

"Of course!" Roderick exclaimed, "I'm an idiot! Why didn't I think of that? I suppose we'll have to double back, then?"

Taggert nodded, and gestured for Roderick and Mr. Hargrave to follow him, as he took the lead this time.

"And don't be too hard on yourself. You're under a great deal of--"

He broke off suddenly, as he rounded the corner.

"Taggert?" Hargrave headed around the corner after him, then suddenly drew back.

"What is it?" asked Roderick.

"Back! Back!" cried Hargrave, turning around and urging Roderick to run.

Behind him, Roderick could now see Detective Inspector Taggert. He was pale, his eyes wide, his hand clamped on his throat. Roderick could see blood spilling out of it. Not half a moment later, the zombies leapt upon him with surprising agility, a speed brought on by the prospect of fresh blood.

They tore into him, tearing chunks of meat from his body, using only their teeth and fingernails. They bit into his flesh, teeth crunching sickeningly, and slurped up blood from his wounds until it stained their faces red. His intestines slopped onto the floor, steaming and hot. The zombies grabbed lengths of his intestines as if they were links of sausages, and bit into them, squirting hot juice into their mouths.

Taggert's screams were pitiful, but there was nothing Roderick or Hargrave could do. If they didn't run, they would be next. Hargrave had already pushed past Roderick, and was tearing down the hallway. Roderick sprinted after him. He spared a glance over his shoulder. Taggert was slumped over, either dead or passed out from the pain. For his sake, Roderick hoped he was dead.

Roderick raced after Hargrave, almost tripping over his own feet as he glanced over his shoulder and saw what the zombies had done to Inspector Taggert. He regained his balance, hands pounding against the wall to stop himself from falling. His lungs aching, heart pounding, he tore down the hall. His bare feet slapped against bare floor, echoed and reverberated against granite walls. Drowning out the sound of his footsteps and laboured breathing, the zombies howled and moaned like starved wolves. The stench of rot filled Roderick's lungs as he sucked in breath after breath of stale air, fear overcoming exhaustion as he tore down the long hallway.

Along the way, dead prisoners thrust their hands through the bars of their cells, grasping at Hargrave and Roderick. The ones that were out of their cells, some of them inmates, some of them prison staff, staggered after.

"This way," Hargrave called, rounding a corner at the end of the hall.

He went up a flight of stairs, Roderick following as quickly as he could manage. His lungs burned, his mortal fear of exercise out-won by a more driving fear--that he would be eaten alive, or ravaged by cold, dead hands--or worse still, that he would be bitten and infected. The thought of becoming one of them was sickening. The thought of his rational mind turning to predatory instinct and the desire to eat human flesh. Desperate, his feet hammered up the staircase, up two flights of steps.

The snarling, slavering dead were only seconds behind him. If he stumbled now, they would have him in a moment. They were clumsy on the stairs. Some of them, their limbs stiffened by rigor mortis, staggered and fell. Those with flesh softened to mush by rot, limbs blackened and decaying, failed too. But the rest climbed over them, agile and quick, the infection still in its early stages. Roderick didn't dare look back. All he could do was climb. Adrenaline and fear filled him with the energy to keep climbing.

As Roderick reached the top flight of steps, he caught sight of Hargrave, tearing down the hallway like the hounds of hell were after him. Roderick mounted the few final steps, zombies grasping at his heels, and panted for breath. Their clumsy swipes missed his ankles by inches at best.

He spun around, drawing his letter opener. The closest zombie was a prison guard, black veins running through grey and flaking skin, a crisp uniform spattered with blood. Roderick seized him by the shoulder for leverage, and thrust the letter opener into his jaw. The blade lodged in the guard's skull, crunching through skin and bone with a sound like slicing a cantaloupe. He dislodged the letter opener, then shoved the dead guard backwards. He toppled down the stairs, taking several other zombies out with him, two hundred pounds of dead weight crashing down the stairs onto them.

But in that time, others had closed the gap. They lunged at Roderick, who stumbled back, desperate to avoid their rot-black fingers. He fell, landed flat on his ass. The letter opener clattered to the floor, out of reach. Terrified, he shoved himself backward, as the two closest zombies bit into the air where he'd been half a second earlier. Unshakeable, frenzied panic made him scramble back further. He kicked wildly at them without aim or precision, nothing but mortal terror.

This was it. This was how it would end. He felt their hands open his chest, and let out a whimper. His waistcoat ripped, and he felt them tearing at his shirtsleeves, trying to get at his arms. He blinked his eyes shut. If they were going to tear open his skin and pluck out his organs, he didn't want to watch them do it. He screwed his eyes closed and braced himself.

Instead, there was a deafening bang.

His eyes snapped open. There was a spray of thick, gloppy blood, and the sound of a body hitting the floor. He smelled gunpowder. Another gunshot. Another body hit the floor. Roderick looked up and saw Hargrave standing over him, gun in hand.

No time to ask where he'd gotten it, he reached up and took Hargrave's other hand. The policeman hauled him to his feet, fired another shot into the mob of zombies, and took off again, running.

Roderick didn't waste a second, just took off again after Hargrave, thanking his lucky stars that Hargrave had come back for him. Ahead, Hargrave stumbled to a sudden stop. Roderick felt his heart stop.

The way ahead was cut off by a second group of zombies, this one even bigger than the mob at their back. Too many to go through. They couldn't go forward, and they couldn't turn back. There was nowhere to run.

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter 18

Anthony Tidkins' was truly a face that only a mother could love. And even she might have preferred him if he'd been pretty. It wasn't as though he had a hideous disfigurement, an amputation, a scarred face or blemishes. Mostly, what it came down to was a total absence of handsome features.

His chin, average. His eyes, pale. His cheekbones, just so slightly too high. His lips, just a bit too thin. His body, under muscled, weak. Even his smile was imperfect, the gaps between his teeth too wide.

It was mostly that amalgam of subpar features that made him unattractive. But then, as if the universe felt that he had gotten off easy, it had also bestowed upon him another burden of physiognomy. Albinism. If merely being unhandsome wasn't enough to make him a pariah, his unnaturally white hair, pale skin, pale and rose-hued eyes did the trick. More than that, he also had a heightened sensitivity to sunlight, frail health, and a steadily increasing number of various phobias.

Knowing all this, one might assume that Anthony did not have a happy childhood. This assumption would be wrong. In spite of the odds being stacked against him, Anthony did at least have a few tools at his disposal, which he used to great effect, not to make a great deal of friends, but at least to make a few that were uncommonly loyal. It was not his intelligence, his perspicaciousness, or his curiosity that made him interesting to his loyal circle of friends. Mostly, it was his fearlessness.

One day, sitting on a bench by the Serpentine, watching the ducks waddling on the banks with a few friends, the word freak echoed in the air. A pregnant silence followed, as Anthony Tidkins curled his hand into a fist.

"What did you call me?" he demanded.

The boy sneered. Here was a boy half his size, frail-looking and weird, parasol in hand, dark glasses over his eyes, acting tough.

"You're gonna fight me?" he said with a laugh.

"Yes," said Anthony, folding his parasol in preparation for the altercation.

"Don't," said one of Anthony's entourage. Under his breath, his friend whispered a cautionary reminder. "You've never won a fight before. Not one."

Anthony laughed. "Maybe this will be the first," he said.

It wasn't. Anthony returned home with a bloody lip and a black eye, soaking wet; he'd been pushed into the Serpentine.

"Let me see your face," said Mrs. Cartwright in that stern voice of hers. "Have you been fighting again, young man?"

"Yes, ma'am," he admitted, shamefaced.

"You know I have to let your father know," she said.

Anthony nodded.

"Yes, Mrs. Cartwright. I understand."

"Be a good lad and run along to your room," she said. "I'll bring your supper up in a minute."

He nodded and excused himself. He did as she asked, but he left his room open a crack, so he could overhear the conversation when Mrs. Cartwright told Anthony's father about the fighting. When she did, his father hardly seemed interested.

"Boys will be boys," he muttered, clearly distracted by something.

Mrs. Cartwright sighed. Through the crack in the door, Anthony saw the conversation unfold.

"I'm busy, Mrs. Cartwright, if you please."

"Sir," she said, but Anthony's father barely looked up.

In some ways, Anthony would have preferred to be punished to being ignored. It had grown worse since his mother passed away a few years earlier. His father saw Anthony as nothing more than a burden.

Anthony quickly hid his face from the crack in the door so he wouldn't be caught eavesdropping. He sat down on his bed and opened his book, just as Mrs. Cartwright came in.

"What's that you're reading?"

"Mysteries of London," he told her.

"Not another penny dreadful, is it?" she asked. "You know your father doesn't like you reading that sort of thing."

Anthony pretended not to hear her, keeping his eyes on the book. Stupid of her to use that, he thought. Anthony knew perfectly well that his father didn't care what he read, so long as he left his medical books on their shelves.

That was probably the only time Anthony had ever gotten into trouble with his father. He'd stolen his father's books, and read each and every last one. At first, the scientific terminology and elevated scholarly language was beyond his understanding. But the more he began to read, the more he began to understand, and the more obsessive he became with those books. He had expected his father to praise him for taking an interest in learning. But that was not to be. Now, his father's books remained behind a locked cabinet, and Anthony was left reading penny dreadfuls.

Mrs. Cartwright threw her hands up and walked out of his room in a huff.

"I give up!" she cried dramatically. "Neither of the men of this house will heed my advice."

#

"Well?" said the surgeon, when Anthony knocked upon the door.

"Are you Dr. Allen?" he asked nervously. "My father sent me."

The surgeon nodded. He stood aside and beckoned for the boy to enter.

The lock on the door of his father's cabinet had not stopped Anthony from attempting to learn his father's trade. Anthony had merely been forced to call upon the expertise of one of the boys in his entourage, a boy who earned money by selling bodies to anatomy schools.

If Anthony couldn't learn anatomy from books, he figured he could learn first-hand. He had performed several dissections before Mrs. Cartwright finally caught him. And had she ever screamed.

At last, Anthony's father was forced to take action.

"Come in," said the surgeon. He had a Scottish accent. "How was the journey here? Long, I imagine. Did you travel by train?"

"No, sir, by airship," said Anthony.

Dr. Allen owned an anatomy school, one of the more successful schools in London. He lived in a small loft above the school.

The surgeon led him to a dining room, pulled out a chair and gestured for Anthony to sit. As he sat, Anthony took in the room. The first thing that he noticed was that the surgeon's books were not behind lock and key. They were not even neatly organized on a single shelf, but spread about the room, some of them open and marked up by the surgeon's own pen. Most of the books were the same as the ones his father owned, but there were some that were unfamiliar.

He also had a number of preparations in glass jars--lizards with two tails, dissected internal organs, jellyfish, baby crocodiles, a monkey's skull. A rooster with a human tooth in its mouth.

The surgeon disappeared through the hallway for only a moment, and when he returned he was accompanied by a servant, who laid out a plate of food or the boy. Anthony dug in, but amidst eating, he began to pester the surgeon with questions.

"What book is that?" he asked.

"Gray's Anatomy," said the surgeon.

"Oh," said Anthony, a bit disappointed. "I've read that. Yours looks different from the copy my father owns."

"This is the American edition," the surgeon explained. "So you've read Henry Gray?"

"I've practically memorized it," said Anthony, more enthusiastic than boastful. "It's fascinating, isn't it?" Almost immediately, he became distracted. "What's that one?" he asked around a mouthful of bread.

"The Institutes and Practice of Surgery. Have you read it?"

Anthony nodded.

"You like to read, don't you?" said the surgeon.

Anthony nodded again.

"We have that in common," said the surgeon. "But I prefer reading bodies to reading books."

"Reading bodies?" young Anthony Tidkins asked.

The surgeon nodded. "You can learn a lot about a man from his body. I understand you've conducted a few dissections of your own?"

Anthony nodded, a guilty look on his face.

"Good," said the surgeon, getting up. Anthony looked surprised. "Come, leave your supper. It can wait."

He headed off down the hall, leaving Anthony to hurry after him. He heard the surgeon's footsteps heading down a creaking flight of stairs, and realized he was heading down to the anatomy school. He followed.

Dr. Allen turned the lights on downstairs, and fit his key into the lock. He headed into school, the young boy trailing behind him. They went into the operating room, a sterile-looking room with a number of tools laid out neatly on the desk. There were raised seats around the operating table, where the students could sit and watch dissections. On the table was the body of a man in his thirties, naked, his skin pale and cold. Anthony swallowed, and looked up at the surgeon, suddenly uncertain. The doctor gestured at his surgical kit, his tools laid out.

"If you're going to be my apprentice," he said, "Let's see how you are at dissection."

#

They arrived the next day at the home of a lawyer whose son was badly ill. As a precaution against transferable disease, Dr. Allen wore a mask. Most doctors wouldn't have bothered; most wouldn't have been familiar with Henry Lister's studies of bacteria and the use of antiseptics. But Dr. Allen read broadly, and kept an open mind to new and experimental methods. He had always rebelled against tradition. There was always room to improve upon established practices. He managed to make a number of enemies with this mindset; most of his colleagues were simply not ready to embrace change. Many still practiced bloodletting. But Dr. Allen had also saved the lives of a number of patients who would have died using old methods.

His mask was old fashioned, a plague doctor's mask made of worn and faded leather. The doctor's appearance was frightening, in Anthony's opinion, but as the door opened, a look of relief passed over the face of the servant who had opened it.

"Doctor Allen," she said. "Thank you so much for coming."

She stepped aside so he could enter the house, Anthony following in his wake.

The lawyer was sitting on a bench as they entered. He barely looked up at their entrance, but just sat there, staring at the wall, sweat upon his face. The doctor introduced himself and his assistant; his voice was thick and muffled by the heavy leather mask. The man looked up, briefly, and nodded as if to say, thank you for coming.

The servant swept past them.

"This way," she said, making her way upstairs to the boy's bedroom. Anthony followed, letting the doctor lead the way.

They paused at the entrance to the bedroom, while the doctor gave Anthony a cloth mask of his own to put on. Then they opened the door to the stench of stale sickness.

The doctor opened his kit.

"Will we be able to save him?" Looking at the boy in his bed, unconscious, pale and sickly-looking, Anthony doubted it.

Dr. Allen, however, began his examination, not bothering to answer Anthony's question. He cataloged the boy's symptoms aloud as he examined him. Occasionally, he would ask for Anthony's assessment, and the surgeon would nod his agreement.

"We'll need to operate," said Doctor Allen, who began by instructing his young apprentice to clean the patient's body in preparation for the surgery. As directed, Anthony applied an iodine solution to the boy's stomach in preparation for a laparotomy.

"Scalpel," said the doctor. A moment later, the tool was in his hand.

Anthony seemed to anticipate his every need. At each turn, the tool he required was ready even before he asked for it. Anthony watched with wide eyes as the doctor cut into the boy. When the job was finished, he cleaned up the doctor's tools, returned them to his kit, and zipped his bag shut.

"Now what?" asked the lawyer's servant as they made to leave.

"Now we hope for the best," Doctor Allen replied.

They passed the lawyer on their way out. He hadn't moved from his seat on the bench by the entrance to his home.

#

Anthony was bored. Again. Dr. Allen had been called away; he had been an army surgeon, and he was required again. The doctor had arranged for him to sit in on the anatomy classes at the school, where his brother was lecturing.

His brother, the older Dr. Allen, was a competent lecturer, but he did not regularly have practical classes. And the longer he sat in class, the more he began to find that the older Dr. Allen tended to ramble on at length, never actually saying anything new. Anthony sat in class, paying little attention, scribbling. Anthony had discovered a love of engineering and mechanics, and had taken to sketching his ideas on paper while he listened to Dr. Allen's lectures.

Occasionally, the anatomy school would arrange to have cadavers brought in, and Dr. Allen would perform dissections. These days were the worst, because the class size would swell and the students would crowd around the demonstration so that Anthony would be unable to see anything worthwhile. The dissections merely reminded him of what he was missing. Assisting with the doctor's surgical procedures was much more satisfying; at least then there was the possibility of saving the life of the patient. With the dissections, there was only death.

Today though, Anthony would have welcomed a dissection. Instead, he was sitting through another boring lecture Anthony had heard a dozen times before. I could honestly teach this class myself, he thought.

He'd read all the books. He'd practiced dissections, and helped with hundreds of surgeries by now. He had more practical surgical experience already than many doctors would see in their lifetime. And now he'd sat in the lecture halls and heard all the lectures until they'd become tedious.

Quietly, Anthony got out of his seat. He was sitting in the back row, at the far left, so it was easy enough to pack up his books and slip out of the class without disrupting the professor, who was going on at length about the arguable merits of bloodletting.

He slipped out of the lecture hall. He unfolded his parasol as he stepped out into the promenade. The day was hot and sunny, rife with possibilities. Anthony was excited by his idea. He was walking quickly now, making his way through the streets he'd come to know so well. There was a little shop near the university, which catered to students of the university.

He had a little money in his pocket. His father hadn't sent him to London to be poor. He fished the coins out of his pocket, and counted them as he walked. There was the shop. A sign in the window reassured him that it was open. He pushed the door open with a chime of jangling bells.

A man appeared behind the counter to greet him. He looked curiously at Anthony, frowning a little.

"Good day, sir," he said, speaking as eloquently as possible so as to reassure the shopkeeper.

"How can I help you?" the man said gruffly.

"I am a medical student at the school of anatomy, and am apprenticed to a surgeon. I require my own equipment."

The man sighed. "A bit young for an anatomy student, aren't you?" he asked.

"I suppose so, sir," Anthony admitted. He waited patiently. The man would either sell him the equipment, or he wouldn't. There was no use attempting to argue with him.

"Alright then," he said at last. The man made his way from behind the counter to where he kept the supplies for the medical students. "You need books?"

Anthony shook his head. "No, sir. I've got plenty of books."

The shopkeeper nodded. He grabbed a few things off the shelf and loaded them into Anthony's arms, listing the items and the prices respectively as he placed each tool into Anthony's hand. Surgical bag. Scalpel. Forceps. Bone saw. When he was finished, Anthony's hands were full, but his face was lit up with excitement. He brought his equipment to the counter, and the man called for his assistant to come and help him load the tools into the bag.

"Anything else I can help you with?" he asked.

Anthony did a quick mental calculation of the price of the tools. He counted his coins again, and determined that he had more than enough to pay for everything. "There is one more thing," he said.

The man raised an eyebrow.

"I need an advertisement placed in the classifieds," he said.

"Ah," said the shopkeeper. Again, he called for his assistant, a boy about Anthony's own age. "Write it down," he said, "Jim here will see that it gets to the papers."

Anthony smiled, delighted. This was all going surprisingly easily. "Thank you, sir," he said. Then he picked up his pen, scrawled down the message.

Anthony Tidkins, Surgeon for Hire, he began.

He finished writing his message, and pushed it across the counter. He placed his coins down beside it, and the shopkeeper's eyes lit up as bright as Anthony's.

"Anything for my favourite customer," he said.

Anthony grinned, and turned to follow Jim out of the store. He paused at the doorway. "You wouldn't happen to know where I might buy a plague doctor's mask, would you?"

The shopkeeper frowned. "What do you need that for?" he asked, all the good will gone from his voice. Anthony produced another coin from his pocket, let it roll between his fingers, and watched the shopkeeper's eyes follow it as he returned it to his palm. He placed the coin on the counter.

"I know a leather-crafter," said the shopkeeper. "It's an unusual request, is all."

Anthony had to agree. It was a bit unusual, but he felt that the mask was important if he was to be taken seriously. Dr. Allen's patients hadn't hesitated to hire the man in the mask. They'd wanted a doctor. They didn't care that he wore an old-fashioned, creepy-looking mask. And they'd been desperate enough not to ask questions. But they might not have been so eager to hire a boy of thirteen, nor, for that matter, an albino.

In short, he felt that people would generally be more comfortable with a man with a mask than a boy without one.

#

Jonathan stared at Palmer in wonder. His knowledge of Anthony Tidkins' life was astounding. He had thought that Parson Sinews was the foremost expert on the Resurrection Man, but Palmer spoke of Anthony Tidkins' life with intimate detail. Jonathan knew that his father and Palmer had researched Tidkins for the Grimmer Company's newspapers, but could they really have learned so much from research alone?

"How do you know all this about Anthony Tidkins?" Jonathan asked.

Palmer looked him in the eye, and with a long, drawn-out sigh, he answered. "Because Anthony Tidkins told me."

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter 19

"Your mother didn't want me to tell you," said Abraham Palmer.

"My mother? What has she got to do with this?" asked Jonathan.

"I think you have the right to know," he said, "And anyway, you'd have figured it out on your own eventually. I'm surprised how much you've already learned. You were right, by the way, about the zombies. But what you don't know is that there were zombies in this city even before the Resurrectionists spread their plague. Not in these vast numbers, mind you. Just the odd incident, here and there. We would hear stories of a man staggering down the streets, sick, out of his mind. Usually an attack of some sort would take place, someone might end up bitten. We would investigate. We would track down the zombie, quarantine those who came into contact with him to prevent the virus from spreading. And in the papers, we would make up a story. Drugs, alcohol, madness, that sort of thing."

"Why lie?"

"Because the Lazarus Virus is dangerous. Your father believed that if the disease ever fell into the wrong hands, it could be used as a weapon."

Jonathan thought of what Parson Sinews had told him. Anthony Tidkins had received military funding to study the Lazarus Virus. Evidently Charles Grimmer's fears were not misplaced.

"Our efforts were largely effective, although we lost good men over the years in encounters with the zombies. We quickly learned that we were not well equipped to deal with the zombies when there was so much we didn't know about the virus. How it worked, how it spread, how quickly it could kill its victims and how quickly bring them back, what were the signs and symptoms of infection, how intelligent and how agile were the infected. We needed a place to study the virus. We built a laboratory, keeping its location a closely guarded secret known only to those few of us who hunted the infected," Palmer continued.

Jonathan followed what he was saying, as if listening to a conversation in a dream. Palmer's words made sense, but what he was saying made no sense.

"Of course, what we didn't know is that while we had gone to great lengths to keep the zombie virus a secret, Anthony Tidkins already knew about it. After your father..." Palmer continued, and trailed off uncomfortably. After an awkward pause, he continued. "Well, the Resurrectionists learned about our laboratory, and decided to use it for themselves. We agreed to let them use it, under the pretence that we shared their goals. We've been working to undermine their goals from the inside."

Jonathan scoffed.

"Well, great job," he said with unrestrained sarcasm. "Seems to be going very well so far, your efforts."

He stood up. He couldn't sit still and listen to this any longer. Abe Palmer, a man Jonathan had known since he was a child, his mentor at the Grimmer Company, a man Jonathan practically thought of as an uncle, actually secretly hunted zombies with his father, and had invited the Resurrectionists to use their secret laboratory. He felt laughter welling up inside, and bit back the urge to let it out. He worried that once he started laughing, he wouldn't be able to stop. He knew that he was being hysterical, but really, was he supposed to just accept what Palmer was telling him?

At last, he sat back down, shaking his head. He let out a single, bitter laugh, and looked up into Palmer's eyes. As incredible as this all sounded, he knew that Palmer wasn't joking. A minute passed in uncomfortable silence. Palmer sat patiently.

"So," he said eventually. "My mother?"

Palmer nodded. "Yes. She didn't hunt zombies herself, but she supported our efforts."

"And your story about Anthony Tidkins..." Jonathan asked, but he was beginning to think he already knew the answer.

Palmer nodded again. "Yes," he said, "I heard the story from Tidkins' own mouth."

#

Annabel awoke in a cell. It was dark, cold, and windowless, a hard bench the only furniture. A set of iron doors locked her inside. She patted her dress, dug through her hidden pockets, and found that her lock picking tools were gone. Her guns had been confiscated as well.

At least both her eyes were working. She might have expected to have had her prosthesis removed by her captors, so it was a relief that her vision was still entirely intact. She unstrapped the device, took the key from around her neck, and used it to wind up the mechanical eye. Before replacing it in its socket, she flipped open the hidden compartment. She had to suppress a grin. The poison dart was still there.

So, an eye for an eye, she thought. She'd put a dart in Dr. Jekyll's neck as soon as she had a chance, see how he liked it.

She flipped the compartment shut and clicked her eye back in place with a click and a pneumatic hiss. There was an uncomfortable pressure in her skull as she fit the device into its socket, but she'd grown used to that over the years. As used to it as one could get anyway. She felt naked without the eye strapped in. Quickly, she fastened the straps, and experimentally rotated the lens.

She jumped back. There was someone in the cell next to her. A dark, shadowy figure in the blackness of the holding cell. He was watching her intently. Annabel shrunk away, squinting with her mechanical eye until it changed focus to reveal the man more clearly. She reached up and adjusted a dial. The device began to emit a dim light. She turned another knob, and her ordinary lens slid off to the side, making way for a green lens to slide into place, allowing her to see more sharply in the dim lighting. As she turned the wheel, she could finally see her fellow captive clearly.

He was astonishingly handsome, an unsettling smile upon his lips. A sardonic expression on his unblemished, youthful face. A piercing gaze in his eyes. His eyes were an unnaturally bright green, though this might have been owing to the tint of her lens.

"Sorry if I startled you," he said.

"Not at all," Annabel lied. She got to her feet and moved over to get a better look at him. Easier than squinting through her prosthetic eye.

"What is this place?" he asked.

She shook her head. She'd been hoping he could tell her.

"Resurrectionist holding cell, I believe," she said.

"I suspected as much," he said. "I was arrested, but the man who took me were not policemen. They mentioned transporting me to a more secure prison. Chateau d'If."

Annabel frowned. She wondered if that's what they planned for her as well. She was surprised the Resurrectionists hadn't just killed her.

"Chateau d'If was the name of a fortress in the Mediterranean Sea, near the Old Port of Marseille. It later became a prison. It was used in Alexandre Dumas' novel, The Count of Monte Cristo, as the apparently inescapable secret prison from which Edmond Dantes eventually escapes," he said. He seemed to possess Annabel's own ability to appear remarkably calm despite the duress of an unusual situation. She wondered if he felt as apprehensive as she did, in spite of his cool demeanor. "Unless we're being escorted there in reality, which I doubt, I'd wager that Chateau d'If is being used as a code name for some other prison."

His eyes never left her as he spoke.

"What do you know of these Resurrectionists?" he asked, suddenly changing the subject.

"I'm not sure I want to tell you," she said, equally cold. "Who are you? What do they want with you?"

He edged closer to the end of his cell, and put his hands on the bars. The green glow in his eyes was even more pronounced with him standing close enough to touch her.

"I'm a hobbyist," he said.

"A hobbyist?" she repeated, unimpressed. "Of what sort?"

"I follow the careers of dangerous criminals, collect broadsides and memorabilia, and visit the sites of their crimes. I try to meet these criminals, when I can."

"An odd hobby."

"But a popular one, believe it or not," he countered. He placed his head against the bars. It seemed an effort to get closer to her. She took a cautious step backwards, and he grinned.

There was something about him, Annabel couldn't quite place, but her instincts were drawn to his bright green eyes, his dark hair, and fair skin. She noted that he had the slightest hint of an Irish accent. She considered his "hobby," and suddenly the puzzle pieces clicked into place. She knew who he was.

"You're Parson Sinews," Annabel said with surprise.

"You've heard of me?" He laughed. It was a cold sound, without mirth, and it unsettled her.

"We travel the same social circles," she said. Annabel's friends and associates were criminals, and Parson Sinews' name was whispered on the tongues of thieves and murderers. It was a name that was feared even by the most hardened criminals. Sinews was infamous. He had influence, wealth, power. And he had a reputation. "I'm surprised we haven't met till now."

Sinews smiled. "As am I," he said. He didn't elaborate, but Annabel got the unnerving sense that Mr. Sinews knew who she was, somehow.

She hadn't really trusted Mr. O, but she'd liked the man well enough. She trusted Mr. Sinews even less, and she didn't think she particularly liked him either. But she was trapped in a cell, and he was interesting if not likeable. And somehow, despite his imprisonment, he seemed to be enjoying himself. She said as much.

He grinned at the question. "No," he said. "I'm not enjoying myself much. Imprisonment does not agree with me. That said, it is a pleasant surprise meeting you here. I never thought I'd have the opportunity to thank you in person. The Rembrandt is exquisite. I've set it on the wall in the sitting room, adjacent to the fireplace."

It took some amount of effort for Annabel to keep a neutral expression. She remembered that particular heist well enough. As was her usual method, she'd made the arrangements through third parties, keeping the identity of her buyer and her own name anonymous. She never met her buyers personally, never learned their names. Using the alias Monday was a failsafe. She was a ghost. She should be untraceable. And she hadn't introduced herself to Mr. Sinews. Seeing that he'd deduced it meant that either he was particularly clever or that her cover had again been blown by one of her sources. Until her recent encounter with the Resurrectionists, she would have considered the latter impossible. Now, she was not so sure.

"I'm glad to hear that, Mr. Sinews, but let's keep the conversation to the Resurrectionists," she said.

She wanted to say more, but she bit her lip. Sinews smiled that infuriating smile of his and shrunk back from the bars of his cell, and took a seat on the bench.

"Very well," he said, threading his fingers together on his lap. "What do you know about them?"

"I don't know how," Annabel said, "But I know that they are connected to the Grimmer Company."

Parson barely blinked at the revelation. But he was no longer smiling.

"This prison is in the basement of the Grimmer Company headquarters," she said. "Last night, at Lord Henry Connor's masquerade, I met a man called Mr. O. He hinted that Lord Connor was a Resurrectionist. I had been hired to rob Connor. After I retrieved the package, the Resurrectionists put a gun to my back and relieved me of it. Have you heard of the Lazarus Virus?"

"Yes," Sinews answered.

"Well, that's what was in the package," she said. "They used a mechanical bird to spread the virus; in a matter of minutes, everyone in the house was infected. I was lucky enough to get out alive, as was Mr. O."

Sinews winced, as if pained by Annabel's news. It was the first sign she'd seen that Sinews was capable of real emotion. She cocked her head at him. "What is it?"

"My fiancée was at the masquerade," he said. "You were there. Is there any chance she made it out alive?"

Annabel shook her head. "I'm sorry," she said. "The only way she could have gotten away was if your fiancée was a Resurrectionist."

Sinews said nothing, but he was grinding his teeth, jaw clenched. To Annabel's astonishment, he seemed to be considering that possibility. Anything, she supposed, to keep the hope that his fiancée was still alive. He must have truly loved this woman, whoever she was.

Eventually, the drawn-out silence became uncomfortable. Annabel decided to fill the void in their conversation. "This man I met," she continued. "Mr. O--"

"Jonathan Grimmer," said Mr. Sinews.

"Does everyone know poor Mr. Grimmer's identity?" said Annabel. "Alas, I don't believe Mr. Grimmer is well suited for the cloak and dagger."

"No indeed," Mr. Sinews agreed. "Then again, it seems that you and I are not as adept at the clandestine as we'd like to think, either, given our current circumstances."

Annabel shrugged. He had a point. "Anyway, the Grimmers are connected to the Resurrectionists. Yet somehow I don't think Jonathan Grimmer is one of them. Call it a gut feeling, call it women's intuition. Call it whatever you like, I believe Jonathan Grimmer is innocent."

"I share your opinion," Sinews told her. To her surprise, she was glad to hear that. She still didn't know why exactly--perhaps it was because despite his naive innocence, he had stayed by her side at Connor's, until she'd chosen to abandon him, or perhaps she was simply taken in by his handsome face--but she wanted to think the best of Mr. Grimmer.

"Still, he knows something about the Resurrectionists," she said, "I came here to find out what. Instead, I ended up imprisoned here."

"Well, if it's any consolation, what Mr. Grimmer knows about the Resurrectionists, he learned from me."

Annabel blinked in surprise.

"I told you I study criminals as a hobby," he reminded her. "I spent some time investigating the Resurrection Man. Jonathan Grimmer came to me looking for answers. I don't know the Grimmer Company's part in all this, but I believe you're right. Jonathan Grimmer is innocent."

Chapter Twenty

Chapter 20

"In here," Roderick hissed.

The heavy door swung open with a groan of protest, rusted hinges squealing loudly as Roderick seized the handle and pulled with all his weight. A loud thump--a waif-like figure crashed into the door from the inside. It growled at them, staggered to its feet, and reached its arm through the crack in the door.

Hargrave put a bullet in its skull, viscous blood filling the air with a putrid, festering odor. Roderick slipped through the door, into the dark cell, with Hargrave right behind him. Roderick dragged the body out of the doorway, while Hargrave pulled the door shut, sealing them inside.

The zombies outside howled with frustration and ravenous appetite, slamming their hands against the heavy, iron door. The door had small square slits at eye level, providing them a narrow view of the hall. The zombies thrust their fingers through the gaps and peered through the makeshift window, leering hungrily. Roderick and Hargrave retreated to the back of the cell.

The door could only be opened from the outside. If the dead could figure out how to unlatch the door, there was no way Roderick could stop them. He was banking on their lack of intelligence to keep them alive.

"How many bullets are left in your gun?" Roderick asked.

Hargrave jumped at the sound of Roderick's voice. His nerves were shot. He was drenched in sweat, his face pale. Even his eyes jumped with nervous energy, flitting from the zombies at the door to the corpse that lay on the floor of the cell, to their bare prison cell.

Roderick's own nerves were on edge as well. He remembered Hargrave stopping to pull him to his feet. He wouldn't be alive if not for Hargrave. So he asked the question again, patient and quiet. "How many bullets?"

"I, uh, I don't know."

Hargrave flipped open the chamber. He looked gravely at Roderick, fear written plainly on his thickly moustached face. Roderick noticed, for the first time, how handsome he was. Any other time, he thought. Hargrave emptied the gun's chamber into the palm of his hand. He held out his palm so Roderick could see.

One. Just one bullet.

He loaded it into the chamber, flicked it shut, and handed the gun to Roderick.

"When the time comes," he said, a thick layer of sweat on his brow, "You mustn't hesitate."

Roderick frowned, but he took the gun. A solid Smith & Wesson revolver, with a wooden grip and round barrel. It must have been prison issue. Hargrave must have taken it from one of the prison guards.

"What are you talking about, Hargrave?"

Hargrave said nothing. His eyes were fixed on the door, watching anxiously as the zombies in the hallway beat their hands against it, hissing and snarling like dogs. Roderick followed his gaze. There must have been at least a hundred zombies out there. There was no getting out, at least not that way. They were trapped in here. Even so, Roderick took his eyes from the door, and put a hand on Hargrave's shoulder.

"We're going to get out of here," he said. "Do you know how many people have escaped from Newgate over the years?"

Hagrave shook his head.

"Hundreds," Roderick told him. "In fact, Jack Sheppard escaped three times. Three times, Hargrave. And we only need to escape the once."

Hargrave snorted. "I appreciate your optimism, Mr. Steen," he said. "You're going to get out of here. Of that I have no doubt. But not me."

He rolled up his sleeve, showing Roderick his bare arm. Roderick sucked in a breath of alarm. Hargrave's bicep was marked with a deep gash, a jagged wound of grisled, lacerated flesh. Impossible to tell if the wound had been caused by teeth or jagged fingernails, but it looked hideous. Painful.

But more than that, the wound was clearly infected. Black, gelatinous blood lined the edge of the wound, his skin a deep, necrotic purple. Greenish pus oozed from the wound. A spider-web of rust-colored lines spread from the infected gash. His flesh was a pale cadaverous colour, and Roderick noticed that Hargrave had to use his other hand to hold his arm up.

Roderick winced.

"Is it painful?" he asked.

Hargrave's answer was tinged with regret. "Not at all," he said. "Truth is, I can't feel it at all."

The wound was sickening, a gory mess of ravaged flesh and swollen, oozing infection, but it was Hargrave's voice that bothered Roderick most. Like the voice of a heavy smoker, his voice was becoming thin and rough, a harsh rasp like shredding paper. The infection was spreading through Hargrave's body, not just his arm, but his lungs. Decay was working its way through him. Still in its early stages--Hargrave wasn't a zombie yet--but Roderick guessed he didn't have long.

"You should have said something earlier," he said, his voice no more than a whisper.

Hargrave laughed bitterly. "And then what?" he asked. "What could we have done?"

"We could have done something, at least," Roderick insisted. "We could have amputated. That might have stopped the infection from spreading."

Hargrave shook his head. "With what equipment? And besides, what use would I have been afterwards?"

He had a point. If Hargrave didn't die of blood loss from the surgery, he would have been weak, likely unconscious. And Roderick wouldn't have made it this far without him. In a way, Hargrave had died to get him this far. And now, they would die together. All of Hargrave's efforts, for nothing.

There was no getting out of this cell, no matter what he'd said about escaping. Jack Sheppard did escape Newgate on three separate occasions, but he hadn't done it with a hundred of the hungry dead standing outside his door. When Hargrave died, Roderick would have no choice but to put a bullet in his skull. His last bullet.

And then, he would be trapped in his cell, alone, with no chance of escape, no hope of being rescued. He would have only one choice: to waste away in his cell, or to open the door and let the zombies finish him off.

If Roderick was a selfish man, he would have stuck the revolver in his own mouth and blown his brains out before Hargrave had a chance to stop him. But he wasn't. So he sat on the bench, the only piece of furniture in the room, and aimed the revolver at Hargrave. And waited.

#

"Someone's coming," Parson Sinews hissed.

Annabel followed his gaze. She couldn't see anyone, even with her enhanced vision, but she decided to trust him. Without a word, she collapsed on the floor, where she lay motionless. A moment later, someone rounded the corner. An unfamiliar voice, two sets of footsteps.

"This is the prisoner?"

"That's her." The second voice belonged to Dr. Jekyll.

"Good, she's still unconscious. Should be easy enough to get a sample."

Annabel heard the sound of a key being pushed into a lock, a sound with which she was intimately familiar. The lock clicked, and the door opened.

"Be careful," said Dr. Jekyll. "She may not be unconscious; she may be dead. Which means she could wake up at any moment, infected with Lazarus."

Annabel kept her eyes shut, and just listened as the footsteps crossed the room. She felt the man leaning over her, endured his hands on her side as he reached down and pricked her neck with the needle of the syringe. She waited a moment while he extracted her blood.

When he pulled the needle out, she attacked, startling him with a head-butt, breaking his nose. She put a hand to her mechanical eye, and the dart shot out. Only a moment later, he slumped forward, dropping the blood-filled syringe to the floor.

She squirmed her way out from beneath his unconscious body, picked up the syringe, and scurried out of her cell, going straight for Dr. Jekyll. The man yelped and turned to flee, but Annabel was much quicker. She seized him by the throat and thrust the syringe into his neck. Suddenly he became very still.

"So, you want my blood, do you?"

"No," he whimpered. "No, please no. You could be infected."

"Explain."

"At Lord Connor's masquerade, you were probably exposed to the Lazarus Virus. Of course, there was no way of knowing for certain you'd been infected. But the needle I used to knock you out, it was contaminated."

She pressed the needle harder into his neck. "Why?" she demanded.

"You know why," he said, his voice trembling, "You might be immune."

"But odds are, I'm not, right?" she replied, somehow managing to remain calm. "So, my blood is infected with the Lazarus Virus? In that case, if you know what's good for you, you'll tell me what I want to know."

From his cell, Parson Sinews quietly applauded.

"Bravo, Miss Monday." he said. "I find I am enjoying myself after all."

Annabel shared a look with him. Perhaps he was not so unlikeable as she'd first thought.

"Behind you!"

She was already on it. Without turning away or letting go of the scientist's neck, she pivoted, raised her arm, and took hold of a man's wrist. She bent her knees and using his momentum against him, flipped the man over her back. He was surprisingly heavy. The only thing that allowed her to manage the feat was his own momentum. She sent him sprawling, grunting with the effort as her corset dug into her chest and her skirt suffered an indecorous tear.

She heard him hit the ground hard, the wind knocked out of him, and turned to look at him. He was a giant, nearly eight feet tall by Annabel's estimation. Tall, broad-shouldered, but slow-moving. He began struggling to get up, but he was having difficulty. She might have broken one of his bones.

Turning back to the doctor, she saw that she had emptied the syringe. She must have done it while busy dealing with the giant.

"Oops," said Annabel, smiling wickedly.

"What?" said Dr. Jekyll, turning pale. "What is it?"

Sinews began to laugh. Either he'd guessed or he'd seen what had happened. He covered his mouth with his hand in an effort to disguise his joy.

"Splendid," he cried.

"What?" Dr. Jekyll said again.

"It seems I've given you an injection of my own blood, doctor. An excellent research opportunity, I have no doubt."

It was true. In the moment she'd been distracted by the giant, she had accidentally emptied the syringe into the surgeon's neck. She showed him the empty syringe, with an apologetic shrug.

The doctor became hysterical.

"You bitch!" he fumed, repeating it again at a greater volume, jerking wildly in her grasp in a vain attempt to hit her. He was going to rouse the entire compound with his fit of verbigeration. She did the only thing she could think of.

She hit him. Hard.

He collapsed to the floor, unconscious. Meanwhile, the giant had managed to get to his feet. His height was even more impressive when he was standing upright. His head practically scraped the ceiling. Like so many of his comrades, he wore the black, leather plague mask. On him, it was even more intimidating. It reminded her of the enormous skull of a prehistoric beast in a museum.

She raised her fists and prepared for the fight. He towered over her, his enormous arms thick as tree trunks and as long as an ape's.

He moved slowly, grasping at her head with his giant mitts. She ducked to evade him, but underestimated his reach. He seized her by the head with one hand and squeezed. She felt like her head was going to explode.

Gasping in pain, she tried to hit him, but he simply stretched out his arms, so she couldn't reach him. She might have tried kicking him, but with her corset, she lacked the range of motion.

She blinked the pain away, grabbed him by the wrist, and twisted. The trick was to use his weight against him. All she needed was leverage, and -

He cried out in pain, twisting as she bent his arm. Annabel had been in fights before; she hadn't survived a life on the street by being meek. While he was off balance, she kicked him, aiming for his shins. He howled with pain, and Annabel jabbed with her left hand, striking him in the gut. His stomach felt like it was chiselled out of rock. Annabel tried to shake away the pain in her hand, and aimed a right-hand hook. She managed to land a solid blow to the giant's chin, sending him sprawling.

He spat blood onto the floor, and got to his feet.

"Quite the punch," he said, reaching up beneath his mask to retrieve a tooth that had been dislodged. He flicked it away, bloody and large. It hit the floor with a sound like dice being rolled.

Annabel sized up her opponent and took a moment to crack the knuckles in her hand and flex the muscles in her shoulder. Like a boxer, she raised both hands to protect her head, and danced around the giant as he aimed a few clumsy punches at her. She managed to land another right-hand punch, causing him to stumble backwards. Seizing her advantage, she followed up with the left, then another right.

But she'd overplayed her hand. Regaining his balance more quickly than she'd expected, he managed to dodge her incoming fist. He countered with a sharp left hook of his own. Vision blurred. Blood, and maybe a broken jaw. Annabel stumbled. She felt another blow to her skull, and heard herself cry out in pain. She took a blow to the chest and went flying.

She landed flat on her back. She was staring at the ceiling. The ceiling was dancing. She reached up, put a hand to her chin, and winced in pain. She was bleeding, but her jaw wasn't broken. Her head ached, her vision danced, but she needed to get up. It was hard to move in this god-awful corset, but she managed to struggle to her feet, anticipating the giant coming over to finish her off while she was getting up.

Instead, he had turned away. He was hobbling down the hallway. No doubt he intended to sound the alarm. Annabel took off after him, half running half stumbling, bracing against the wall for support.

She had nearly caught him when he darted through a doorway. The door slammed. She tried for the handle, but he had locked it already. Mere moments passed before the alarm began to sound, a horridly loud siren sound that resonated throughout the compound.

She doubled back. She needed to get back to the elevator, but she hadn't crossed this part of the compound on her way in.

"How do I get out of here?" she hissed at Mr. Sinews when she arrived back at his cell.

"I'll get you out," he said, "But first you'll need to get me out."

She nodded quickly. There was little time to argue with him. She'd spent her last dart, was unarmed, and who knew how many worked in this facility and what sort of security they had? She stepped back into her own cell, reached for the keys the unconscious scientist had dropped, and found them a moment later. A surprisingly difficult task, given the wardrobe requirements of her sex, but she managed it quickly enough.

She tried the keys in Mr. Sinews' cell door. The first one failed to open it. She tried the next. When it too failed, she slid it along the key ring and tried the next one in line. Again, the lock refused to open. She spared a glance down the hallway. Still vacant, but surely she didn't have much time. The alarm was unbearably loud. It had to be a matter of seconds before they converged upon her.

The lock refused to turn. One key after another until her attempts became more clumsy as she frantically eliminated each one.

"Try the next one," Mr. Sinews urged.

She did so, and the key failed. Last one; if this one failed, she would have to make a choice. Either leave him here and navigate the complex alone and badly outnumbered, or attempt to pick the lock without her proper tools and risk being caught.

She slid the key into the lock and without hesitation, turned it. The lock didn't budge. She banged against the cell door in frustration.

"It's no use," she told him, "I've tried them all. I'm sorry."

Mr. Sinews' face became cold with rage, though Annabel could see that it was not directed at her. The swagger he seemed to possess, the nonchalance and sardonic smile melted into a sneer.

"Do me one last favour then," he said, locking eyes with her and forcing a smile.

His eyes. They were that bright shade of green that seemed, well, inhuman for lack of a better word. A vibrant absinthe green. There's no time for this, she thought dully, but she found herself nodding.

"Yes," she said dreamily.

"Draw back your sleeve," he said.

It was strange. She wasn't even sure his mouth had moved. His voice just seemed to be inside her head. Ordinarily she would have gasped at the scandalous request, but now she complied, drawing back the fabric of her left sleeve to reveal bare skin. She found that she was trembling. The wailing of the siren was drowned out by the palpitations of her heart.

He reached a hand through the bars of his cell door, took hold of her wrist, causing her to flush. One of his fingernails was long and sharpened to a point. He used it to prick two tiny pinholes in her wrist. A bead of blood formed at each tiny wound. He drew her arm inside his cell, bent his lips over her wrist, and began to suck the blood from her wounds.

She gasped, but it not because it was painful. It was startlingly pleasurable, even when he drew hard on her wrist and sucked back mouthfuls of her blood. She felt her knees becoming weak as he drank, and though she was scandalized, she found that she was incapable of objecting. If he wanted to take her, just now, she would have let him. If he'd wanted to kill her, she'd have given him the bullets and the gun to do the deed.

Mr. Sinews was even more dangerous than she'd given him credit for, even behind bars.

"You're not one of them, are you?" she said. "A zombie, I mean."

He shook his head and licked the blood from his lips.

"I am something else," he said darkly.

"Then you really are a vampire," she whispered, still a bit delirious.

She stifled a giggle. Who would have thought her blood would be in such high demand?

"Just because I drink blood and daylight burns my skin doesn't mean I'm a vampire."

His mouth was still smeared with blood, and the smile was back on his face. He appeared flushed, and there was something different about his eyes. They were still green, but now they seemed more natural. More human.

"What are you?" she asked, sobriety gradually returning to her.

His answer was a whisper in the air, evanescent and ephemeral as fog, and she found herself beginning to forget it even as the words slipped from his tongue. "I am fey," he said.

Fey, she thought, as in fairie. Even as an orphan, Annabel had heard faerie tales growing up. There was a great deal of superstition in Annabel's social class. Urchins, orphans, the poor and criminal class, the immigrants, they tended to believe in faerie stories. But theirs were not the same as the fairy tales of spoiled rich children. The faerie tales Annabel had always heard were of dangerous creatures, inhuman and dangerous. The faeries that stole children from their beds, replacing them with monstrous changelings. The faeries that led travelers astray, drowned them in bogs, or snacked on their bones.

There was a fleeting moment where Annabel almost laughed, but it was gone in an instant. When she looked into his eyes, she knew he wasn't joking. And she knew that if he really was a faerie, he was the kind Annabel could believe in.

She had a question, on the edge of her memory, and a strange sense that she was between two worlds right now--the world of Parson Sinews, and the other world. There was a siren going off, a loud ululating tone that somehow seemed to be coming from far away.

She forced herself to listen to it, to hear the alarm. There was something that she needed to do, something she desperately needed to do, if only she could remember what it was. Run. There it was--the simple, three-letter word she'd been searching for--and suddenly, she could no longer remember why she was standing there, staring into Parson Sinews' green eyes. She needed to get out of here. The deafening alarm was ringing throughout the hallway.

She tore herself away from Sinews' intoxicating eyes, only to face another danger. She was surrounded by Resurrectionists.

There were six of them on each side of the hallway, a dozen in all, their guns fixed on her. They were dressed in the crow-faced plague doctor masks. Among them stood the giant, towering above the rest.

But it was the man beside him, who held Annabel's attention. He stepped forward, holding off the others with a casual gesture. Even the giant stepped aside to make way for him. It was clear that he was a leader among these Resurrectionists. His mask, distinct from the others only in that it was weathered and had obviously been well-worn, was familiar to Annabel. She'd seen it at Lord Connor's masquerade, and should have recognised it then. A part of her had, but she'd denied it, because she knew what it meant.

"Hello Annabel," he said, his voice muffled but nonetheless familiar.

His voice, too, had been familiar when she'd heard it at the masquerade. Even though it was muffled, she should have known. But it had been so long since she'd heard it, and she hadn't expected to ever see him again. Still, a part of her had known his voice then, too.

She'd known it when she saw Bertram Melbourne's mutilated body. She'd known it when she first began seeing the reports in the newspapers. She wanted to unclasp the leather straps on her head and tear her eye from its socket. He had given her this eye. Wearing it now, she felt like an accomplice to his deeds. Like she was condoning what he'd done. More than that, she owed him for her vision. She didn't want to owe him anything. She wanted to rip her eye from her face, to crush the damned thing beneath the heel of her boot. But she couldn't.

"Hello, Jack," she said, her voice a razor-sharp blade she hoped would cut him, all sharp edges and cold steel. "Forgive me. You go by Anthony Tidkins these days, don't you?"

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter 21

How long had it been since Annabel had seen Anthony Tidkins? There was still a part of her that wanted to run towards him, even now, and put her arms around him. There was another part of her that wanted to put her arms around his throat. That's family for you though, isn't it, she thought.

When Annabel first met Anthony Tidkins, she had been fascinated by him, walking through the streets of London with a parasol above his head. She'd never seen a gentleman with a parasol before, that feminine accessory more regularly used by ladies. His was of a distinctly more masculine design, if such a thing were possible, but it wasn't the parasol that gave her pause. It was the paleness of his skin, so white she felt that if she squinted she might actually be able to look through him. His eyes were a soft pink colour, his eyelashes long but white as snow. His hair was that wintry white as well, and his body waif-like, thin. Aside from the parasol, he was dressed to the height of fashion, immaculately dressed in dark but rich tones of grey and blue.

He wasn't considerably older than she was, perhaps fifteen, sixteen maybe, while she was nearing nine. He was a gentleman, however, and she was an urchin. She began following him, at first out of mere curiosity. Then as she continued to thread her way through the marketplace, following his footsteps, it occurred to her that he must be absurdly wealthy.

Annabel, with her plain and tattered skirt, brown fingerless gloves and hair knotted and messy, was keenly aware of her own social status, as she tailed the wealthy young man. She couldn't imagine what he was doing in the Old Nichol in Bethnal Green, a bleak neighbourhood consisting of ramshackle tenement buildings, a labyrinth of filth-ridden streets, the home of the downtrodden. Here, Annabel knew girls only a little older than her--some her own age--who had already turned to that other, less dignified form of employment that girls of her social status often turned to, for money. In a few years, she might be forced to consider that herself. She had only one thing that would keep her from suffering that indignity. Sticky fingers.

She followed him from the Old Nichol all the way to the Columbia Market, where it was Annabel and not the albino that was out of place. There, she paused to watch him purchase a newspaper, and paid close attention to which pocket housed his coin purse. She followed him a little longer, waiting for the right moment. A horse was milling nearby, its cabriolet parked on the side of the road beside a haberdashery.

As the albino stopped beside the horse to look at some item on display in the shop window, Annabel settled on her game. The horse dodge. Without warning, she violently slapped the brim of his hat, causing the hat to fall over his eyes. While he was busy reclaiming his vision, Annabel was slipping her little fingers into his pocket. She closed them around the pouch and swiftly lifted it from the albino's pocket. If all had gone according to plan, she'd have dodged beneath the legs of the horse and been out of sight before he'd righted his hat.

Instead, the pouch caught on something. A chain dangled between pocket and purse. The chain pulled, and the albino quickly extricated his hat from his eyes. But Annabel was not to be deterred. A knife flicked out of her pocket. Deftly, she sliced open the gentleman's jacket, taking pocket, chain, and purse and all. Before he could react, Annabel slipped the purse into her own pocket and pointed the knife at the older boy, warning him not to try anything.

Then she was off, dodging beneath the legs of the horse. The game usually went more smoothly than this. This time, she was forced to flee, back into the crowd of the marketplace. She dove beneath vendors' carts and weaved through a sea of pedestrian traffic. The city was her playground, and she'd played this game before. She never lost. The trick was that she was always the first to start running.

This time was no different, except in one regard; the albino hadn't even bothered to chase after her. He simply smiled as he watched her flee. When Annabel realised that he wasn't about to continue chasing her, she opened her palm in order to examine her prize. Her eyes grew big and bright. Such a score! What she held in her tiny palm was more than a year's salary for a man of modest income.

#

The next time Annabel saw Anthony Tidkins was also the first time that Annabel had ever really been caught stealing. It was nothing overly fancy. A necklace. But the theft had been overly brazen, even for her; she'd stolen it right off a lady's neck.

She had nearly gotten away with it, too. The lady seemed not to have noticed the absence of her jewelry from her neck. She must not have felt Annabel's little fingers unclasping the necklace while the lady shopped. It was the lady's husband that caught her. A large, burly man who seized Annabel by the wrists and threatened to break her arms for her crime.

"Begging your pardon, sir," Annabel heard someone saying, but there were tears stinging her eyes. The man was holding her arms so tight she really thought he might break them. "The girl is my charge. I assure you, she meant no offence. She is silly, you understand. My apologies, the girl gave me the slip. I do hope she hasn't been bothering you too severely?"

Finally, Annabel turned to look at the man. She recognised him immediately, even with her eyes a-blur with tears. The albino handed a few coins to the brute, who relinquished his grip on Annabel's arms, took the coins. He seized his wife's necklace from Annabel's trembling hand and returned it to his wife.

"Just see to it that this doesn't happen again," he said with a growl.

"Yes, sir," was the albino's reply. There was the hint of an American accent to his voice, though Annabel couldn't place the dialect. Just that he sounded a bit different from other upper class gentlemen.

Annabel looked up at her mysterious benefactor, wondering if she ought to flee. If he had rescued her only to enact his own form of retribution. But curiosity kept her.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"Nothing at all," he answered.

"Then why help me?" she spat.

"I didn't like how he was treating you, and I felt I was in a position to help you," he answered.

Annabel studied his face to see if she was lying. If he was, he was a very clever liar. She still didn't understand why he'd helped her though.

After that, she began seeing him more and more. Occasionally, he would buy her presents. Little things like clean clothes, a new pair of boots, and even books.

"I can't read," she told him.

"I could teach you," he answered.

"Why?" she asked. It was a question she asked every time she met him, without fail. No one had been kind to her without reason.

One day, he finally answered honestly.

"You have a talent that I believe could be useful to me."

She didn't understand.

"I want to hire you," he said.

"I'm not for sale," she spat.

He smiled. "I mean to say that I wish to hire you as a thief," he explained.

"Oh," said Annabel, feeling silly. That wasn't what she thought he'd meant. "What do you want me to steal?"

When he told her, Annabel nodded.

"I'll do it," she said. "I'm Annabel, by the way."

"Jack," he introduced himself, extending a hand. "Jack Bernhardt."

#

Over the years, Anthony--known to her in those days as Jack--had introduced Annabel to several of his acquaintances, many of whom were, quite frankly, criminals. Her services were highly sought after by Anthony's friends, and Annabel was all too happy to oblige and was quick to adapt her skill as a pickpocket to the theft of more valuable items, sought by the ton in part due to their illegal nature. Paintings, such as the one Annabel had provided for Mr. Sinews, for example; ancient Egyptian artifacts, which had required Annabel to break into museums; and more importantly, evidence, records, and files, which Annabel was able to rescue from the police without too much difficulty.

Then there was also the research that Annabel had stolen on Anthony's behalf. This, according to Anthony, was the real reason he'd hired her. Her benefactor was a scientist, and though he was still in his teenage years when she met him, he was educated as a physician, had gone to university, and had studied under one of America's most prominent doctors. Dr. Allen. Anthony's pursuit of science was obsessive. He'd taken to pursuing shortcuts whenever possible.

He was not above stealing the research of other scientists. Annabel had personally visited the homes and laboratories of Charles Darwin, Edward Jenner, John Hunter, John Boyd Dunlop, Lord Kelvin, and Nikola Tesla, among others, and had returned to Anthony with unpublished studies, notes, and specimen, whatever he required for his endless pursuit of...

Annabel knew not what it was exactly that Anthony was studying.

But until now, she had always believed that while Anthony's methods were criminal, his intentions were benevolent. He held life as the most precious gift. He'd often spoken to Annabel passionately about wanting to make a difference in the world. Every life, he'd always said, was worth saving. This, Annabel had always felt, was why he'd saved hers, all those years ago. He'd taken her in, given her a home and a purpose, helped her to elevate her social and financial position. And years later, he'd saved her yet again, when her eye had been ripped from its socket.

It was for this reason that she felt a mild stinging in the back of her eyes, as she realised that Anthony was utterly, completely insane. She'd been taken in by his lies. She hadn't even needed to be drugged to be taken in.

"What do you want with me, Jack?" she hissed. It was the only way to keep herself from crying. She wouldn't let herself be weak, not in front of him. So she set her mouth in a cruel sneer and glared at the young man who'd treated her as a daughter. "You tried to kill me."

Anthony laughed. He sounded different. Perhaps that's why she hadn't recognised it before. Not just because it was muffled by the mask, but because there was a cruelty that had crept into his voice. There was no joy to his laughter.

"At the masquerade, you mean? You knew that was me?," he asked.

Annabel kept her mouth shut, her eyes fixed dangerously on him.

"I wasn't trying to kill you," he said. "I was testing my hypothesis."

While he spoke, Annabel was still looking for a way out. There had to be some way of getting past the dozens of Resurrectionists, even with their guns trained on her. She just had to wait for the right moment to present itself.

"What hypothesis?"

Before he had a chance to answer, a door swung open. She wanted to hear what Anthony had to say, but the door was open, and this might be her only chance. She stepped through the door, pushing past the Resurrectionist that had opened it, shoving him out of her way.

"Stop her!" Anthony cried.

Ignoring him, the Resurrectionist turned to the door and bolted it shut.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter 22

Roderick watched with tiring patience as Mr. Hargrave's sickness took him. It might have been a matter of hours, or a matter of minutes; it was impossible to tell. A narrow gap in the wall, a mild breeze from outside, was the only indication of the passage of time. The thick fog and black clouds made the day as black as any night.

In all that time, the zombie mob still lingered in the hallway, voicing their hunger with the same desperate moans. No change had come over them.

But Hargrave had changed.

He had grown quiet and still. His eyes seemed to have sunken back in his head. Dark shadows crept across his skin, the necrosis spreading from his blackened wound and poisoning his entire body. The grey pallour that Roderick had first observed on the policeman's arm was now the colour of his neck, his face, his chest. His veins were black webs. A thin sheen of sweat clung to his forehead. His lips appeared chapped, the skin on them peeling away.

Roderick guessed he didn't have long.

The gun was beginning to feel heavy in his hand. His wrist had begun to shake with fatigue. But still, he waited. He wasn't about to kill the man while he still lived.

"Roderick," Hargrave croaked. His voice was beginning to sound less human. It was the first time he had spoken in hours.

"Hargrave," Roderick answered.

Hargrave tried to shift position, to sit up a bit straighter, and flinched. He coughed, a hoarse rasp of air expelled from black lungs through a tattered throat. At last, he settled. He forced a smile.

"Please," he said, "Call me Richard."

Roderick swallowed. He gave the man a nod, tears threatening to well up in his eyes. He blinked them back. He barely knew this man, but they had a hard-earned closeness, the brotherhood of having fought at each other's sides. They had fought the living dead together, they had saved each other's lives. And for the past few hours, Roderick had been sitting at his side, watching him die.

"Richard, then," he said, and he forced a smile, and began to cry. He wiped his tears on his sleeve. "What is it?"

"Promise me--"

"Yes?"

Hargrave's words were a whisper, the man's dying words drowned out by the mob of the unliving outside the door. Roderick stood up from the bench and crossed the short width of the cell. He bent down and put his ear to Hargrave's mouth.

"Promise you what?" he asked.

Hargrave had gone quiet. Even with his ear pressed against Hargrave's mouth, he couldn't hear a thing. And, he realised, he couldn't feel the air of his breath. He couldn't see the rise and fall of his chest.

He looked at Hargrave's face. His eyes had fallen shut. His body was stiff, motionless. Roderick peeled off his gloves, set them on the floor next to his gun. With a shaking hand, he reached out to check his friend's pulse.

He put his fingers against Hargrave's carotid. His skin was cold, and lifeless. Roderick couldn't feel a pulse. A hard knot formed in his throat. He swallowed it, and steeled himself for what he needed to do.

He reached for his gun, just as Hargrave's eyes snapped open.

#

A red light began to blink beneath Palmer's desk, electric and bright. It pulsed on and off, the red light casting an unnatural glow onto Palmer's face.

"What is that?" Jonathan asked.

"Emergency alarm," Palmer explained. "It means there's a situation in the laboratory."

"What kind of situation?"

"Suppose I'll have to find out," Palmer replied, standing up. "If you'll excuse me--"

"I want to come with you," Jonathan blurted out.

He was standing up now too, the silent alarm still pulsing, on, off, on, off. He put his hand on Palmer's shoulder as the older man tried to brush him off.

"I want to see the lab," he said. "I need to see it."

"Jonathan, be reasonable," Palmer replied, "The laboratory isn't run by Grimmer and Sons any more. It's run by Resurrectionists. They've come to trust me and your mother, because so far we've been cooperating with them. What do you think they'll do if I bring you down there?"

Again, Jonathan had to grab ahold of Palmer to get him to stop and listen. He refused to be brushed aside like some sort of child. He was frustrated that both his mother and father had kept this monumental secret from him, but he had to admit he didn't entirely blame them. He hadn't taken his duties with the family business seriously. Why should he be trusted to take the Lazarus Virus seriously? But after what he'd learned from Parson Sinews, after seeing the destruction of the city from The Penny Dreadful, after having his throat nearly torn out by a dead man, Jonathan wasn't about to be left out.

"You have a mask," Jonathan said.

"What?"

"The plague doctor's mask," he said. "You have one, don't you?"

"Yes, but--"

"Give it to me," Jonathan told him.

"And what about me?" asked Palmer.

"You'll say you forgot to put it on, in your haste," Jonathan said. "Now, the mask."

Finally, Palmer relented. He let out a heavy sigh as he fetched the mask in question. "Your mother is going to have my head if anything happens to you," he said.

"Your problem," Jonathan told him.

Palmer handed him the mask. He didn't seem happy about it, but at least he was doing as Jonathan asked. Jonathan turned the mask over in his hands. Inside the beak-like protrusion of the mask was a rubber seal. A network of tubes, a filter.

"It's a gas mask," Jonathan realized.

The plague mask was not merely a symbol of the Resurrectionists, it was also a means of avoiding inhaling the infectious gas.

"So," he asked, adjusting the straps on the plague mask to fit his face, "Where is this laboratory?"

Palmer chuckled, amusement crinkling the corners of his eyes as he went over to the bookshelf. He grabbed one of the books. It made a strange, mechanical sound, then snapped back into place on the shelf. Jonathan heard the distant rattle of heavy machinery, and stared at Palmer with confusion.

The sound seemed to be coming from below. He raised his eyebrows, forming a question, and frowned as the floor shook like the floor of an airship.

"You'll see," said Palmer, enjoying the suspense.

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Annabel raced down the hallway, the Resurrectionist in tow. The others were still banging on the door, demanding that he open it, but he was single-minded in his pursuit of her. It was difficult to run, her skirts trailing heavily behind her, and difficult to breathe, her corset tightly laced. The Resurrectionist was gaining ground.

Still she ran, her boots thudding hard against the concrete floor of the hall. In the dim lighting, she could see the brass cage of the elevator, not too far ahead. She raced toward it, breathing heavily. She slammed into the gate, unable to slow her momentum, but with barely a pause she threw the door open. She stepped inside and reached to shut the gates.

Too late. The Resurrectionist's hand barred the gate. Annabel let out a surprised cry. She'd thought she'd been quick enough. The bastard was surprisingly strong. She tried to shut the gate, fighting against him as he strained to keep it open. She changed tactics.

She began to swat at his hand, trying to force him to release his grip. He yelped, but his grip was firm. She grasped his fingers with her own and began to peel them off, one by one.

"Stop!" he protested. "Stop it. I'm trying to help you."

"Like hell," she said.

Another man stepped out from behind him. She nearly jumped. Somehow she hadn't seen him before. He was an older man, white-haired, in his mid-forties. Abraham Palmer, she guessed.

She knew this bastard was in collusion with Mrs. Grimmer. Together, they'd been plotting with the Resurrectionists. She told him what she'd heard.

"I can explain," he said.

She imagined he could. Not that she was likely to believe his explanation, but she was sure he'd have one. But in the distance she heard the door beginning to splinter beneath the efforts of his fellow Resurrectionists, and she knew that she had little choice but to humour him. She was unarmed and outnumbered.

She looked at the one in the Resurrectionist mask.

"Take it off," she instructed.

He did as he was told, unclasping the straps and slipping off the mask. His hair was damp with sweat, a side effect of wearing the leather mask, but he was handsome. Hold on--

Annabel recognized him. He'd been masked when they first met--not in the plague doctor's mask, but in a masquerade mask--but even so, enough of his face had been visible that she could recognize him now. It was his eyes that she remembered most clearly. They'd been etched into her memory.

She caught a glimpse of recognition in his eyes, too, as she watched his vision hone in on her prosthetic eye. She'd been in male garb then, but the ocular device was enough to give her away, despite the disguise. He knew who she was, just as well as she knew who he was.

"Mr. O," she said.

"Miss Monday," he replied, his voice smooth. It sent a cool shiver rippling up Annabel's spine. She cursed herself for thinking of such things at a time like this.

She recalled her conversation with Parson Sinews. Sinews had believed Jonathan Grimmer was innocent. She wasn't so sure now. He wore the Resurrection mask, and stood at Mr. Palmer's side. How could she trust him?

And yet, the Resurrectionists were banging at the door she'd come through. It wouldn't take them long to get through. She decided to play along, for now anyway.

She stood aside, letting go of the elevator gate to make way for Mr. O--Jonathan Grimmer--and Mr. Palmer.

As she took hold of the lever and started up the ascent, Jonathan squeezed into the elevator and blinked at Annabel in confusion.

"Since when are you a woman?" he asked.

"My whole life," she replied, not without humour. "I was wearing a disguise when we met, obviously. Easier to get into Lord Connor's unnoticed."

"Some disguise," he remarked honestly.

She glanced upward, but it was impossible to see anything in the darkness of the elevator shaft, and even so her view was blocked by the roof of the cage.

The machine rattled noisily upward, but even despite the din of the elevator, they could hear the Resurrectionists breaking into the hallway below. They weren't safe yet. Annabel doubted the floor was thick enough to protect them if the Resurrectionists decided to start shooting at them. And they could always just cut through the cord, and the entire cage would come tumbling down. She silently urged it to climb faster.

"Don't worry. They want you alive," said Palmer.

Annabel wasn't convinced. She looked dubiously at the floor of the cage and listened for the sound of cutting rope. She could hear distant, muffled voices echoing up the shaft. Nothing else, but the ordinary clicking of gears and winding of pulleys.

"Why?" she asked, finally.

"At Lord Connor's, you were exposed to the Lazarus Virus, were you not?" Mr. Palmer replied.

"I'm not sure," Annabel told him. "But your associate gave me an injection. It was contaminated."

"My associate?"

"Dr. Jekyll," she said.

"Ah," said Palmer. "I see. So, you are carrying the virus, even now?"

She didn't know what he was getting at. Yes, she had the Lazarus Virus. She didn't know exactly how it worked, or what would happen to her, but she knew that she would soon be a zombie, like the unbreathing one in the laboratory. Like Lord Connor, or the man who'd fallen from the second story of his mansion. Like the dead that roamed the streets of London.

"Yet you still display no symptoms whatsoever, of the virus."

She looked at him, suddenly. She remembered the conversation she'd overheard, when sneaking about Lord Connor's garden.

"I was given to understand that the--what's the phrase? Incubation time?"

Palmer nodded.

"I understand that it varies."

"True," Mr. Palmer agreed. "Sometimes it takes minutes, rather than seconds, for the change to occur. An hour or two, at most."

"What? But I've had it much longer than that."

"The Resurrectionists believe you may possess immunity to the virus," he said.

Annabel frowned, uncertain. It sounded too good to be true. Why her? Why should she be immune when so many had been infected so easily?

"So, you can rest assured they want you alive," he told her, "After all, the entire point of their Dead London Project is to find a test subject with a natural immunity--"

The sound of a bullet interrupted his thoughts and proved him a liar. The bullet ricocheted inside the elevator shaft and struck the floor of the cage. It put a dent in the floor, but didn't pierce the steel.

"You were saying?" Annabel said.

"Shit," Jonathan swore.

More bullets joined the first, until the elevator shaft was filled with the banging of gunfire and smell of powder. Like the first, the subsequent bullets at first failed to break through the metal floor of the cage. But as the Resurrectionists continued to fire, Annabel felt a bullet whiz past her face. It struck the ceiling above. She looked at Jonathan as if she expected him to do something about it. As if he could.

"Why keep me alive when all they really need is my blood?" she asked rhetorically. "Are you armed, either of you?"

Another bullet put a hole in the floor, and whooshed past her head. It wasn't as close as the first, but it was no less unsettling.

She looked to Palmer and held out her hand. He nodded, briskly, and offered up his firearm, a pinfire revolver.

She aimed the muzzle through the hole in the floor and fired. She heard a cry of alarm from below. Hopefully her bullet had struck home. She couldn't see what she was shooting at. She fired again, and was answered with another alarmed shout. The Resurrectionists kept firing back, bullets ricocheting dangerously in the narrow elevator shaft.

Annabel fired, again and again, almost emptying the chamber. She wanted to save at least one bullet, just in case.

At last, the elevator shuddered to a halt, and Jonathan slid the door open. They practically tumbled out of the elevator. Annabel looked herself over and was relieved to see that while her skirt was ridden with bullet holes, she herself was unscathed. She looked to Jonathan and Palmer.

The older man was clutching his shoulder. There was blood seeping through his shirt and onto his hands. He must have been shot.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter 23

The gunshot rang out through the hallways of the prison, a deafening sound like thunder reverberating in the small cell. The zombies seemed to be drawn to the sound, their efforts to get past the heavy door suddenly renewed. Roderick began to weep. He pounded his hands against Hargrave's lifeless chest in frustration, dropping the empty pistol on the floor with a clatter.

"God damn you, Hargrave," he cried. "Don't leave me alone in here."

His friend's head was shot through, a clean hole through his forehead, a hideous snarl permanently held on his face, like the smile on a wax figure.

Roderick took Hargrave's hat from his head, placed it over his face, and stood up. He couldn't stand to look at him any more, and he found himself unable to tear his gaze away. Now that his face was covered, he was able to look away.

He dusted himself off, bounced on the balls of his feet to shake off the nervous energy, and pulled his gloves back on.

"Get a hold of yourself, Roderick," he said aloud. He found that his nerves were steadier when he was talking aloud, even if there was no one to hear but him. He wished he had Bailey with him. Roderick was accustomed to spending nights alone in his studio, but at least then he had the dog to talk to. Now, there was nobody but the zombies in the hall and the corpses in the cell.

Remembering that he still had a bit of cocaine in his pocket, he reached into his jacket and pulled out a small bag of it. He dabbed a bit under his nose and inhaled. Almost instantly, he felt more himself.

For what seemed like the first time, he examined his cell. It was like seeing it for the first time. The bench he'd been sitting on, hard, weathered oak on legs of iron. The bare walls of cinder. The iron door to the dark hall outside the cell, the square grates in the door through which the dead thrust their fingers. The tattered bed-sheet on the floor. The thin opening in the wall through which the faint breeze found its way into his cell.

During one of Jack Sheppard's escapes from Newgate, he'd filed away the iron bars on the door and climbed through the narrow space between the bars and into the hallway. With the aide of his female accomplices, he'd managed to slip past the distracted guards. Roderick, of course, had no accomplices, and his guards were a mob of a hundred ravenous corpses.

During another of Sheppard's famous escapes, he'd gotten away by climbing through the window. He managed to scale the wall, climb up onto the roof, and later descended to the ground, using a rope made of bedsheets. Roderick might have gotten out that way, but the narrow window was blocked by an iron bar that was lodged into the cinder.

"That's it!" Roderick cried, laughing aloud as he considered it. "Yes, that might just work."

It was during Sheppard's final escape from Newgate that he'd filed away the iron bar that obstructed his escape through the window. He'd used the iron bar to chip away at the ceiling, eventually managing to put a hole through it large enough to climb through. Once free of his cell, he'd gotten up onto the roof, used the blanket in his cell to reach the roof of the house across from the prison. He'd broken into the house, climbed down the stairs, and headed out to the street, all with with his irons still on his legs.

Roderick considered the possibility of his own escape. Being repelled by the thought of exercise, Roderick had virtually no muscle on his slight frame. Like Jack Sheppard, he was not overly tall, and certainly not athletic. Still, in some ways he might be well-served by his slight frame. At least the hole he'd need to put in the ceiling didn't have to be terribly wide.

It might take hours, days even, but at least it gave Roderick a glimmer of hope. With enough luck, he might not actually die in here.

He fished a nail-file from one of his pockets--it never hurt to be prepared for cosmetic emergencies--and dragged the wooden bench over to the window. He climbed up onto the bench, and looked through the window.

His heart leapt.

He could see an airship floating outside the prison. Even through the dark and foggy air, he could make out the ship's familiar shape, and the brightly painted logo on its blimp. Beneath that, the name of the ship was printed in blazing red letters.

The Penny Dreadful.

#

The blood seemed to have stopped flowing. Annabel had roughly patched Palmer up with a strip of cloth from her skirt. It was badly ripped enough already, so she dared not worry about the scandal her bare legs might cause should she be seen in public in such a state. There were other, more pressing concerns. Besides, given the state the city was in, it was unlikely that she would be the only one with a torn skirt.

"We've got to get out of here," she said. "The Resurrectionists could be right on our heels."

Abraham agreed with a groan of pain. "This isn't the only way out of the lab, either," he said.

He hurried to the door, stopping only to retrieve another weapon, a shotgun he had hidden beneath his desk. Annabel had to remind herself that if he'd wanted to kill her he wouldn't have needed the shotgun to do so. He could just as easily have left her to the Resurrectionists. Or he could have kept his pistol to himself. Still, she didn't trust him, so she positioned herself so that Jonathan Grimmer stood between her and Palmer.

She had only just met Jonathan the night before. He'd given her little reason to trust him. He'd provided a false identity. He'd known that Lord Connor was a Resurrectionist; he'd said that Connor had dangerous friends. His family was obviously connected with the Resurrectionists, and now she'd caught him wearing a plague mask, down in the Resurrectionist's secret laboratory. Everything she knew about him screamed Resurrectionist. And yet...and yet, he'd stood by her, on lookout while she cracked Connor's safe.

Annabel had survived in a dangerous world of criminals because she had good instincts. She didn't trust easily. In all her life, she could only think of one time when she'd trusted the wrong man--but that single black stain on her record was Anthony Tidkins. A great whopping mistake in judgment. She couldn't afford to make that mistake again. She couldn't afford to trust Jonathan Grimmer.

"I don't know why I trust you," she whispered to him. The truth was, when she looked into Jonathan's eyes, the only thing she could think to do was to kiss his lips, to lose herself in his embrace. No wonder she trusted him. "But I do," she continued. "I don't trust Palmer."

"I do," he said.

Annabel bit her tongue, and nodded. "That will have to do," she said, "for now."

She turned to Palmer, stopping him before he left the room.

"I need more bullets," she said, holding up the gun he'd loaned her.

He returned to his desk, and opened another drawer. He rummaged through it, fished out a small stash of nine millimeter ammunition, and handed it over.

"Most of the offices don't have elevators into the basement. Just those of us who worked in the laboratory before the Resurrectionists took it over," Palmer told them, as he crossed the room to the door. "Mrs. Grimmer's office, mine, and Charles Grimmer's old office--Jonathan's now. Mr. Grimmer's office is closest to this one; they'll likely be headed there. Follow my lead."

"Right," said Annabel, opening the door and heading into the hallway in a hurry.

The employees of the printing company stared at them as the trio tore down the hall. They made quite the sight--Annabel with her tattered dress, Palmer with his bandaged wound, and Jonathan with his customary roguish smile still on his lips. The gossip, however, quickly turned to stunned silence, when the crowd noticed Mr. Palmer' shotgun and Annabel's pistol.

Without slowing, the trio hurried through the crowd, the shouts of the Resurrectionists announcing their arrival from behind. Barely pausing in his tracks, Abraham cocked the shotgun, aimed it at the Resurrectionists, and fired.

Screams erupted from the printing company's employees, while a cry of pain arose from one of the masked Resurrectionists. The Resurrectionists scattered for cover, though some of them raised their own weapons and began firing back. The chaos of screaming journalists, secretaries, and printers provided cover, while Annabel fled through the crowd, Jonathan and Palmer right behind her. After a moment, the Resurrectionists resumed the chase.

They sprinted around the corner as a bullet tore a hole in the wall, plaster and dust sprinkling the floor. They hurried through the printing room, shoved open the door to the lobby. Past the startled receptionist, toward the front door. They shoved it open, and tore down the front steps.

The Grimmer Company was clear of zombies; clearly, the Resurrectionists hadn't wanted the dead to interrupt their work, so they'd avoided spreading the Lazarus Virus within the vicinity of the lab. Annabel wondered how long it would take before even this neighborhood was overrun by zombies. How long, without the aide of the infectious gas, would it take for the plague to spread?

Annabel spared a glance back. The Resurrectionists were just now arriving in the lobby.

"Come on!" she cried, hiking up her skirt and heading down the long driveway of the printing company.

The men didn't need to be told twice. They quickly hurried after her, with only the occasional backward glance to see that, yes, they were still being followed.

Another shot rang out, but it went wild. Palmer returned fire, forcing the Resurrectionists to take cover while the trio fled. They sought cover behind a statue that marked the entrance to the driveway. A hail of bullets struck the statue, and Annabel had to cover her ears and eyes as the stone crumbled.

Abraham reloaded, stepped out from behind cover, and fired again.

"Go!" he shouted.

Annabel didn't hesitate. She headed out onto the street. Jonathan was right behind her as she hurried across the deserted road, bullets bouncing off the ground inches from his feet. It was only by luck that he wasn't hit. They took cover behind a tree. A bullet lodged in the thick trunk, bark filling the air.

The neighborhood was dead quiet, but for the shower of bullets; Annabel could spy fearful faces peering out of the windows at her and Jonathan. Probably wondering if she and Jonathan were zombies.

"We'll have to go on foot," she said. She'd hoped they might flag down a passing hansom and hop on before the Resurrectionists had a chance to follow.

Jonathan was scanning the sky. "Shit," he swore. "Where is it?"

"Your airship?" she asked, still running.

Palmer was hurrying after them, at a distance. They slowed to allow him to catch up. Another bullet zinged past, shattering a window. Another one struck the pavement, creating a spray of debris. They ducked into an alley.

"We'll be safer in the skies," Jonathan whispered quickly. "I sent some of my crew on a bit of an errand. I'd hoped they would be back by now."

Annabel risked a peak, and saw that the Resurrectionists were still following. They had split up, though, half of them heading away from them, the rest headed their way. They might not have seen them flee into the alley, but they would round the corner in a moment. Then they'd be sitting ducks.

"We need to keep moving," she said, taking off down the alley. "Where are we headed?"

"Newgate," he answered.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Chapter 24

Having managed to file the iron bar from the window, Roderick applied himself to the task of putting a hole through the ceiling with furious energy. He didn't wish to be left behind. His arm aching from his efforts, each attack on the granite ceiling vibrating through his tendons, he chipped away at the ceiling. His efforts were rewarded with a shower of granite. The ceiling was surprisingly fragile, enough to make him worry it would all come crashing down on him.

He wondered how Jack Sheppard had managed it. The sound of chipping granite rang through the prison, sending the zombies into a fervor. How could the guards not have heard what he was up to and come rushing in to stop him? Perhaps they'd been bribed, he thought.

Before long, he was drenched in sweat, his face red and glistening with exertion. He stripped off his waistcoat and flung it on the wooden bench, wiped the sweat from his brow onto his shirt. Exercise was sobering. He no longer felt the delicious energy given to him by the cocaine.

He picked up the iron bar again, was about to renew his efforts, when a sound like distant thunder caught his attention. He set the bar back on the bench and climbed down. Another loud bang followed the first. Gunfire.

He went over to the door. He couldn't get close enough to look out through the hatch. The zombies still had their fingers thrust through its gaps. He heard more gunshots, dozens of bullets fired one after another. It was difficult to tell, with the way the sound reverberated on the hard walls and bare floor, but it sounded like the gunshots were drawing closer.

Another barrage of gunfire erupted. This time, Roderick was sure it had come from closer. The fingers in the hatch withdrew, and the zombies began to stagger away. He saw one of them fall, a bullet through its skull.

Roderick peered through the hatch. Some of the zombies lay still on the floor. The rest were moving away from the door, all headed in the same direction. It could only mean one thing. Whoever was shooting was close by.

He began banging on the door.

"In here!" he cried, "I'm alive in here!"

Some of the zombies paused at the door and looked in through the hatch to see what all the fuss was about. One by one, their faces dropped away, as a spray of thick, glutinous blood painted the walls and slopped on the floor.

Roderick pressed himself against the door again, and peered through the small square holes into the hallway. The floor was littered with dead bodies. His angle of view was narrow, but he couldn't see any zombies. He couldn't see the shooters either.

"In here!" he called again, in case they were still alive. "In here!"

"Did you 'ear that?" said a voice.

"Hello?" a second voice called loudly.

Roderick practically leapt for joy. They were still alive! Somebody--living people--was still alive.

"In here!" he cried once more. "I'm in this cell."

He picked up the iron bar from the bench, and used it to bang against the door so they could find him. Finally, a man's face appeared in front of the hatch. Roderick never thought he'd be so happy just to see a living man's face, but he felt himself grinning from ear to ear. He felt tears welling up in the corners of his eyes.

"Thank god," he said, smiling broadly.

He wiped the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief, a bit embarrassed by his appearance. He gathered up his waistcoat and threw it back on hastily, as the man opened the door.

"Kip Lockwood," said the man, reaching out to shake Roderick's hand.

Instead, Roderick threw his arms around the man, embracing him firmly. Kip yelped in surprise. Of course, he was even more surprised when Roderick planted a kiss on his cheek.

"Well, uh, Ah'm 'appy to see you, too," he said, awkwardly.

A short, black-haired girl joined him in the doorway. She had the practical look of a mechanic--worn leather fingerless gloves, fingers stained with oil and grease, and plainly colored clothing. To complete the look, she wore a pair of brass welding goggles on her forehead, and brandished a rusty pipe as her weapon. The pipe was crusted with blood and gore. She was short in stature, but Roderick noticed her broad shoulders and her muscular build. The girl looked like she could pick Roderick up with one hand.

"Toshi," said Kip, "This 'ere's--actually, didn't catch your name, sah."

"Roderick Steen," said Roderick, hugging the second man, who was even more awkward about it than the first. "Sorry, I'm just very glad to see you."

"Yes, well, we didn't think we'd find anyone in here. At least, nobody who wasn't--" Toshi trailed off.

"A zombie?" Roderick ventured, pointing at the sea of corpses in the hall.

"Is that what you call them?" asked Toshi.

Roderick shrugged. "As good a name as any. What are you doing in the prison?"

"Looking for someone," Kip replied.

"As was I," said Roderick, "Before I took shelter in here."

"We shouldn't linger," said Toshi, heading back into the hallway. She stepped over the corpses carefully. "Might be more of them, and we're running low on ammunition."

Roderick followed them into the hall, where they joined the rest of their crew, a dozen or so men who--like Kip--had the look of sailors. Roderick felt a bit out of place in his blood-stained ivory frock coat, blue ascot and kid gloves, but he was just grateful to be among the living again. He followed them, eager to get out of this hell-hole.

"So," he said, nudging Kip conspiratorially, "Who was it you were looking for?"

"Some bloke called Parson Sinews," Kip replied. "'ow 'bout you, sah?"

Roderick raised his eyebrows.

"Small world," he replied.

True to form, Roderick was quick to assess his new allies, small clues spilling stories, deductions filling in the gaps. Roderick had seen The Penny Dreadful nearby, which meant the men were not sailors; they were the airship's crew. Clementine Chen was clearly an engineer or a mechanic, while the men were likely crewmen. If they were the Dreadful's crew, then Jonathan must have sent them. Which meant Jonathan had seen Mr. Sinews' arrest. It made sense; he would have been at Sinews' home around the time that Inspector Taggert had sent the police to collect him. So, Jonathan was still investigating The Resurrectionists. This was good news. It meant that his friend was still alive.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter 25

The airship was high above the dying city of London, above the clouds, sailing through the aether. Far enough above the city that they could no longer hear the apocalyptic sounds from the ground below. The screams of the living as they watched their friends and family members die, only to turn on them. The inhuman moan of the zombies as they hunted for living flesh. The shattering of glass as the creatures broke into homes and businesses; even in their homes the living were not safe.

The airship was as steady as solid ground, with only a light breeze stirring the air. The whir of propellers and the chunk-chunk of the engines kept up a steady rhythm.

While Jonathan generally disliked air travel, the airship was not without its comforts. At any rate, it was preferable to being on the ground at the moment. Jonathan had nonetheless plopped herself into a chair with an audible sigh. Then he rang the bell for tea.

His first inclination had been absinthe, but the bright green bottle had lost its appeal at the moment. It reminded him of Parson Sinews, his furious battle with the police as they made their arrest. It was hard to believe that had only been the night before.

Across from Jonathan sat Abraham Palmer. To his left, Miss Monday. And to his right, Roderick Steen, Kipper Lockwood, and Toshi. He had been surprised to find Roderick aboard his ship when he, Palmer, and Monday had finally reached Newgate. Apparently, Mr. Lockwood--with the help of some of the airship crew--had managed to rescue Roderick, who had been trapped in a cell, surrounded by zombies. They had not found Parson Sinews, but thanks to Miss Monday's efforts, they now knew that Sinews was being held prisoner by the Resurrectionists.

After a long, trying day, tea was not just a comfort. It was a necessity. It was served with sandwiches and sweets, lemon tarts and soft warm bread. Because Kip and Toshi had rescued his best friend, Jonathan had thought it appropriate to invite them to tea.

He watched Kip tear into his sandwich with relish. He wore a mustache of tea on his upper lip. Miss Monday sipped her tea delicately, her eyes scanning the room warily.

She had told her story over their first cup of tea. How the Resurrectionists had taken the prize she'd stolen from Connor's safe, and used it to unleash the Lazarus Virus. How she'd followed Palmer and Mrs. Grimmer down into the Resurrectionist laboratory, where she'd seen the zombie in its tank, and where she met Dr. Jekyll, who had explained the Dead London Project--the Resurrectionists intended to cure death. To do so, they needed to find someone who was immune to Lazarus. How she'd been taken prisoner, and met her fellow captive--Parson Sinews. How she'd made her escape, after a brief confrontation with Anthony Tidkins.

They were comparing notes. Jonathan's own findings were much the same as hers. He told the gathered party about his own meeting with Parson Sinews, and what Sinews had told him about the Dead London Project. He told them about Sinews' arrest; the police believed Sinews was the Resurrection Man.

Miss Monday snorted. "The police are wrong," she said. "I've met Mr. Sinews, and I've met Anthony Tidkins. They are not the same man."

"I agree," Roderick said, "But Detective Inspector Taggert said he spoke to a witness who swore up and down that Sinews was the Resurrection Man. It was Taggert--god rest his idiotic soul--who sent the Black Mariahs to arrest Sinews."

"Mr. Ocelot believed his employer, Mr. Sinews, was used by the Resurrectionists as a scapegoat. The so-called witness was likely a Resurrectionist. A convenient way to get rid of Mr. Sinews, who might have been a threat to the Dead London Project," said Jonathan. "Mr. Sinews believed my father's death was not an accident. He suggested my father might have been killed by the Resurrectionists."

He noticed Palmer looking down at his tea, and directed his attention at him.

"After my meeting with Mr. Sinews, I headed to the Grimmer and Sons headquarters, where I spoke with Mr. Palmer," he said.

Jonathan sat back in his chair and sipped his tea thoughtfully. He gave a brief summary of his conversation with Palmer to the rest of the party. All eyes seemed to turn on Palmer.

Palmer nodded.

"Yes, I suppose you want an explanation," he said. He took a sip of tea, wincing with pain from his gunshot wound. "What Jonathan says is true. Beneath the Grimmer Company is a laboratory. It was used to study the effects of the Lazarus Virus, these inhuman creatures you call zombies. Mr. Grimmer and I have been hunting these creatures for years now, since Jonathan was a boy."

Miss Monday frowned seriously, scrutinizing Palmer with an unreadable expression. It was impossible to know what thoughts lay behind those eyes, when one of them was made of brass, polished wood, and polarized glass. She gulped back her tea as if it was the last cup on earth. Jonathan raised an eyebrow.

"It's been a long day," she said with a dismissive shrug, "I find tea to be quite the restorative, don't you?"

Jonathan had to agree. He nodded.

"Drink tea. Kill zombies," she said, "If that's what life is going to be from now on, we might as well do what we can to enjoy it."

"I like this girl, Jonathan. She has fire."

Miss Monday grinned.

Jonathan returned her smile. True, she did have fire. The thing about fire, though, is that it was dangerous. Beautiful, to be certain, but wild. Unpredictable. And while Miss Monday could play the part of a lady, Jonathan knew that she was not the delicate woman she looked like on the surface. What was it that Parson Sinews had said? We are all moths, drawn to the flame. But if Jonathan was being honest, it was Miss Monday's danger that drew him to her, and at the same time frightened him.

He looked back at Palmer, who continued as if uninterrupted. "When the Resurrectionists found out about the laboratory, they began to make arrangements to take it over. Rather than let that happen, we offered to work with them. We provided unrestricted access to the lab, believing that this would make it easier to monitor their activities. We now know that even though we were able to keep an eye on them, they were still able to keep secrets from us. We knew about Dead London, but we didn't know they planned to begin the experiment so soon. What you have to understand, though, is that even if we had all the information, it would have been impossible to stop the Resurrectionists. Their identities are such closely guarded secrets, it's impossible to even know how many of them there are. We do know that they have members in all areas of society. Not just scientists, but policemen, soldiers, even aristocrats--Lord Connor being just one example. Rumor has it that even Queen Victoria is sympathetic to the Resurrectionist cause."

"Queen Victoria supported the idea of turning London into a city of the dead?" Jonathan scoffed.

"The Resurrectionists believe they can conquer death. Queen Victoria is getting old. She was promised immortality. Yes, we believe she supported the Dead London Project."

Jonathan fell silent and took a sip of tea. He nibbled on a butter tart, as he stared at Palmer. The tart was probably the first thing he'd eaten in days, now that he thought about it.

Palmer was badly wounded, his shoulder bandaged with a strip of cloth from Miss Monday's skirt. He tried to hide a grimace as he lifted his teacup to his lips. Blood had seeped through his bandage.

"So," said Roderick, "The Resurrectionists believe they can use the Lazarus Virus to cheat death? And to do so, they need to find someone who possesses a natural immunity?"

Palmer nodded.

"It begs the question," Roderick continued, "Suppose we manage to come up with a way to stop the Resurrectionists, to defeat them once and for all--should we?"

"What do you mean?" asked Toshi, who'd been silent all this time until now. "Surely we should stop them if given the chance."

"Even if that means the city will be overrun by zombies with no hope of a cure?" Roderick countered.

"The Resurrectionists are not the only scientists in the world. If we could find someone with an immunity to the virus--before they do--could we not find a cure on our own?" asked Toshi.

"There are years worth of research in that laboratory," said Palmer. "Without that research, a cure could take years, decades even."

"Good then!" Roderick exclaimed, "We have our answer. We'll simply have to steal the research back."

Miss Monday sat upright and grinned. "Did someone say steal?"

"Ah, yes," said Jonathan. "Did I mention--Miss Monday is a cat burglar."

"Never liked that term. Hate cats. I like to call it what it is. I'm a thief."

"Thief it is." Jonathan flashed a smile at her.

"Speaking of thievery," she said. "Something that's been bothering me. It was the Resurrectionists that put me up to robbing Connor's safe. But we now know they already had access to the virus. Whatever they wanted me to steal from Connor, it was more than just the virus. When I mentioned the green liquid I took from Connor's safe, Dr. Jekyll said that Francis Varney's contribution to the Dead London Project was a means of distributing the virus. According to Dr. Jekyll, this green liquid, which contains the virus, is easily converted into gaseous form. Why did Lord Connor have Varney's green liquid in his safe?"

Jonathan's eyes widened. He took something from his pocket, and showed it to Miss Monday. The scrap of paper with burnt edges. Lord Henry Connor is Francis Varney.

"That explains it. They had the virus; what they didn't have was a means of distributing it. Varney's solution, combined with Anthony Tidkins' clockwork bird, made it easy for them spread the virus," said Miss Monday. "And I helped them do it. God, I feel sick."

Hastily, she set aside her tea and got out of her seat. "Would you excuse me a moment, gentlemen? Clockwork parts to wind."

She crossed the large room, found herself a table and a mirror, far enough from Jonathan and Mr. Palmer that she could wind up her gears without interrupting their tea, but close enough that she could still follow the conversation.

"So what now?" said Jonathan. "We just head back to the Grimmer Company, break in, steal their research? Simple as that?"

"Yes, well, if it's not too much to ask, I'd like to stop at home first," said Roderick.

Jonathan inclined his head, wondering if his friend had something up his sleeve.

"I need to check on Bailey," Roderick explained. "Poor boy's been home alone all day."

"Then we break in to the secret lab and steal the research?" asked Miss Monday.

"Unless I've missed something, there's still the matter of the individual with the immunity to the virus," said Toshi.

"About that," said Miss Monday. "Mr. Palmer suggested that I might be immune."

"What? Why would she be immune?" asked Toshi, turning to Palmer.

Miss Monday answered. "For one, because I've already been infected, and I have no symptoms of the virus," she said. Jonathan stared at her in alarm. "And for another thing, it's not the first time I've been exposed to the virus."

"My god!" Kip exclaimed.

Jonathan's mouth hung open. "What do you mean? When?"

Miss Monday finished winding her clockwork. She fit her prosthetic eye back into its socket with a click, and got up to rejoin them.

"There's something you should know," she said. "Something you should all know about me."

#

"I was a much younger woman back then--a girl, really--and if it can be believed, even prettier than I am now," said Miss Monday, with a wink of her one eye.

"Impossible," he said, smirking.

Miss Monday grinned, her cheeks dimpling.

"I was still new to my profession. Until very recently I'd been picking pockets and stealing things that were of very little worth to anyone. That all changed when I met a man who wanted to steal something more valuable. His name--when I met him--was Jack Bernhardt. I had met him previously, and he had been kind to me. I began to see him more regularly, and he would occasionally buy me lunch. Sometimes, he would bring me a clean dress or a new hat. Simple enough presents that might not have meant much at all to an ordinary person, but I was a street girl. An orphan. To me, it meant the world. I came to think of him like an older brother. He looked out for me, and he asked nothing in return. So, when at last he did ask something of me, you can imagine my answer."

"What did he want you to steal?" Jonathan asked.

"Research."

"Why? What sort of research?" asked Mr. Palmer.

"Bernhardt was a doctor. A physician. Although he was somewhat of a Jack of all trades--no pun intended. Eventually I learned that he had been conducting scientific experiments--of all sorts. He also enjoyed tinkering with rather whimsical inventions. Clockwork dolls and such things. He was something of a genius, and had apparently been a child prodigy, too. According to some of his friends, who I met through my association with him, he never spent a single day in school. I'm not sure if that's true, but that's what they said. He learned it all from books, and from his mentor. But his real talent was people. He understood people, was quick to recognize their talents and their weaknesses, and to apply their strengths to his own ends. He often collaborated with other scientists, or hired them to work on his projects. And when others refused to work for him, he would use me."

"He'd steal their research, you mean?"

"Yes," Miss Monday said. "Anyway, on one particular mission, we were to travel from London all the way to the small island of Haiti. I travelled via dirigible, with Jack as my constant companion. I'd come to accept that he was an eccentric young man, but I hadn't quite understood the extent of his eccentricities until we began to travel together. Throughout the duration of the journey, he had been toiling with one of his inventions: a pair of wings, which, when strapped to his back would apparently allow him to glide on the wind as if he were flying. He'd been collecting the feathers of crows throughout the journey, and I imagine he'd been collecting them long before then. Anyway, he'd been sewing the feathers to these artificial wings, bit by bit covering the leather and wooden contraption in black feathers, fashioning it into black Icarus wings.

"Whatever his obsession with crows was, I can't say, but his eccentricities had never bothered me. As I said, he'd been like a brother to me. I never questioned him. He was wealthy, but not excessively; the ship itself was perhaps the smallest dirigible I'd ever seen, barely big enough to fit the both of us, and it was not richly detailed or lushly decorated like this one. Of course, I was hardly one to complain, and at least my salary was fair.

"Or so I thought before I knew exactly what the job would entail. At that point, I knew only the few details that Jack had provided. As I said, it was an expedition to Haiti. I knew that much. But I did not yet know about the Bokor."

"The what?" said Jonathan. He was sure he had heard the word before--Mr. Sinews had used it--but he couldn't recall its precise meaning.

"The Bokor," Miss Monday repeated. "It's a vodou word. It means sorcerer. I'm not sure I can explain it as precisely as Jack eventually did, but are you at all familiar with vodou?"

Jonathan leaned forward. This was the second time he'd been asked that in the past few days, Parson Sinews having asked the same question. "I vaguely recall having once read an article from the Royal Geographical Society on the subject," said Jonathan, "But I can't say I remember much about that. However, Parson Sinews mentioned that zombies are supposedly made by vodou magic. By these vodou sorcerers."

Miss Monday nodded.

"Practitioners of vodou believe in spirits called loa. You might think of the loa as gods. The bokor is a servant of the loa, so in this way, he is like a priest. He does not practice magic. He serves the loa."

"But not all loa are kind, benevolent spirits, isn't that right, Miss Monday?" asked Toshi.

Jonathan raised an appraising eyebrow.

Toshi shrugged. "I happen to read the Royal Geographical Society papers as well."

"They say that a bokor serves with both hands," Miss Monday explained. "On the one hand, the light--healing the sick, protecting the weak. On the other hand, the dark. A bokor that embraces this sort of power is supposedly able to raise the dead."

Jonathan repeated those words, inflecting meaning into them. "Raise the dead, eh?" he muttered.

"Yes, precisely my point," said Miss Monday. "The bokor that I was to steal from had apparently amassed quite the following, though his people also feared him. They called him Papa Doc because he was healer. The light, on the one hand. On the other hand, he had been using his power as a political weapon, creating fear and propaganda. Even his own people feared him, and he slaughtered those who questioned him with uncompromising mercilessness. Jack estimated that Papa Doc had killed thousands."

"Nice chap," said Jonathan.

"Yes, well, they made him president," she said.

"So you was there to steal from the president of 'aiti?" asked Kip Lockwood, in awe. "My god."

Miss Monday shook her head. "That was the pretense. You see, while Jack had assured me that I was only there to steal something from Papa Doc, I later learned that I was there to kill him."

"My god!" Kip repeated.

Miss Monday continued. "The airship eventually touched down in the city of Port-Au-Prince, with a backdrop of sunny skies and palm trees. Jack must have been sweltering beneath his plague doctor's mask, but still he kept it strapped to his face.

"As we climbed down from the dirigible, I heard the unmistakable but muffled voice of a lady. I looked down and was surprised to see that she was fair-skinned, as I had been led to believe that the people of the island were colored. Of course, I soon learned that she was not an islander, but a French scientist. She was also our contact here.

"She was prettily dressed, in a red walking dress. She carried a parasol and wore white gloves on her delicate hands, which she waved to get our attention. It was only her neck that showed that flash of white skin that led me to guess that she was not a native Haitian. Her face was covered by a mask that was identical to the one that Jack wore. The mask of the Resurrectionists. Of course, I didn't know what the mask meant at the time.

"My associates valued their anonymity even more than their comfort. She must have been sweating buckets beneath the leather mask. But in my business, discretion is the better part of valor. It was my assumption that this was why she wore the mask.

"Jack introduced her as Dr. Mircalla Karnstein, which must have been a pseudonym. I can't think of a name that's any less French than Karnstein. Of course, in my line of work nearly everyone uses a nom de plume. I hadn't yet become Miss Monday, so I introduced myself simply as Miss Grey. Dr. Karnstein's English was heavily accented and at times difficult to understand, so the conversation was tedious, as neither Jack, nor I spoke a word of French. Eventually, with the niceties out of the way, she took us to a steam-powered paddlewheel boat, which she'd hired to take us the rest of the way to what she explained was the small town where it had all begun and where Papa Doc kept his army of zombies."

"When you say zombies--" Toshi began to ask.

"I mean the supposedly resurrected dead," said Annabel. She swallowed a sip of tea, and added, "Raised and controlled by the Bokor."

"No wonder this Papa Doc was so feared," said Jonathan.

"You have no idea," Annabel replied. "Shall I skip to the good part?"

"You should have begun with the good part," said Roderick.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter 26

Bailey yipped excitedly as Roderick unlocked the door and hurried inside. The small dog bounced on its hind legs and danced in circles, whining loudly. Roderick scooped him up and kissed his brow affectionately. He allowed the dog to lick his face, laughing as the dog's soft tongue tickled his cheeks.

He ushered Miss Monday, Jonathan, Palmer, and Kip Lockwood inside. Toshi followed right behind him. Roderick locked the door and gestured for everyone to make themselves at home.

"And don't steal anything," he added, for Miss Monday's benefit. He winked, and added, "Jonathan, do keep an eye on her."

Miss Monday grinned, and Roderick was relived to see she had a sense of humor.

Roderick, meanwhile, needed to let Bailey outside. Poor boy had been locked inside for far too long, and would need to go out to relieve himself. So while Roderick longed for a hot bath, he made do with splashing a bit of hot water on his face and applying a bit of lavender-scented soap to his filthy skin. He washed up quickly, and hurried to his bedroom for a change of clothes.

He dressed sensibly, choosing a smart pair of black and red striped trousers, a grey vest and shirt, and black cravat. He swapped blue for white gloves, and most importantly, he carried a cane. Not merely decorative and stylish, the cane doubled as a weapon. As any sensible gentleman in London knew, the city was a dangerous place to be without that most crucial accessory and a reasonable knowledge of the gentleman's martial art, bartitsu. Roderick, being pragmatic, had also made a study of cannes de combat, and could disarm a vagrant of a knife without so much as sullying his shoes by stepping off the sidewalk. That generally left his would-be robber feeling quite silly for having made the attempt. On the off-chance that a blunt weapon would not suffice, the cane also contained a hidden sword. The curse of the artistically minded, of course, was a constantly wandering mind that often caused him to forget his street smarts. Thus he often left the house without his cane. Occasionally, without his shoes. Once, without his pants.

Not this time.

This time, Roderick had all his ducks in a row. His shoes upon his feet, his trousers on his legs, his cane in hand, and his dog on a leash, he turned to the door. He had his hand on it when the knock came.

He heard the distinctive click of dozens of guns, and saw that each of his houseguests had their arms raised to the door. They had taken the time to stock up on firearms and ammunition from Jonathan's father's gun collection before leaving the airship. Palmer had traded his shotgun for a carbine, owing to his injury. Kip Lockwood had a Webley revolver aimed at the door. Toshi was squinting down the barrel of a shotgun. Jonathan still had Roderick's flintlock revolver. As for Miss Monday, she had claimed a generous selection of weapons from Charles Grimmer's collection. Her eyes had lit up at the sight of an ornately decorated crossbow, which she now aimed at the door. Of all things, a crossbow.

Roderick snorted.

"Put those down," he said. "Zombies don't knock."

The knock came again, insistent and loud. Bailey yipped.

Roderick opened the door, feeling his guest's guns still raised over his shoulder. A familiar, young, and devilishly attractive man stood in the doorway. Roderick opened his mouth and stammered.

"Roderick," said the lad.

"Yes," Roderick confirmed.

"You've forgotten, again, haven't you?"

"My dear boy, of course I haven't forgotten you," he said. "I'm just surprised. It isn't safe out there."

"I had to see you."

Roderick put a hand on the lad's shoulder, smiling warmly.

"I'm glad you did," he said. "Did you run into any trouble on the way here?"

"Nothing I couldn't handle."

Roderick smiled. He turned to the room. "You can lower your weapons," he said. "This is Rémy Vaillancourt."

"Salut," said Rémy.

"Rémy models for me," Roderick explained by way of introduction. And indeed, a number of the paintings mounted on Roderick's walls were of the handsome youth. "Perhaps you might join my friends in the living room while I take Bailey for a quick jaunt? Miss Monday here was just regaling us with a story of her travels. Did you know this well-travelled lady has been to Haiti?"

Rémy put his hand on Roderick's. "If it's all the same to you, I'll join you and Bailey."

"My dear boy, I'd feel better if I knew you were safe inside," Roderick told him.

Rémy sniffed. "I feel the same way about you. Do you know what I've been through to get to you?"

Roderick leaned in and kissed him until he felt silent. "Please," said Roderick. "I'll only be a minute. I have no intention of staying out there any longer than I have to."

They shared another lingering kiss, and as Bailey whimpered impatiently, Rémy finally nodded. He headed into the living room, and took a seat beside Jonathan.

"Come along then, Bailey," said Roderick.

"Shall I continue?" he heard Miss Monday say as he headed out the door.

#

I was armed to the teeth and dressed in the most unusual outfit I could ever have imagined myself wearing. With Jack's leather crow's mask on my face, and his Icarus wings on my back, I must have looked like a human crow.

Most of my weapons were hidden beneath my skirts and shawl, except one: an old-fashioned small-sword, loaned to me by Dr. Karnstein.

I wore a pair of tall leather boots, but I was still careful to watch where I stepped as I traipsed through the bushes into the backyard of the colonial mansion of François Duvalier, the man known as Papa Doc. Apparently there were deadly snakes and poisonous spiders in this small island nation, and I was naively more terrified of both these dangers than I was of Papa Doc's army of zombies.

I'd told Jack that I was not an assassin, but when Dr. Karnstein had explained the entirety of the situation, I felt that an exception might be in order. The female scientist wanted Duvalier gone because he had been speaking out against her research, turning the locals against her. She feared for her research, but she also feared for her life. If Papa Doc gave the word, she would be dead within the day.

But the situation was more complicated still than that.

These zombies of Papa Doc's were not under his control, as he claimed they were. And they were not the usual sort of zombies, if such a thing exists. They were not created by the methods traditionally used by bokors. They were the product of a virus.

I didn't know what the virus was called, then, but I believe I do now. Dr. Karnstein had been studying a virus that kills its victims quickly, causing them to rise after death. It was Lazarus, I am sure of it now, the same virus that plagues our city as we speak. Its victims would revive after death, and given to cannibalistic urges, would viciously attack any living thing that crossed their path, including their own loved ones. Even after they'd begun to rot, they would continue walking, hungry for living flesh.

A sample of the disease had been stolen from Dr. Karnstein's laboratory. The evidence pointed to Papa Doc. I was to steal it back. And when my work was done, I was supposed to make certain that Papa Doc would never be able to steal it again.

With a gas lamp to light my way, I pushed through the thick vegetation and made my way into his garden. I only half believed what Dr. Karnstein had told me. I didn't believe these men were truly dead, just sick. And I had no idea just how dangerous they were, despite what Jack and Dr. Karnstein had assured me. How could I believe that? It sounded like madness.

The yard itself was deserted and dark, but there were lights on inside the house, so I had to be careful not to pass in front of the windows. Cautiously picking my path, I navigated the floral garden and stepped beneath the veranda.

I dimmed the lamp and slowly I made my way toward the back door. Suddenly I heard a noise that startled me. Most of the noises here were foreign to me. The call of the birds were strange, and the chirps of the insects were alien, but the noise that startled me was strangely familiar. It sounded human.

But it was not human.

I directed my lamp at the source of the noise and spied a small building across the yard that I assumed was either a barn or a guest house. Checking to be sure that no one was coming, I abandoned the mansion and began to cross the yard toward the building.

As I drew closer, I began to make out the features of the building, and came to the conclusion that it was a barn. The noises that came from within also became more clear. Voices, I realised. They sounded like voices.

I approached the wide doors of the barn, raising my sword as I walked slowly through the tall grass. The voices became louder as I drew near, but they weren't distinct enough to determine how many of them there were. Their voices all seemed to blend together until they just became a choir of muffled moans and coughs. Choking voices, hacking coughs, and sometimes wretched growls. The voices were strained and sickly, rough and phlegmy. Inhuman.

I set the gas lamp down on the ground so my hands would be free, then readying my sword, opened the door. The voices stopped in an instant as a hundred faces turned to look at me. The sudden silence was deafening.

Suddenly thinking better of my initial decision to put the lamp down, I hastily grasped for it and with one hand turned the dial, causing the lamp to brighten. Then I stepped inside and closed the door behind me.

The zombies stirred out of their temporary shock at seeing their prey walk straight into their den. All at once, they moved toward me. I was ready with my sword. I began to slash through them, cutting each one down as they approached with slow and rotten limbs.

Each face I sliced into was a man or a woman from the village, farmers mostly, fathers and wives, sons and daughters. All of them were dressed plainly, some wearing caps upon their heads, some bare-chested with thick muscles becoming atrophied post mortem. Their faces were emaciated, their eyes sunken into their heads.

They were slow, but they were many, and they were hungry. Soon, I had worked up a good sweat inside my crow's head mask and bustle skirt. But I did not slow in my frenzied killing spree.

Left, right, behind me, I met them all with my sword. I was everywhere at once, cutting them down, creating a whirlwind of blood and body parts which rained down upon the floor of the barn.

Bodies piled up around me so that I barely had room to move any more. My arm began to ache, so I took advantage of my ambidexterity and switched hands, lifting the lamp above my head so I could not only hear them coming with their raspy breaths and ravenous growls but also see them approaching. See their hands twitch with excitement when they were ready to move in and attack.

I resisted the impulse to add my voice to the fray, instead swinging my sword in silence, with only a subtle breath of exertion. Finally, after what seemed like hour on end of slaughter, but what must in reality have been a matter of seconds, I had decimated the bulk of them.

A euphoric calm settled over me in the aftermath of violence. The settling of adrenaline, the calming of my rattled nerves.

Only one of Papa Doc's zombies remained. Which was exactly how it was supposed to have gone. It was Jack's idea that it should be one of Papa Doc's own wretched creatures that executed him. Poetic justice. In my own naivety, I agreed, even laughed at the idea, horrifying though it seems to me now.

This one wretched creature, on its own in the darkest corner of the barn, quietly moved toward me. Somehow, though I'd just faced a hundred of these monstrous things, facing one alone felt different.

Looking into the eyes of a creature that once was human, and knowing that you must cut him down...

Even though I'd been told that this poor wretch was already dead, I didn't know what to believe.

My heart began to hammer against my chest. The sweat within my mask turned cold. The creature met my eyes.

I'll never forget those eyes. Pale, colourless orbs, set within a face that was little more than skin and bones. No wonder I faltered when--years later--I looked into Lord Connor's eyes, and they were the same. No wonder these creatures still fill me with dread to this day.

The creature dragged its hands across the gore-slick floor and crawled its way to me. With no legs to walk upon, this wretched creature was persistent in its hunger. It dragged itself slowly, breathing through its nostrils, those pale eyes unblinking.

I set the lamp down on the ground and sheathed my sword. I reached out to take hold of him, careful not to let him bite me.

That was when I was seized from behind.

I whirled around to see one of those hideous wretches I thought I'd slain, grasping my ankle. The creature was pulling itself out from under the pile of corpses, and its grip was strong and unrelenting. I reached to draw my sword again; if it would not relinquish its grip, I would sever its arm from its body.

But I was grabbed again from behind, this time by the arm.

I yelped and pulled away, somehow managing to free myself from the creature's grip, but I stumbled over the pile over corpses and fell. I landed in a mess of limbs softened by decay and wet with gore.

The stench in the barn was horrible, even through my mask, but it was worse amongst that pile of severed limbs and still-groping fingers.

I could hear them breathing. I felt the pile of corpses writhe.

In the throes of panic, I pushed myself back, away from the pile of corpses, even as they grabbed at me. I caught glimpses of their pale eyes, still looking at me. They grasped at me with renewed fervour. I pushed and kicked and shoved my way backward, away from the corpses, until I was free of them.

How many of these creatures had somehow survived their slaughter? I'd hacked off their limbs, slit their throats, or disemboweled every last one of them.

Only the ones whose faces I'd failed to cut through, whose eyes I'd not poked out--these were the ones whose bodies were still moving. Dr. Karnstein had warned me. She'd told me to destroy their brains. But I hadn't grasped the importance of that point. I did now.

Suddenly, I heard the hiss of one of those creatures whispering in my ear. Its voice was cold on the back of my neck, so close I could feel it. I whirled around and screamed.

It was the creature with no legs. Suddenly, it reached out with its gnarled and yellowing fingernails and grabbed at my mask, tearing at the leather stitching. It dug in with its fingers in such a frenzy that against all odds, it managed to tear open a weak spot in the mask, even with its rotting muscles and flesh.

And when it had torn a hole in the eye of the mask, it reached in and grasped my naked flesh as hard as it could with its atrophied muscles.

It gouged me with its sharp nails until it broke the skin and hot blood squirted from my face like the juice of a burst grape.

I screamed and screamed as my own blood rained down upon the zombie's face. I felt warm blood run down my cheek. I felt sick.

At some point, I wasn't sure when, I'd lost the vision in my right eye.

I felt a dull pain in my right arm, but I hardly noticed it. Something was biting me. Tearing through the fabric of my sleeve, chewing through my flesh. Biting down to the marrow.

I fought back, kicking and screaming.

Even as I struggled, I could still see that horrid creature raise its bloodied hands to its mouth and chew happily upon my severed eye.

I tore myself away from the hands that grasped me, tore my arm from the hungry jaws of a dead man. I felt faint. Dizzy. Nauseous.

I grasped for my blade. I struggled to my feet, caught my balance, and raised a hand to run the zombie through with my blade. I found I could barely lift the sword with that arm. Blood had soaked through my sleeve. There was no feeling in my arm. No pain. Just numbness.

I transferred the sword to my other arm and stabbed it through the zombie's hideous face as it licked its lips.

I'd ceased being afraid now. Now I was furious.

I reached down and tore my eye from its jaws and held onto it as tightly as I could with my hand that had lost all feeling.

Turning back to the pile of corpses, I roughly grabbed each one that looked at me, beginning with the one that had ravaged my arm.

I pulled it from the pile and shoved my sword through its head. I continued in that manner until the bodies stopped twitching. All of them but one, anyway.

Dragging the severed upper body and head of the last remaining zombie with my one good arm, I pushed open the door of the barn. Stumbling dizzily, I hiked across the lawn toward the mansion.

Papa Doc and his servants must have become accustomed to strange noises coming from the barn, because no one had come outside to investigate. Or maybe they were all still asleep.

I revved the engine that powered the Icarus wings, pulled a cord to spread my wings, and levitated, off the ground, heading towards the upstairs window where Papa Doc was most likely sleeping. I can't remember what happened next. I blacked out.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Chapter 27

While he walked, his mind was at work. Bailey wandered the sidewalk, sniffing for owls and perking his ears up at the sound of distant crickets. Night had fallen.

Occasionally, they heard the sounds of zombies in the distance, and Roderick tightened his grip on his cane.

A corvine bird perched on the archway of a house.

"Quoth the raven," Roderick muttered.

Bailey continued to sniff the ground, and Roderick paced anxiously beside him. "Just do your business, my boy. The sooner we get back inside, the better."

Though Bailey had been inside all day, the smell of the city had changed so drastically, he was too unsettled to mark his territory just yet. He needed to explore a bit first. Roderick's neighborhood seemed deserted, so he let the dog be, but kept a tight hand on the leash, and kept his eyes and ears open.

"Good lad, don't you think, Bailey?" Roderick said, thinking of Rémy.

He sighed wistfully. The boy obviously adored him, and Roderick felt a pang of guilt for leading him on. Guilt coupled with longing. It was not that Roderick didn't return his affection. But Roderick's mind was occupied by more than just romantic affections. He didn't have time to allow fickle things like love to distract him. There were zombies about.

Zombies. The word still felt foreign on his tongue. It still felt impossible. While many people were quick to accept the supernatural, Roderick was a sceptic. Belief in the supernatural was not merely normal; it was in vogue. In a city where spiritualist mediums and fortune tellers could be as famous as actors and actresses, Roderick's skepticism was a rarity. Fashionable men and women had seances to contact their loved ones from beyond the grave. Ghosts, vampires, werewolves. What reason did anyone have to doubt their existence?

As for Roderick, his father had been a policeman, as well as an alcoholic. Edward Steen had made a modest salary as a detective at Scotland Yard, in spite of his inability to refuse a glass of whiskey when one was proffered. He'd retired young, if retirement was the right word. The truth was that he'd drank himself out of a job. Roderick's wealth was not inherited; it was earned. Roderick hadn't seen his father in years, and almost never thought about him. It was strange that Roderick should think of him now.

Edward Steen was superstitious. He believed that murderers were possessed by devils, that sin was a gateway for demons to cross over into our world. Perhaps that was exactly why Roderick was so steadfastly logical. Perhaps this was also why he never let a drop of liquor touch his lips. Edward Steen had always preferred cats to dogs, drink to drugs, and superstition to logic.

But then, what if an irrefutable fact presented itself, one which made superstition more logical than superstition? If pragmatism must prevail, then Roderick was forced to consider that even myths may have a foundation in truth. Here, in this city, Roderick had seen the dead rise. He had seen them feast on the flesh of the living.

Roderick tried to shake off the curious sensation that he had fallen down a rabbit hole and was likely to open his eyes and find himself in his own bed at any moment.

"Bailey," he called.

Silence greeted him in return. The leash had somehow slipped from his hand. He swore, cursed himself for letting his mind wander.

No jangling collar. No scampering feet. No hyperactively sniffing snout. Just the unnerving silence of Dead London. He whirled around, seeking any sign of his furry friend. A single flickering gas lamp cast long shadows onto the square brick buildings that lined the road. It was nearly dawn, but the street was still dark.

"Bailey," he called again.

A layer of fog drifted along the cobblestones. He heard a sound that might have been Bailey's collar and spun in the direction of the sound. He saw only a chain attached to a locked gate, rattling in the wind.

"Bailey, where have you gone, boy?" he called out into the dark.

He stood, helpless, on the side of the street, his arms wide, imploring, calling Bailey to him.

Finally, a sound broke through the unnerving silence. The movement of feet. He followed the sound, despite the danger of wandering an alleyway alone in a city plagued by the dead.

Throwing caution to the wind, he stepped into the alley, following the footsteps into the darkness. His eyes still adjusting to the gloom, he made his way through the alley almost entirely by sound alone. The footsteps stopped, but he followed them, until he nearly walked straight into their source.

A man stood there, still mostly indistinguishable in the darkness. His back was to Roderick, and in this dim light, he was more shadow than man. But perhaps he'd seen his dog. Perhaps Bailey had followed his scent in search of a new playmate.

Speaking of scent, even Roderick could have followed this man's scent. He must have been living in this alleyway; even in the stench of London, the man's smell was potent. He smelled sickly. Like walking death.

Roderick felt a knot beginning to form in the pit of his stomach. An unsettling chill that came not from the night's cold breeze, but from the fear that crept up his spine. Fear that this man was not living.

"Sir," he said, desperation overcoming his fear. "My dog," he pleaded. "Have you seen my dog? He must have come this way."

The man didn't turn. Not right away. Just kept on chewing. Yes, he was eating something. Chewing noisily. The scent of fresh meat penetrated even the homeless man's own sour stench of sweat and rot.

"Please," said Roderick. "My dog--"

Finally, the man turned.

Roderick recoiled. His face. It was covered in blood and meat. He could see that, even in the darkness. Blood and meat. His teeth, glistening, red, chunks of meat between his teeth. Chewing noisily upon gristle and flesh. In his hands, a ravaged handful of meat and wet fur.

#

I regained consciousness somewhat gradually. I have hazy recollections of those few moments of semi-consciousness. Blurry memories of a brightly lit room. The distinctly muffled voices of the doctors.

I remember being in a bed somewhere, twisting and turning as I woke. My head was pounding, and it was difficult to think. I remember seeing Jack--though it might just as well have been Dr. Karnstein--as I only had vision in one eye, and his face was masked.

I could hear his voice, too, but I could only make out some of the words. My ears felt like they were ringing, and they felt as if they'd been stuffed with cotton.

I heard him call our for someone named Camille. I had no idea who Camille might have been, although looking back it seems obvious that this was Mircalla Karnstein's real name. I heard him telling her no. No, insistently.

"We have to, Jack," she said in her thick French accent. "You know we have to."

I was surprised to hear her use his real name. I knew him as Jack, but I'd assumed that Dr. Karnstein knew him by his pseudonym.

Jack argued with her. "We can fix her," he said. "It's not too late, but we must act now."

Whatever was said next, I cannot recall, but I do remember Dr. Karnstein asking about my eye.

The next time I awoke, I felt immediately as though something was different. There was pain, that was one thing, but that was not the whole of it. The world looked different. It felt different. I could see details I'd never been able to see before. The precision of my eyesight was remarkable. I felt like a blind man being given a pair of spectacles for the first time.

But as I blinked my eyes, I felt a knot in the pit of my stomach. I had the sudden horrific memory of a zombie digging its hands into my flesh and plucking my eye from its socket. There were no eyelashes upon my cheek when I blinked my eye. Instinctively I reached up with my arm to feel for what was wrong."

Annabel hesitated. Even after unburdening herself of everything she'd told them, she was hesitant to share the rest. She was embarrassed. She hated talking about the mechanical part of her. It made her feel inhuman.

I stumbled out of bed, still unsteady on my feet, and sought out a looking glass. I found one, a small mirror that sat on the nightstand. I picked it up with my good arm--the other one having been ravaged by the zombies--and held it up to my face.

I hardly recognized myself. My hair was knotted and disheveled, as if I'd been asleep for days. My face was bruised. And there was a bright pink gash that ran down my face, intersecting that foreign object that had replaced my eye.

I reached up and explored the device with the fingers of my left hand. I was amazed that I could still see with both eyes. I could see better with that one eye than I could with the other. The effect was dizzying. Unfamiliar. I felt my way around the device with my hand, searching for a latch or a button that would released the contraption from my face.

Eventually I found one. There was a clicking sound and the hiss of air releasing. Instantly my vision changed. I could only see with my left eye now; I was at once relieved and disturbed by the sudden change.

I felt nauseous. I began to remove the straps that kept the prosthesis in place. At last, I looked away. I could not yet bear to look at my face without at least something covering the gaping hole where my eye had been removed. There was searing pain when I moved my good eye to look away.

And there was Jack, standing in the doorway.

"How do you feel?" he asked me.

For a long time, I did not answer him. I thought the answer must have been obvious, anyway. I felt horrid. Couldn't he see? I'd lost my eye. And as I thought of those sick and wretched faces I'd cut down as they'd tried to devour me, I believed I'd also lost my soul. I hated him for sending me in there.

"You did well," he said.

I snorted. If that were true, I thought, I would not have lost so much.

"What have you done to me?" I asked eventually. I held out my mechanical eye, practically shoving it in his face.

"I've saved your life," he said. And though I couldn't see his face through his mask, I could tell he was smiling. It was in the tone of his voice. He was proud of what he'd done. He wasn't talking about the clockwork eye, though. Somehow, Jack had saved me from the virus. He said that it should have killed me, should have turned me into a zombie. I didn't understand what it meant that I had survived the zombie infection.

"It meant you had some natural immunity," said Palmer. "And having survived your infection, it is possible you are now immunized against the virus. Your blood holds the key to the cure for Lazarus."

"Possibly," Annabel admitted.

"What happened to Papa Doc?" asked Jonathan.

"I don't recall," Annabel answered.

Her memory was mostly blanks. But in truth, she knew exactly what became of him. She knew, because she remembered planning it, before she blanked out. Like a fallen angel, with black wings drenched in blood, she descended onto Papa Doc's balcony and broke into his home. And waking him by softly calling his name, she placed the zombie upon his bed and let it crawl towards his face.

After a while, I heard the sharp sound of Jack's footsteps as he turned and walked down the hall, away from me. And for a long time, I did not see him again. Until recently.

Annabel looked directly at Jonathan Grimmer. She looked at Abraham Palmer, and Kipper Lockwood, Toshi, and Rémy. It was strange that these people--these strangers--had become her allies in so short a time. Annabel didn't trust easily. She had little choice but to trust them now.

"The man I knew as Jack Bernhardt goes by another name these days. You know him as Anthony Tidkins, The Resurrection Man."

Stunned silence followed Annabel's revelation. In the quiet, still house, they heard a distant scream from outside. It sounded like Roderick Steen's voice.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter 28

Roderick screamed. His vision swam as he blinked back tears and choked back the vomit that threatened to spill from his throat.

Bailey, he thought in horror. Oh, god, Bailey!

He turned and fled. It was all he could do. It was too late to save his furry friend.

Behind him, a dead man shoveled mouthfuls of meat and fur into his mouth, and Roderick could still hear him chewing. It was deafening. He lost his footing, fell to the ground, head-first. Slammed into the hard stone, but barely felt it. He scrambled to rise, but he hurt more than he realized. It was difficult to move.

He felt a warm tongue on his face and reeled back in panic, and screamed again. In a moment, he was back on his feet and was turning to flee. But as he ran, he spared a glance back at the creature that had licked his face. Standing there, wagging his tail happily, was Bailey.

He blinked in confusion. He looked back at the zombie who still stood there, noisily chewing. He looked back again at Bailey. Unharmed. Untouched. Whatever the zombie was eating, it wasn't his dog.

"Good god, Bailey, you worried me!"

Confusion turned to relief. He reached down and scooped up his dog into his arms, cradled him like a child, and Bailey returned his affection as dogs do, licking the dirt from his face.

"Must have been a rat," he muttered. London was teeming with rats, now fat with the flesh of the dead in their bellies.

But there was little time to rejoice in his reunion with Bailey. The dead man had finished his meal and had begun to advance toward the duo, mouth still bloody but clearly still hungry.

Roderick turned to flee, and nearly stumbled into another shadowy figure, which blocked his path and snarled.

He stepped back. There were more of them behind the zombie nearest him. In each direction, at least a dozen of them shuffled forward in the dark. His screams must have drawn them.

Bailey in his arms. He drew his gun and fired six shots. Six bodies fell, and his gun was empty. He drew his cane-sword.

The dead men continued to close in, climbing over the bodies of the fallen, while Roderick continued to back up. He inched further from one cluster of zombies but closer to the other. But as he backed up through the dark, foggy alleyway, he spotted a door.

The side door to some shop, or somebody's house, Roderick wasn't sure which.

He put his hand on the knob and tried the door. He swore. It was locked.

The wood was old, splintered, the doorknob flimsy. Perhaps he could force it open. Not with Bailey in his arms though. He set the dog down. The zombies continued to move in on them.

"Stay," he said, sternly.

Then he slammed into the door, putting his shoulder into it. It looked like the flimsy, structurally unsound sort of door that might cave in under a hard shoulder-check, but the door did not yield. He tried again, slamming into it with all his weight.

Bailey began to bark.

Again, Roderick slammed into the door, and again, it refused to budge.

Meanwhile, the dead men closed in, shuffling slowly on limbs stiffened by rigor mortis.

Bravely, Bailey tried to fend them off with his bark, yapping loudly to ward them off. Still, they advanced, paying him no mind, even as he snapped at their ankles. Roderick shouted at him to stay, but they weren't interested in Bailey. Not with Roderick so close they could almost reach out and touch him.

"There's a good dog," he said. "Keep them busy, my friend. This is it. One last shot."

He stepped back as far as he could and aimed once more for the door, putting everything he could into it.

#

Rémy was first out the door. Jonathan called out to stop him. In the corner of his eye, he saw Miss Monday's teacup fall to the floor and shatter as she abandoned her chair.

"Rémy, wait!" she called, but the young man was already out the door and headed into the street.

Even the ground was rotten--fallen leaves, wet with rain, squelched under Jonathan's feet as he hurried after them.

"Stay here!" he called to Palmer, Toshi, and Lockwood, who halted at the door. "We'll be back in a moment."

He was already losing Miss Monday and Rémy, whose silhouettes were disappearing into the fog and the dark. Dawn was beginning to break, a vermilion streak across the horizon, while the slender sickle-like blade of a crescent moon still hung from the sky, but the fog seemed to devour all light. It gave everything a yellowed appearance, like an aged photograph.

"Which way did the scream come from?" he asked, when he managed to catch up to Monday. "Are you sure we're headed the right way?"

As if in answer, they heard another scream. If there had been any doubt that it was Roderick's voice, that doubt was gone now.

"Roderick!" Rémy cried, and tore down the street in pursuit of his lover.

"Quiet," Jonathan hissed. "Are you trying to wake the dead?"

That expression took on new meaning. So far they'd been lucky not to run into any zombies in Roderick's neighborhood, but the dead were around. They were everywhere, wandering like ghosts through the shadows. The inhuman sound of distant, hungry moaning had become a soundscape as constant as the striations of crickets in a cornfield, each voice blending with another. The sound was punctuated only by the occasional screams of the living as they either ran for cover or were eaten alive. Whatever had made Roderick scream was probably a zombie.

But Rémy carried on, heedless of Jonathan's warning, abandoning caution and tearing loudly down the street, his leather boots slapping against the stone street as loud as gunshots in the near-silence.

"He's going to get himself killed," Miss Monday hissed.

"He's going to get us killed," Jonathan said. "Are you armed?"

Miss Monday rolled her eyes--including her clockwork prosthesis--and raised her crossbow. "What kind of question is that?" she asked. "Have you met me?"

"Come on then," Jonathan said.

They hurried after Rémy, hoping they weren't too late to save Roderick, and that Miss Monday's prediction wouldn't come true.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Chapter 29

Roderick slammed into the door again, but still it held. His shoulder ached with his efforts, but the wood was beginning to splinter. It might have been boarded up from the inside. Still, another few kicks and it would swing open. Only there was no time. The zombies were at arm's length. He raised his cane-sword. It was all he had to defend himself with now that his gun was empty.

At least it was better than the feeble letter opener he'd had earlier. He swung at the nearest of them. He sliced through the brittle skull of another, hacked off the jaw of a third. It came at him again, leering with its face sliced in two. There were too many of them. He tried to take a step back, but hit the wall of the building. There was nowhere to run, and no way he could fight them off.

A gunshot rang out in the small space of the alleyway. Roderick ducked and covered his head as another shot was fired. One of the zombies staggered and fell, a crossbow bolt through its skull. Out of the corner of his eye, Roderick could see two figures firing in his direction. If they missed, they'd hit Roderick. He wondered if they could even see him in the dark.

"Careful!" he called. "I'm not one of them!"

Bailey barked in agreement.

Apparently ignoring his instruction, the dark figure with the crossbow fired another shot. His aim was good, however, and another zombie hit the ground, bolt piercing through its eye. Shakily, Roderick got to his feet.

He could still count a dozen zombies, but he might actually stand a fighting chance now that he had help. Another gunshot rang out, followed by another crossbow bolt that went flying into one of the zombie's throats. Syrupy, dark clots of blood oozed from the creature's throat, but it still staggered forward, heedless of the bolt in its neck.

Roderick slammed the point of his sword into the creature's eye, and drove it in deep. With a slurp of blade against brain and bone, he pulled the blade free and whirled it again.

The next zombie to come at him was a woman, her dress dirty and tattered. Her organs spilled out of her, wet and rotten. Her belly was swollen with pregnancy, but it had been ripped open, the umbilical cord hanging loose from the gaping hole in her stomach. Feeling sick with pity and disgust, Roderick staggered back, and took a moment to steel himself for what he had to do.

He looked into the woman's eyes to remind himself that she was already dead. Then he ran his sword through her. She didn't scream or cry out as she died. She simply fell silent and stopped moving. She hit the ground, mouth hanging open.

Roderick's heart pounded. He gritted his teeth, wiped the sweat from his brow with his handkerchief, and deftly whirled his blade.

Finally, his freshly changed clothes soiled with gore, a pile of corpses surrounded him and his dog, and he sheathed his cane-sword. He took a moment to allow his nerves to steady.

"It's alright, Bailey," he said, though the dog was relatively calm.

It was Roderick that needed the assurance. He tried not to look at the sea of corpses that surrounded him. He tried not to think about the lives these men and women had once had, as he gingerly stepped over their mutilated and rotten bodies. The pregnant woman in particular left a lasting impression in his mind.

He raised his hand as he approached the shadowy figures in the alley. His saviors.

"Thank you," he said.

As he drew nearer, dawn's light steadily rising, fog clearing to reveal faces, he recognized Miss Monday as the crossbow wielder. The man with the gun was Jonathan.

Roderick smiled, relief turning to embarrassment. He let out a nervous laugh.

"Well, that was more of an adventure than we bargained for, eh Bailey?" he said. "I'm lucky to see you two."

Jonathan said nothing, face grave, blood in his hair and on his hands. Miss Monday's face and clothes were stained with blood. She wiped her face and panted for breath.

"We'd better get back," she said, "God knows how many of these rotten things there are wandering about."

"Right," said Roderick, who followed as she turned on her heel and headed back in the other direction.

Jonathan halted him with a hand on his shoulder.

"What is it?" he asked.

He took another look at his friend's face. His expression was not merely grave. There were tears in the corner of his eyes, pity written on his brow.

"What's happened?" he asked.

That's when he noticed that the blood on Jonathan's face and hands was still wet and bright, unlike the blood of the zombies. It was fresh, and it wasn't Jonathan's own.

Roderick's heart stopped. A hard lump formed in his throat. He tried to speak, and found that he couldn't. His mouth was dry. The words froze on his lips.

"No," he said, at last. His voice was a quiet whisper, raw with rage and pain. He wanted to scream, but the word came out silent, choked and broken, a silent sob.

"I'm sorry," said Jonathan.

"Rémy?" he said, searching his friend's face for some sign that he'd misunderstood, that it was someone--anyone else--who'd died. Palmer, or Lockwood, or even Miss Clementine. Roderick would have given anyone else's life just to know that Rémy was still alive. He'd never told Rémy how much he loved him, how much he meant to him. He hadn't even realized it himself, until now that he was gone.

"I'm sorry," Jonathan said again, but Roderick couldn't hear him over the sound of his own heart beating.

They followed Miss Monday back to Roderick's house, but Roderick was barely aware of his surroundings, even as Monday cleared the path with her crossbow and Jonathan with his gun. He simply followed along blindly. He could have been eaten alive by the dead and he would hardly have felt it--all he could think about was Rémy. All he could see was his face. All he could feel--the last kiss they'd shared.

He was vaguely aware that they'd made it back to his place, of Lockwood and Toshi and Palmer staring in dumbstruck horror as they realized that Rémy hadn't made it back. In the edge of his vision, he saw Bailey whimpering and circling anxiously around his leg.

"They're going to pay," he said, finally, gritting his teeth. "They're going to pay for this."

Part Three: Day Three

Chapter Thirty

Chapter 30

Cloaked in olfactory camouflage--the stench of putrescence smeared on his clothes in streaking lines of gore and blood--a pale man walked with a slow gait, paused to unfurl his umbrella before stepping out into the rain and fog. He was ignored by the dead, who confused him for one of their own, thanks to his death-like stench and slow pace.

The dim light of a few street lamps pierced the blinding fog, cutting through the grey skies with orbs of yellow that melted into the mist.

He ambled slowly through London's bleak streets with purpose, passing through neighborhoods a gentleman of his prestige ought to have avoided even if the city wasn't ridden with zombies. Eventually he reached Whitechapel, which had yet to be touched by the Lazarus Virus. Here, only the danger came from the living, but this danger was not one to be overlooked.

The coarse voices of beggars called to him as he passed, drunken cries suffocated by liquor. Whispered words from toothless prostitutes, muffled by the patter of rain upon cobblestone, hardly managed to arouse his curiosity. He was here on business.

He continued on his way through Whitechapel, not speaking a word to anybody, though he paused to lower his umbrella and to feel the rain pouring down upon his neck.

Jack The Ripper once worked here, he thought. On these very streets, picking out women whose guts he wanted to see from the outside, and whose blood he wanted to spill. He thought about what that must be like, not from the whore's point of view, but from the Ripper's.

Turning one's thoughts to the contemplation of murder was a certain way to ease the boredom. Was that why Jack had done it? To feel his own pulse quicken as he felt their hot blood upon his face, stifled their screams with a gloved hand upon their soft lips.

There was fear in taking a person's life. Fear of being caught, fear of being damned to hell, fear that one's prey might not get away.

Guilt. There was guilt, too. Then again, he wasn't so sure. For him, there was no guilt, but whenever he had killed, it was with purpose. The Dead London Project. Jack the Ripper was different. He killed wantonly, without purpose or reason. Still, perhaps the Ripper had felt no guilt. Perhaps the thrill of murder had overcome those scant feelings of meaningless remorse. Perhaps knowing that he could slit a woman's throat and pluck out her insides as easily as slitting open the wax seal of a letter, made the Ripper feel so powerful as to render his victims' lives meaningless in his eyes.

He must have felt like a god. A god of death and destruction, a killing angel. The whores--ants to be crushed beneath his feet.

It didn't feel like so long ago that he had taken his first life, not so long since he began to fear he would not be able to go through with it. The Dead London Project was too important to him to fail on account of something so ridiculous as his overdeveloped sense of the importance of human life. After all, that was the point of it all, anyway. To conquer life.

To see his life's work come to fruition, he needed to be like Jack the Ripper--powerful, able to claim lives without a single moment of regret, to feel their hot blood upon his cheeks. He needed to be like Varney the Vampire, Sweeney Todd, or Anthony Tidkins, the very embodiment of fear, an emblem of death. A villain from a Penny Dreadful.

Only then could he transcend who he really was. Pathetic. Weak. Frail. Emotional. He, who believed that nothing, not love, not art, not money, not even science, could possibly outweigh the worth of a single human life. He remembered the fear he'd felt. The doubt. Could he really take someone's life?

And if he did, would it thrill him? Would it quicken his pulse with fear and guilt and revulsion? Or would he hesitate? Would he pause to reflect at the immorality of his actions, halt and consider the villainy of even thinking such damnable thoughts--the murder of innocents, the slaughter of thousands.

He felt his trousers tighten, felt the blood in his veins seem to quicken, felt his eyes light up with a fervour that made the darkness of the cloudy night seem strangely bright, and he remembered the very moment he'd known the answer to that question.

No, he hadn't hesitated. No, he hadn't paused to reflect. No, he hadn't felt the slightest flicker of guilt.

Yes, he had been thrilled. Yes, his pulse had quickened. Yes, he'd felt more alive than he ever had in all his years.

Aroused by that memory, he let his umbrella clatter upon the ground. He stripped off his jacket and his vest, and threw them upon the street. He peeled off his shirt as if overcome by fever. Feeling manic, he let the rain beat down upon his bare chest. He stared into the sky and watched the rain beat down upon the lenses of his mask.

"'ello mister," said a voice, drawing his attention away from the heavens.

A woman, delicate and soft-featured, though she was dirty and dressed in cheap and tattered cloth, raised her hand to her forehead to shield her eyes against the rain, and looked at him in surprise.

Her blue, flower-print dress was drenched in rain, her hair soaked, and she was evidently intoxicated, as she staggered in his direction.

"See somefin' ye like?" she called, raising her dress up to reveal a set of long legs. She named a price, and when he said nothing, lowered the price without a moment's consideration. When he still made no reply, she raised her dress still further, giving him a flash of the goods.

Finally, she cursed at him and turned to leave.

Suddenly, she recoiled, as she caught a glimpse of his masked face through the roiling cloud of fog. She caught a flash of ivory-white skin beneath his mask, and through the foggy lenses of the mask, soft pink eyes.

He moved slowly toward her as she staggered back, reaching into a small bag that he kept in his left hand, and withdrawing a small vial of green liquid. He reached into the bag again, and slotted the green vial into the back of a mechanical raven.

He smiled beneath his mask, as the young woman watched him approach through the fog, surprise giving way to fear.

Yes, he thought, at once thrilled and disturbed by the look on her pretty, young face. Yes, I do see something I like.

He tipped his hat and smiled, though she could not have seen his cheshire grin, as it was hidden by the bird-like leather mask of a plague doctor.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked, replacing the hat upon his head and taking the clockwork bird out of his bag. His voice sounded strange and muffled through the leather mask, low and inhuman.

She shook her head and began to move away from him, backing up until she stumbled into a wall and lost her balance. She fell, mud and rain splashing upon her dress and legs. She kicked out and began to scramble, backward, away from him. Her shoe slipped off, but she hardly seemed to notice.

He wound the clockwork bird, and let it go. It took flight and wheeled overhead, hissing as it released the infectious gas.

The sound of the woman choking, gasping for air. Her face turning blue. Her body twitching in the gutter. It delighted the Resurrectionist.

"I am Anthony Tidkins," he said, "The Resurrection Man."

#

"We need to get back to the Dreadful," said Palmer. "It isn't safe here any more."

Jonathan nodded, keeping one eye on Roderick, whose fists were clenched and trembling.

"Grab whatever necessities you may require, and we'll be on our way," said Jonathan. "Miss Monday, Roderick keeps a wardrobe of lady's clothes over there, for his female models. You may find something in your size, if you need a change of clothes."

"Thank you," she said, and headed for the wardrobe.

"Roderick, can I help you gather your effects? Anything you think you'll need?"

"Cocaine," Roderick answered.

"Are you sure that's--"

"Cocaine," Roderick snapped. "Don't offer to help if you aren't being sincere. The box is on the bookshelf over there."

"Right," Jonathan answered. "Anything else?"

"I suppose a change of clothes might not be a bad idea," he said, a bit more subdued. "Whatever I have in black."

Jonathan returned a minute later with a black shirt, black pants, and a black top hat. A pair of black boots. Roderick hadn't moved from the doorway. He was still barefoot, his feet utterly filthy.

Jonathan headed for the door and eased it open. The airship was still floating above Roderick's house, a hundred feet off the ground. As the fog was beginning to clear, and dawn was beginning to break, Jonathan had an almost clear view of the zombies walking through the streets. More to the point, they had a clear view of him.

The nearest group of zombies was over a hundred feet away, just down the street, but there were hundreds of them. Another group of them on the adjacent street, and a third group on the opposite side of Roderick's street. They didn't seem to have seen Jonathan and his group yet, but they would need to signal the airship.

This would be risky. Jonathan had taken a flare gun with him from the airship. He drew the gun now, and aimed it at the sky.

"We ready?" Jonathan asked.

"Ready," Palmer answered.

"Yes, sah," said Kip.

Miss Monday and Clementine nodded.

"Good," said Jonathan.

He fired the flare gun. A hundred pale eyes looked up at once as the flare burst into a brilliant green and streaked across the sky. It sizzled and cracked, trailing smoke. It hit the ground fifty feet from Roderick's doorstep and lay there sizzling.

"They must have seen it," said Toshi, as the ship's propellers began to whir almost immediately after the flare landed. The Dreadful surged toward the flare. It was astonishingly fast, given its vast size. Jonathan had to remind himself that it was, after all, lighter than air.

Meanwhile, the dead began to move as well, slowly ambling toward the smoking flare, moving as one enormous mass of rotten bodies.

"Quickly!" Jonathan cried.

Without losing a moment, the party was on their way to meet the airship, hoping they would reach the ship's ladder before the hungry dead could get at them.

Jonathan saw something drop out of the bottom of the airship and tumble down towards the earth. It bounced as it unspooled, and hung, suspended ten feet above the ground. It was the rope ladder, Jonathan realized. It was still too far to reach.

The zombies were closing in on them from all directions. If they didn't make the ship, they might not make it back to the house now either. This was it. They had reached a point of no return.

He heard a cry of alarm, and swung around to see what had caused it. He saw it immediately--some of the zombies were quicker than the others, and one of them had already reached the group. It had its hands around Clem's neck. Jonathan raised his pistol, but he couldn't get a shot. Not without risking hitting Toshi herself.

It was Miss Monday, who was nearest to Toshi, that came to her aide, putting herself between Toshi and the zombie. With tremendous force, she seized the creature by one arm and hauled it roughly back. It tumbled to the ground on top of her. Abandoning its intended victim, it now tried for Miss Monday's throat, snarling and biting. It nearly had its teeth around her throat. Miss Monday was on her back, the creature on top of her, just as she'd been when he found her with Lord Connor. The zombie was going to tear her throat out.

Jonathan again raised his pistol--again, he couldn't make the shot.

"Help her!" he cried.

He was holstering his pistol and rushing to help her himself, even as the creature sunk its teeth into her arm.

She didn't cry out, or give any indication of her pain, so it might not have broken the skin, but Jonathan couldn't be certain. All he could do was watch as Toshi hurried back to help Miss Monday. The formidable mechanic managed to break the creature's hold on Miss Monday, and with her rusty pipe, smash its brains in.

By now, even the slowest of the zombies were closing in on them, but the airship had descended enough that they could now reach the ladder. He helped Monday to her feet, and shouted for her to go first.

He raised his weapon as the zombies narrowed the gap, forming a tight circle with Toshi, Kip, and Roderick, while Miss Monday climbed. He fired into the throng, just barely hitting his target.

"You next, Roderick," he shouted.

He managed to get Bailey into a little duffel bag, which he slung over his shoulder, and began to ascend.

"Quickly!" he called.

He had to reload his pistol, which he did while Kip covered him. Meanwhile, Toshi began to scamper up the rope after Roderick, leaving only Jonathan and Kip on the ground.

With a fresh pair of bullets in his pistol, Jonathan pointed it another incoming zombie, close enough to hit at point blank range. He shoved the muzzle into its face and pulled the trigger. He was rewarded with an explosive spray of blood and brain, and the sight of a necrotic dandy falling to the ground dead.

"Yore next, sah," said Kip, patting Jonathan on the back. "Ah'll cover ya."

Jonathan didn't argue. He grabbed a hold of the rope and hoisted himself up, one rung at a time. He paused to fire a shot at one of the zombies, which had come up from behind Kip.

"Thank you, sah," Kip called, swinging around to see the fallen corpse at his feet. "Much obliged."

With that, Kip began to climb up after Jonathan. Even before they finished climbing, the ship unleashed a load of water from its ballasts, causing the ship to rise suddenly.

Jonathan lost his footing. He clung desperately to the ladder, as his feet slipped off the rungs. The ladder jerked violently. One of his hands slipped, and he found himself holding on by one hand. He held tight, and scrambled to get his foot back on the rungs. He fingers were slipping.

He looked down and saw that one of the zombies was climbing the ladder after them.

"Kip!" he cried, scrambling to find purchase.

By sheer luck, he managed to get one foot back on the rung. He almost lost it again--the ladder bounced violently as Kip tried to shake the zombie off the ladder, kicking madly at the creature's head. Somehow, it managed to hold on. Finally, rather than shaking it loose, he managed to kill it, crushing its half-rotten skull with his boot. Still, its fingers clung to the ladder.

"Talk about a death grip, eh, sah?"

Jonathan grasped for the ladder, still hanging on for dear life. As the rope ladder stilled, he managed to grab on. He laughed nervously. "Death grip. Yes, very good, Kip. Well said."

Finally, they were out of the zombies' reach. Heart hammering, Jonathan paused to glance down at the unliving mob, and let out a sigh of relief. Then he remembered Miss Monday's arm, and he renewed his efforts to climb up after her.

Chapter Thirty-One

Chapter 31

"Let's see the damage," said Jonathan.

Annabel hadn't been sure he'd seen the zombie biting into her arm. She'd hoped he hadn't. Things would be so much simpler if he hadn't. But now Jonathan was staring at her, waiting for her to roll up her sleeve. Kip, Toshi, and Abe Palmer were crowded behind him, and even Roderick Steen had a crease across his brow, a line of worry.

"I'm fine," Annabel said, pushing her way past all of them.

She crossed the wide room, pausing to regain her balance as the airship hit a patch of turbulence, and took a seat at the bar. Doing her best to ignore the stares she could feel on the back of her head, she borrowed a rag from the barman and began to wipe down her crossbow. She had taken quite a liking to it. It was surprisingly light, a one-handed variation on the traditional crossbow, with a pistol-like grip, and was made of dark, polished wood. Much to her chagrin, it was already stained with blood. She scrubbed a bit harder to see if she could still get the blood out.

"Let me see your arm," Jonathan persisted.

She hadn't even noticed him come up behind her and take a seat at her side. She swung around, glaring at him.

"I said I'm fine."

"I must insist," Jonathan replied. He was looking at her with concern and with something else in his expression as well--attraction? Was it possible he felt the same magnetic pull she did when she looked at him? God, she thought. One look into his eyes and she just wanted to melt into his arms. How embarrassing! She was supposed to be a hardened criminal, yet here she was, simpering like a schoolgirl.

Annabel swore.

"You do realise that a bite from one of these creatures can be fatally infectious? If your skin is punctured..." he continued.

She looked up from her task. She'd borrowed a rag from the barman, and after wiping the blood from her face, was using it to clean her shoes. She fixed Jonathan with a deadly stare. "I'm. Fine."

Apparently not being one to back down, Jonathan ignored the warning in her voice. "We don't know for certain that you're immune," he said, concern written all over his face. "Please, don't be stubborn."

"He's right, you know," said Palmer.

Annabel spun around in her chair to look at him. She noticed that Kipper Lockwood and Miss Clementine had disappeared, either to resume their duties with the ship's operation or, possibly, to give Annabel a bit of space.

"If you've been bitten, and if you've been infected, it's possible we can still stop the infection from spreading if we amputate," Palmer continued.

Finally, Annabel relented. She began by peeling off her glove. "Little late for that," she said.

"It may very well be," said Jonathan, managing to sound both sarcastic and concerned for her welfare.

Then Annabel drew back her sleeve, and he fell silent.

Jonathan was staring at her in silence, her reluctance to allow him to examine her arm now made clear. As she'd said, it was too late to amputate.

Annabel's right arm was a prosthetic. Like the clockwork eye she strapped to her face each morning, it was made of mechanical parts. Gears which clicked as she rotated her forearm, hydraulics which hissed as she flexed her artificial muscles. Gears clicked with the steady rhythm of a clock each time she rotated her wrist. Each joint bore a keyhole. The key with which she wound her clockwork eye was a perfect fit for her arm as well.

It was made of copper and brass, with the same extraordinary workmanship as her mechanical eye. It moved with quiet motions, even as the gears whirred and clicked. She demonstrated the dexterity in her hand by flexing each of her fingers in turn, clenching her hand into a fist.

"See," she said, "No bite marks."

In awe, Mr. O reached out a hand to touch her arm.

"Don't," she warned him.

He retracted his hand.

"Sorry," he said. "It's just..."

"What?" she said, covering up her arm again with her sleeve. "Freakish? Inhuman?"

"Fascinating," he murmured. He was looking at her in a way that she found unsettling. Unsettling in that it was sincere, honest, and--dare she think it--affectionate.

She blushed. No one had ever looked at her in this way, not after they'd seen her arm. Most men blanched at the sight of her eye and at the hideous scar that ran down the length of her face. She was pretty, sure, but she was also disfigured. If the eye wasn't enough to turn men away, her arm most certainly was.

But Jonathan reached out, gently, and touched her cheek. She flushed, hot, and felt her heart flutter in her chest.

"You're not a freak," said Jonathan. "I think you're extraordinary."

For a moment, the rest of the world slipped away, and she forgot about the zombies that plagued the city, and about the Resurrectionists, and about the other eyes in the room looking at her. There was only her and Jonathan.

He put his hand against the back of her neck, leaned in close, and let his lips linger half an inch from hers.

Almost against her will, she reached out in return, and pressed her brass hand against the back of his neck, pressed her body close to his, and pressed her lips against his. She felt too vulnerable, too exposed, with her arm uncovered like this.

Her breath caught in her throat, and she felt a warmth in her very bones, as he returned her kiss. Her heart hammered more furiously than when she'd been fighting off the dead. She felt her cheeks flush, red-hot. It started as a gentle kiss, his lips tenderly caressing hers, but it quickly gave way to passion and fire, and he kissed her roughly, grasping her by the back of the head tightly.

Maddeningly, he suddenly pulled away from her, but it was only to catch his breath. Then he leaned back in and began to plant kisses upon her neck, small wet kisses that moved their way up her neck and caused her to grasp the hair on the back of his neck and press herself as close to him as she could. She pressed her left hand against his hip, and she moaned softly as his teeth tugged at the lobe of her ear.

He put his hand upon her arm. She couldn't feel it there, not exactly, but she felt a slight pressure in her shoulder, where the prosthesis was affixed to her flesh.

After a moment, she drew back and looked at him like an addict might look at a bottle of absinthe. With a mixture of wariness and attraction. She staggered back. Her expression changed as she remembered their surroundings.

They were both wearing clothes soiled by blood and gore, and in the background, even louder than the whirring motors of the Dreadful, they heard a city swarmed by the dead. It was apocalyptic. Keening, inhuman groans, and the intermittent sounds of living men and women and children screaming. Windows shattering, fires burning. And in their presence, Roderick carried a bundle of mourning clothes.

"My god," Annabel said. "Such horror abounds, and yet here we are. Locking lips while the plague spreads. We must truly be deviants."

"I'm sorry," he told her.

"Don't be," Annabel replied, leaning towards him once more. She whispered in his ear, "I'm afraid I rather liked it."

It was Jonathan's turn to turn bright red. His cheeks dimpled. "I'm glad you're alright," he said.

"Well," said Roderick, clapping his hands together. "If you two lovebirds are quite finished, I believe we have a heist to plan."

"Apologies, Roderick," Jonathan said. "Here you are, grieving for poor Rémy, while Miss Monday and I are...well, expressing affection."

Roderick brushed aside her concern with a flick of his wrist.

"Think nothing of it," he said, although Annabel worried that his nonchalance was an affectation. "You barely knew Rémy. That's my fault, really. I took him for granted. But don't let that stop you. After all, given the state of our beloved city, we may not survive the day. As Miss Monday said earlier, we might as well do what we can do enjoy it."

Palmer cleared his throat. "That said, we do have a heist to plan."

"How hard can it be?" asked Annabel with a smirk. "We simply sneak into the Resurrectionists' secret hideout, find and assassinate Anthony Tidkins, break into the underground facility and walk out with their research, right under their noses."

"Well, when you put it that way..." said Toshi.

"There's one other detail," said Palmer.

"Yes," Jonathan agreed.

Annabel looked to the older gentleman for an explanation.

"Mrs. Grimmer is still with the Resurrectionists," Palmer explained. "We can only hope that they are still convinced she is loyal to their cause, but it's possible I may have put her in danger by betraying them by helping you escape."

"Either way, we need to find her and get her out of there," said Jonathan.

"Any idea where she'll be?" asked Annabel. "Are we even sure they'll still be in the laboratory? Wouldn't they be smarter to get out of the city?"

"They certainly won't stick around forever," Palmer answered, "Which is why we'll need to act quickly. I had copies of the building plans in my office, including the layout of the facility, with each of its points of access. I helped Charles Grimmer come up with the plan to build the facility. Unfortunately, I didn't have a chance to take the plans with me."

"Do you think you could make a sketch?" Jonathan asked.

"The details are etched quite firmly in my memory," Palmer answered. "Just give me an hour or so to put it down on paper."

#

One of the deckhands was kind enough to draw a bath for Annabel. A bath room on an airship seemed a ridiculous extravagance to Annabel, and the Dreadful's bath room took this extravagance further still. It was a wide room with a deep clawfoot tub and--to Annabel's amazement--it had in-built plumbing. She had only to turn on the taps and a fresh stream of hot water would spill out of the pipes and into the tub. There were little bottles of fragrances and jars of bath salts on the shelves, but Annabel could hardly see the point of using them. She just wanted to scrub the blood from her skin, and she knew that in a few hours she was likely to have a fresh coat of blood on her skin, not to mention a layer of sweat.

Annabel had made a career of robbing wealthy gentlemen, and had over her years acquired more than one item that on its own could have bought entire countries. From rare works of art to crown jewels and enormous diamonds, Annabel was no stranger to riches. She could have lived like a queen. But she had never really been able to shake the notion that she didn't belong among the ton. Among the rich, she was an imposter. Among the poor, she was a traitor. She couldn't help but feeling she had abandoned her brothers and sisters in suffering.

When so much of the city was struggling just to survive their lives of poverty, how could anyone enjoy their lives of luxury? She had tried to instill in herself the notion that it was every man for himself, she tried to harden her heart, to remind herself that she was supposed to be a hardened criminal, impervious to the lives of others. But try as she might, she hadn't been able to forget her humble upbringing, her life on the street. How dirty she'd been as an orphan, and how cold, how alone, and how hungry. It sickened her to see others suffering while the wealthy grew ever richer.

While other girls had sold their bodies for a penny just to have a roof over their heads for a night, Annabel had been spared by her talent for picking pockets. She'd grown rich thanks to her benefactor, Anthony Tidkins. On more than one occasion, Annabel had given her takings from her various heists to charity.

And yet, here she was, soaking in a warm bath aboard the most lavish of airships Annabel had ever seen--in a bathroom as grand as any palace--while the rest of the city was struggling to survive as the zombie virus spread. And, she reminded herself, kissing the man who owned the airship. It was foolish of her to fall for Jonathan, charming as he was. They were not of the same class. She realized this as she soaked in the warm tub and washed herself clean with richly scented soap.

And as she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the looking glass, she felt more foolish still. She'd removed both her eye and her arm for getting in the tub. She stared into her cycloptic and scarred reflection and sighed.

There were silver clasps surgically installed into her eye socket, a mess of scarred and mangled flesh. A long, deep scar ran down one half of her face. Not only was she nouveau riche, a societal parvenu amongst the legitimate upper class, she bore the scars of the dangerous life she lived.

Her right arm was a stump, a few mere inches that ended abruptly at her upper arm where it had been amputated. That was how she'd survived the zombie bite all those years ago, in the barn behind Papa Doc's home. Anthony Tidkins had taken her arm off with a bone saw before the virus could spread through her body.

She still had the feeling of an arm that wasn't there. Occasionally swore she could feel an itch or a cramp in that arm although that was impossible.

Jonathan's words ran through her mind. I think you're extraordinary. She laughed. How foolish of her--she'd actually believed him.

She washed her hair and rinsed it under the copper pipes. She climbed out of the steaming tub, even less relaxed than when she'd climbed in. She snatched up a towel with her left hand and began to dry her hair. She felt a jolt as the airship shifted direction. She threw the towel over her shoulder, picked up her discarded prosthetic arm. The prosthetic connected to the surgical implants in the socket of her arm with a mechanical click. At once, she could move the arm again, and flex her fingers. She had no feeling in that arm, but she'd grown so accustomed to using the mechanical arm that it felt like second nature to use it. There were a couple of leather straps to help hold the heavy mechanical arm in place. She strapped them over her shoulder. There were deep lines in her skin from the leather straps.

Before replacing her eye, she wound up the gears with the key she wore around her neck. The clockwork began to tick, as she hooked up and strapped on her eye. She wound up her arm in the same manner, and with the same key. She finished toweling dry, and scooped up the clothes she'd borrowed from Roderick Steen's wardrobe. Most of his ladies' clothes were long, elaborate dresses in old fashioned styles from the Renaissance period, but she did manage to find one outfit that suited her well enough.

Rather than wear a skirt, she'd borrowed a pair of white trousers from Roderick's personal wardrobe. She hoped he wouldn't mind. They were a bit baggy on her, but better than being burdened by a bulky bustle skirt. This mission might require her to run or to fight, and she couldn't do either easily while wearing a skirt. She dressed herself in a black corset, with a striped black and white blouse and a rich brown bodice, accessorized with a light brown corduroy jacket with a mandarin collar. Her key hung from her neck, pendant-like. She put on a bulky pair of leather boots and laced them up tight. Somehow she still managed to look stylish despite the androgynous ensemble.

She patted her damp hair again with the towel, and ran a comb through it. Jonathan had offered to send a maid to assist her, but Annabel had simply scowled at him until he retracted the offer. Now, as she sorted through her tangled hair and tried to style it so that it wouldn't get in her way, she half-regretted that decision.

At last, she emerged from the bathroom, where one of the deckhands was waiting to escort her back to the passenger's lounge. When she arrived, the gentlemen were gathered around Palmer's sketch of the facility's layout.

Jonathan smiled, and headed over to greet her with a kiss. Annabel strode past him, leaving him to kiss the air where she'd been a moment earlier and heading over to get a look at Palmer's map.

"Just because I let you kiss me once doesn't mean we're on such familiar terms that you may do so whenever you please, Mr. Grimmer," she said curtly, and took Jonathan's vacated seat at the table. She reached for the map. "May I?"

"By all means," said Palmer.

Jonathan stood, stammering a half-formed apology, while Annabel looked over the map and did her best to ignore him.

"There," she said, pointing at the map. "That's how we'll get in."

The others listened intently as she laid out the plan.

Only three of the Grimmer Company offices provided access to the Resurrectionist hideout. Palmer's own office had the secret elevator, as did Charles Grimmer's former office, and Mrs. Grimmer's. There was a fourth and final access point from within the printing company. This was not an elevator but a hidden staircase, which led from the library to a hallway near the Beta Laboratory, which was shared by a number of the Resurrectionist's scientists, and which was connected to the Alpha Laboratory by a long hallway.

In between the two laboratories were a number of offices, libraries, smaller medical labs, and living quarters for the scientists. The holding cells where Annabel and Parson Sinews had been held were in an adjacent hallway. They would have to stop by the holding cells in order to rescue Sinews, as well, assuming he hadn't already been moved to Chateau d'If.

Aside from the elevators and the hidden staircase within the Grimmer Company, there was also a ladder that was accessible via a tailor's shop across the street. The shop was a front, its only purpose to allow the Resurrectionists to access the facility without arousing the suspicions of the Grimmer Company's employees.

Annabel had chosen a different point of access for herself and Abraham Palmer. Jonathan was to use the entrance in the tailor's shop, while Roderick Steen would use the front door. After all, Mrs. Grimmer might not be in the underground facility. She might just be on the ground floor of the Grimmer Company, in which case there would be no need for Roderick to sneak into the underground facility. If necessary, he would sneak into the company library and access the facility via the hidden staircase.

"Is everyone clear on their roles?" Annabel asked. "Our mission depends on stealth. The scientists are not fighters. If we can avoid the guards, the plan should go off without a hitch. One wrong move, however, and the plan will fail. This could be our one shot at saving this city."

Jonathan nodded. Annabel looked to Palmer, who gave her his assurances.

"Roderick?"

He nodded. "Let's go save London."

Chapter Thirty-Two

Chapter 32

Annabel had chosen the least pleasant way into the underground facility. The sewers.

She had a scarf wrapped around her face to deal with the smell, although the tunnel they were using was a maintenance tunnel. No actual sewage flowed along this route, but it was close enough to the pipes that did contain sewage, so the smell was still something to contend with.

"When Joseph Bazalgette designed his sewage system, Mr. Grimmer--Charles Grimmer, that is--made arrangements to have this tunnel constructed in secret, connecting the sewer system to the underground facility."

"Mr. Grimmer was a very suspicious man," Annabel mused.

Palmer grunted in agreement.

"Yes, well, you're not paranoid if they really are trying to kill you, right?"

Annabel couldn't agree more. That's why she'd insisted that Palmer go with her. She wanted to keep an eye on him. Though Jonathan had vouched for him, Annabel still didn't trust him.

They had entered via the Abbey Mills Pumping Station, gaining access to the building via an open window on the second story. With a rope, lowered from the deck of the Penny Dreadful, they'd swung across, onto the roof of the lower annex. From there, it had been simple enough to climb in through the window.

Palmer carried a gas lantern as they walked the length of the tunnel, which cast shadows along the walls of the corridor. He favoured his left hand, given the injury to his right shoulder.

Toshi had managed to extract the bullet and stitch his wound; though the mechanic's education was specific to the study of Aeronautical Engineering, she was still the most scientifically knowledgeable among them, and had a steady enough hand. According to Toshi, human beings are just like extra complicated machines.

Their footsteps echoed down the tunnel.

"So, the Resurrectionists don't know about this entrance?" Annabel asked.

The narrow tunnel came to a sudden dead end. They halted, Annabel looking up at Palmer with concern.

"Did we take a wrong turn somewhere?" she asked.

He shook his head, grinning knowingly.

"Nope," he said, reaching up with gloved hand and exploring the brickwork with his fingers until he found a hidden latch.

"Ah," said Annabel. "I believe I understand. It would hardly do to have some unsuspecting sewage worker wander down this tunnel and inadvertently discover the secret facility."

"Exactly, m'dear," said Palmer, gruffly.

As the latch pulled, the bricks began to swing open, like a door. As they did, it became clear that they were not bricks at all. Just thick cardboard, painted to look like bricks, like props in a stage production. The faux brickwork was glued to a thick, metal door, which opened into a closet. As they stepped inside it, Annabel noted that there was trickery on both sides to conceal the door. False brickwork slid along a track to hide the door from view, shutting them in to the underground facility.

#

Jonathan sat up, nursing an awful headache. He blinked and looked around. It took a few moments, despite the familiarity of his surroundings, for Jonathan to figure out where the hell he was. He was still on the airship. Why was he still on the airship? He was supposed to be headed to the tailor across the street from the Grimmer Company, and searching for the hidden entrance to the underground facility. It was an experience Jonathan was familiar with, waking up with no recollection of how he'd gotten there, but on this particular occasion there was no smell of alcohol on his breath. He certainly had the headache and foggy memory he associated with a hangover, but he was sure he hadn't been drinking.

As the fog cleared from his mind, he began to remember what had happened. After Miss Monday had described her plan, the crew had begun to file out the door. As Jonathan turned to leave, he'd been forestalled by a hand on his shoulder.

"A moment of your time, Jonathan?"

It was Abraham Palmer.

Jonathan pulled himself to his feet, and surveyed the empty room. The bartender had been dismissed, so Jonathan grabbed a bottle from behind the bar and took a swig to ease the ache in his head.

"Of course," he remembered answering.

As he'd told Miss Monday, Jonathan trusted Palmer. After all, Jonathan's parents had been so consumed by their business with the Grimmer Company that Jonathan had practically been raised by servants, and by the employees at the printing company. Palmer had been more of a father to him than Charles Grimmer ever had. Everything that he'd learned about the printing business he'd learned from Palmer.

"I'd like to ask you something, and I'd like to be direct, if I may," said Mr. Palmer, taking a seat at the tea table and directing Jonathan to do the same. When Jonathan was settled, Palmer continued, "There was a moment in your childhood. You must have been about seven or eight years old. I wanted to know if you remembered it."

"What moment?" Jonathan asked.

"Ah, so you don't remember?" Palmer replied. "The doctor said you might not. You weren't yourself at the time, after all."

"What?" Jonathan said. He wasn't following. Not at all.

What had Palmer meant? Jonathan took another swig of absinthe, straight from the bottle, and headed to the library, where his father had kept his gun collection. His gun had been removed from his belt.

"You were exposed to the Lazarus Virus."

He remembered Palmer's words, though he had no memory of the incident Palmer was describing.

"We don't know how you contracted the virus, but it was an earlier strain. You were feverish, delirious. You weren't yourself. It's a blessing you don't remember it."

"I remember...being sick. I remember having a fever."

"It was no ordinary fever. Under the careful ministrations of Dr. Allen, you recovered from your illness. But that was not the end of things. A servant had been bitten. She took to the fever, and was sent home to recover. Of course, she didn't recover; she got worse. The virus spreads easily. A bite. A scratch. Jonathan's father began trying to track down incidences of attacks involving the infected, hunting down the zombies, throwing their bodies into the Thames, and covering up their deaths. Eventually, a more sophisticated means of dealing with the virus became necessary. The virus was impossible to contain. That was why your father built the laboratory beneath the Grimmer Company. It's also why I believe the Resurrectionists are our only chance of finding a cure."

Jonathan felt sick. He grabbed two pistols, shoved one in his belt, and kept the other in his hand. He swallowed another mouthful of liquor, but his head still ached. He made his way to the window and looked outside. They were still moored in place, floating near the Grimmer Company.

"The first batch of the antiserum was derived from corvine birds, which possess a natural resistance to the virus. Not all animals do, you see. So, crows became a subject of interest to Dr. Allen. He believed, given their natural immunity, that they might allow him to synthesize an antiserum. Apparently his obsession was passed on to his assistant, Jack Bernhardt."

Jonathan tried to remember how he knew that name. Jack Bernhardt? Wasn't that the name of the man who hired Miss Monday to steal Papa Doc's research in Haiti? The man who later became Anthony Tidkins? And wasn't Dr. Allen his mentor? His mind was sluggish. He'd been drugged.

"Through his research, Dr. Allen became unintentionally exposed to the virus. Lazarus works in two stages. In stage one, the virus slowly kills the host body. It is only in stage two that the body becomes a zombie. As Dr. Allen was in stage one, he became useful as a test subject for the antiserum. If the Resurrectionists could cure that stage of the virus, we could harness immortality; the virus would act only to keep the body alive after death, but without the other negative side effects: necrosis, rot, the primal urge to eat living flesh.

"The infected would not be zombies, but undead. The antiserum actually showed promise. It worked to a point, preventing the virus from killing him, but it was still not a cure. Dr. Allen was dying; we were only delaying the inevitable. He believed that crows would not suffice to provide a cure. The cure had to come from humans. Humans who'd been exposed to Lazarus and survived."

"Like me and Miss Monday, you mean," said Jonathan.

"Yes," Palmer answered. "Of course, Mrs. Grimmer forbid the Resurrectionists from using you as their test subject. I tried to persuade them to use only Miss Monday, to stay away from you. But Miss Monday proved elusive. But the Resurrectionists had another solution. The Dead London Project. If your mother had simply been willing to give you up, that could have been prevented. Still, once they find the cure, this will all be set to rights."

Jonathan's mind was whirling. So many things just didn't add up. Even working from within, how could Palmer know so much?

"Once we find a cure, you mean? After we recover their research, we'll find a cure, as we discussed. We don't need the Resurrectionists."

Palmer laughed. "Don't be naive," said Palmer. "The Resurrectionists have been studying the virus for years. Anthony Tidkins is still our best hope of finding a cure for Lazarus."

Jonathan pushed his chair back a little, watching Palmer uneasily. Palmer twitched when Jonathan moved his chair.

"I don't care," Jonathan said, his tone challenging Palmer, brooking no argument. "We're not getting into bed with the Resurrectionists, not after what they've done. They need to be stopped. We'll find a cure without their help."

"I was afraid you might say that," said Palmer. "That's why I put something in your drink."

"What did you put in my drink?"

Whatever it was, its effects were already working their way through his body. Jonathan felt drowsy. He tried to stand. His knees collapsed. He hit the ground hard.

"Bastard," Jonathan groaned as his eyelids grew as heavy as lead weights. "What do you intend to do?"

Palmer's voice sounded slow, and hollow, as Jonathan lost consciousness. "Miss Monday is going to kill Anthony Tidkins, given half a chance. I intend to stop her, by any means necessary."

Chapter Thirty-Three

Chapter 33

Roderick kept expecting zombies to leap out at him from beneath the hydrangeas, as he crossed the driveway of the Grimmer Company. His nerves were on edge from his numerous encounters with the hungry dead, and from too little sleep, and if he was being honest with himself, from overdoing it with the cocaine. But he blamed the Resurrectionists for Rémy's death, and he would see them pay for it. Until then, he would just have to deal with his fraying nerves.

He jumped again as a shadow moved in his peripheral. Just a tree swaying in the wind, he reassured himself. The zombie virus wouldn't have spread to this part of the city yet. Not if the Resurrectionists were hiding out here. They would have taken care not to distribute Lazarus in this neighborhood.

"You don't shit where you eat," he muttered, crassly.

A sour expression on his face, his feet feeling cramped by his shoes, he climbed the steps to the front door. He stole a glance inside the window. It looked like business as usual inside, although the place was more deserted than usual. Given that zombies were rampaging through the city, he imagined that most of the printing company's employees had left early, either to go home to look after their families, or to get out of the city. It was difficult to imagine why anyone would have stayed to finish their work day, but if they hadn't actually seen any zombies, they might not understand just how bad it was.

As he approached the door, he adopted the role of the beleaguered traveller. As if he'd gone through an ordeal to get here, he staggered up the steps, grasped at the door handle, and stumbled into the lobby. He panted as if with exhaustion and looked around warily for any sign of zombies. As he caught sight of the receptionist, he took a step back and gasped.

"Can I help you?" asked Mrs. Thompson, putting her hands up placatingly.

Roderick took a moment to stare fearfully at her, acting as though uncertain that she wasn't a zombie. Of course, he could tell straightaway that she was human. The signs of affliction were obvious.

"You're not...one of them?" he stammered.

"Is it really so bad as we've been hearing?" she asked. "We've been getting reports about the situation, but we haven't had any incidents here. You're quite safe now, I assure you."

"Oh, thank god," Roderick said, breathing an exaggerated sigh of relief. "You would not believe what I went through to get here."

"I can imagine--" she said, and broke off, squinting at his face. "Don't I know you?"

"Roderick Steen," he said.

"Of course! Mr. Grimmer's friend, isn't that right?" she answered. "I'm sorry I didn't recognize you right away. It's been quite a day for me as well. I imagine you're here to see Mr. Grimmer. I'm afraid he isn't here. Would you like to wait here for him? I can make up a pot of tea while you wait."

"Actually, I'm here to see Mrs. Grimmer."

"Mrs. Grimmer?" the receptionist repeated. "I'm afraid she isn't in, either."

"No matter," said Roderick. "I'll simply wait in her office."

Before she could object, he stepped around her, made his way into the hallway, and headed down it.

"Thank you," he called as he continued along the hall. A moment later, he popped back into the lobby. "Which door is it?"

With an exasperated sigh, she at least took pity on him.

"Last door on the left."

He flashed his teeth at her, mouthed the word thanks, and returned to the hallway, making his way to the appropriate door.

He stepped into the office and closed the door. As Mrs. Thompson had warned, Mrs. Grimmer wasn't in.

Asking for directions had been a ploy. Roderick had been to the Grimmer Company often enough to know his way around. When Roderick's father had worked for the police, Charles Grimmer had interviewed him on a couple of occasions, which is how he'd first met Jonathan. Later, when Roderick began to help the police with their investigation into the Resurrection Man's murders, Mr. Grimmer had interview Roderick a number of times as well. Roderick had visited Jonathan at work a number of times too. There was a time when Roderick had hoped their friendship might have been more than that. For a while, he had visited Jonathan every day of the week. Eventually, he'd realized that their friendship was just that--friendship--but by then they had already become inseparable. He wondered if Jonathan had known how Roderick had felt about him.

He opened the door again, and crept into the hallway. The constant hammering of the printing machines was enough to provide him cover. Little stealth was required, and if he happened to be discovered, he figured he could always feign ignorance. Which way to Mrs. Grimmer's office, again, he would say.

He hurried down the hall to the company library. The large room, which housed the company's newspaper and magazine archives, as well as copies of the company's most popular penny dreadfuls, featured a set of double doors at its entrance. Both were locked.

Roderick wished he had Miss Monday with him. If he survived this ordeal, he'd have to get her to teach him how to pick locks. He figured he could probably break in without her assistance, but it would be much easier if he didn't have to. He decided, instead, to try a bit of masculine charm. He returned to the lobby. Mrs. Thompson looked up from her desk in surprise.

"You mentioned something about tea?" he said, flashing a smile. "You were right, of course."

"About?"

"Mrs. Grimmer wasn't in her office. I thought, perhaps, I could take my tea in the library while I wait," he said. "I don't suppose you have a key, Miss--"

"Mrs. Thompson."

"Ah, missus," he said, managing to sound disappointed. "You're married, then?"

"Widowed," Mrs. Thompson answered.

Roderick affected a little gasp of surprise. "Oh, goodness, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry," he said. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank you, Mr. Steen. That's very kind. I'll show you to the library, and then I'll put the kettle on. How do you take your tea?"

"Sweet," he answered. "Very sweet."

#

Annabel Grey, better known as Miss Monday, crept along the hallway of the Resurrectionists' underground headquarters in the basement of the printing company. Once a research facility for the monster hunters in Charles Grimmer's employ, it was now a sanctuary for the Resurrectionists, monsters themselves. Annabel had to remind herself that not all of the scientists were willing accomplices to Anthony Tidkins' plot. Those who betrayed him were, like Lord Henry Connor, dealt with mercilessly. The scientists were under Tidkins' thumb. They had little choice but to do as he said. Still, if it came down to it, she wouldn't hesitate to kill them. If it couldn't be helped.

"This way."

She turned to follow Abraham Palmer down a hallway she hadn't been down before. It was impossible to guess the size of the facility, but it seemed labyrinthine, given the number of unexplored corridors, offices, and laboratories.

It was only due to Mr. Palmer's hand-drawn map of the complex and his knowledge of its layout that they were able to find the Beta Laboratory. With a silent exchange of glances, she signalled that she was ready and waited for Palmer's confirmation. He slipped on his Resurrection mask, and nodded. Annabel hid her crossbow behind her hip, out of view. She pushed open the door with her other hand.

The Beta Lab put its Alpha counterpart to shame, at least in size. It was a vast, open space that made Annabel forget how deep underground they were. A number of enormous machines took up space within the room, boilers at work, hissing steam, chemicals running through tubes. Several rows of operating tables spanned the room, tubes running from the machines to the bodies on the tables. Colourful liquid pumped into their veins, while they struggled against their bonds. Each body on each table was strapped down, wrists and ankles cuffed so tight the the bonds cut into their skin. Not that they would feel it; they were zombies.

Despite the barbaric experiments that were conducted here, there was a clinical cleanliness to the room, a thorough organisation to the madness. Annabel wondered if the men on the operating tables had been dead when the experiments had started, whether it was the disease or the cure the Resurrectionists were pumping into their veins. She knew they had no qualms about spreading the deadly disease.

A series of hazy black and white photographs were pinned to one of the walls. Unusual photographs, they revealed the subjects' skeletons.

Another section of the laboratory seemed to be dedicated to the study of those corvine birds that had provided the emblem for the Resurrectionists. Tubes filled with blood were stored in a glass cabinet, kept cool by some mechanical device. Condensation had formed upon the glass.

A dozen dissected birds were mounted with labeled pins, while the living birds squawked in their cages as scientists pricked them with needles, either drawing blood or injecting the crows with something. It was part rookery, part slaughterhouse, part monster hospital.

For a minute, Annabel and Palmer went unobserved, which gave them ample time to take stock of the laboratory. Eventually, the scientists seemed to notice the presence of the intruders. Annabel made a quick count of the Resurrectionists. Eight of them. She had more than enough bullets, not to mention crossbow bolts.

She recognised one of them, despite the mask he wore. His posture, greying hair, and age-spotted skin gave him away. Lifting his mask with one hand, he coughed into a handkerchief, then took a puff of air from a device that was hooked up to a cylindrical tank. He lowered his mask, again covering his mouth. But Annabel was sure of who it was. Dr. Jekyll, the scientist she'd first encountered in the lab that housed the zombie in the fishtank.

Annabel was surprised to see he hadn't yet succumbed to the Lazarus Virus. He was clearly suffering from its effects, but the fact that he was still living suggested he had some sort of resistance. Perhaps the scientists were already close to finding a cure.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, staring at her confusion.

"How's the head?" she asked.

Jekyll put a hand to his head where she'd hit him, but he said nothing.

Palmer quieted her with a look. She frowned, but let him take the lead.

"I have the subject in hand," said Palmer, taking her in hand and nudging her forward. He used his own body to help her conceal her weapon.

This had been Annabel's plan. If this had been an ordinary burglary, Annabel would have stole into the laboratory, avoiding direct confrontation, and taking the research right from under the Resurrectionists' noses. But the facility was too heavily guarded, and the Resurrectionists were on the lookout for her. Better to treat this mission as a heist than as a burglary, to favour deception over stealthiness.

The Resurrectionists believed that Palmer was loyal to their cause. He might have jeopardized that by helping Annabel escape, but Annabel figured he could regain their trust by bringing her in as his captive. Then, once their guard was down, they would strike.

"She escaped from the holding cell," said Palmer. "I managed to recapture her. I understand she was a subject of interest, given her exposure to the Lazarus Virus."

"Good, very good. Get her strapped down. There's an empty table, just there."

Slowly, Palmer moved her forward, careful to angle himself so as to keep her weapon hidden from view, until he stood adjacent to Dr. Jekyll. Only then did Palmer let her go.

The moment he did, she caught Dr. Jekyll in a headlock, aiming her crossbow at his skull. He yelped in surprise, and some of the Resurrectionists drew their own weapons. Only two of them were armed. After all, these men were scientists. Not all of the Resurrectionists were fighters.

Annabel positioned herself so that they didn't have a clean shot at her without risking killing Dr. Jekyll.

"Put your guns down," she instructed.

"Do as she says," said Palmer.

Slowly, careful not to make any sudden moves, the gentlemen complied.

"Good. Now, you're going to collect whatever notes you have on the Lazarus Virus, and you're going to hand them over to my friend here. Quickly, before I decide to introduce you to my other friend," she said, brandishing the crossbow.

As instructed, the scientists began collecting pages of notes, gathering stacks of leatherbound notebooks. Years worth of research. It would take ages to sort through these notes, even with the best scientists working on it. They'd have to deal with that later. For now, she had other things to worry about.

She spoke quietly, directing her next words to Dr. Jekyll alone. "Where is Jack?"

He moved his head. She wasn't sure if he was trying to answer her, or simply get free of her grasp. Eventually, she realised he was coughing, and she let him take a breath of air from his tank. Once he'd caught his breath, she pointed the crossbow at his neck.

"Who?"

"Anthony Tidkins," she said. "Where will I find him?"

The doctor made another sound--at first Annabel thought he was coughing again, but then he unstrapped his mask, and pulled it from his face. He wasn't coughing. He was laughing.

The mask had left deep lines on Jekyll's face. He had dark bags beneath his eyes, and his skin was wrinkled and blemished. But it was not just age that marked his skin. In patches, his face was completely black, with lines of grey and violet radiating outward. His neck was peeling. Long strips of skin had fallen away. The flesh beneath the layers of dead skin was beginning to rot.

Annabel stared open-mouthed. Was this the result of injecting him with her infected blood? If she was actually immune, could she still have transmitted the virus? She remembered that he had been coughing, hacking up blood, even the first time she met him. This disease, if it was Lazarus, he'd had it before she injected her blood into him. He must have been taking some sort of medicine to stop the virus from spreading, but the virus was winning. No wonder he was so dedicated to the Resurrectionist cause, of finding a cure.

"Before you said Anthony Tidkins, you said Jack," said Jekyll. "You knew him?"

"I did," Annabel answered.

"And yet, you plan on killing him," said the doctor. "Don't try to deny it. I can see it in your eye. And your other eye. It looks like his handiwork. It is, isn't it? You hold Jack responsible for what's become of this city. For spreading the zombies. Perhaps he is responsible. Or perhaps I am, for teaching him. Jack Bernhardt was my apprentice, you know."

"You're Dr. Allen," Annabel realized. Jack's mentor. Jack had spoken of the doctor often. Just as Annabel had once thought of Jack as the brother she'd never had, Dr. Allen had been more of a father to Jack than his own father ever had.

The man she knew as Jekyll nodded. "I am," he admitted.

Annabel kept her eyes on the other scientists, while her crossbow remained pointed at Jekyll. Threat lingered in her eyes, and they kept their wary distance. These were scientists, not soldiers. They seemed likely not to intervene so long as she retained the upper hand.

"Jack is our best hope of finding a cure," said Jekyll. "He's my best hope of a cure. So, you still think I'm going to tell you where to find him?"

"I'll find him without your help," Annabel said.

"Sorry. But I can't let that happen." Out of the corner of her eye, Annabel saw Abraham Palmer pointing a gun at her head.

"What are you doing?" she demanded.

"Put down the crossbow," he said. "It's over."

She cursed under her breath. She'd known not to trust Palmer. And now, here was the proof. She should have trusted her instinct, not some man she barely knew.

She set the crossbow on the floor.

#

Rung after rung, Jonathan descended the rope ladder with the memory of Palmer's betrayal playing over and over again in his mind. He kept thinking of Miss Monday, who had gone down into the underground lair of the Resurrectionists with Palmer. She'd warned Jonathan that she didn't trust him, and Jonathan had vouched for him.

Miss Monday is going to kill Anthony Tidkins, given half a chance. I intend to stop her, by any means necessary.

Jonathan wondered if it was already too late. He didn't know how long he'd been unconscious. Hopefully it hadn't been long. Suddenly he lost his footing. He found it again just as quickly, but he reminded himself to pay more attention to what he was doing.

He climbed down until he hung just a few feet above the ground. Then he let go. He landed hard on the grass, and tumbled to the ground. Shakily, he got to his feet. It felt good to be back on solid ground. He dusted himself off and crossed the lawn to the large angular building.

He walked through the front door like he owned the place; incidentally, he did own the place. Mrs. Thompson was noticeably absent from her desk. The lobby was deserted. He headed through the printing room. The workforce was down to a skeleton crew. They looked up as Jonathan entered the room.

"What are you all doing here?" he asked. "Go home. Take the rest of the day off. Take the week! I expect London will be evacuated shortly."

The workers looked up in confusion. He supposed that many of them had known his father but probably didn't know Jonathan. Perhaps they didn't even realize he was their boss.

"My name is Jonathan Grimmer," he said loudly. "I value your loyalty, and I appreciate your efforts to keep the company running throughout this situation. I'm sure you're all apprised of the situation--after all, you're printing it--but if you haven't been out there, perhaps you don't believe the stories. I assure you, they're all true. Pack up your belongings, and clear out. If the city's still standing in a week, you may return to your jobs. Until then, you are all dismissed, with pay. Consider it a holiday."

They didn't need to be told again. Whether or not they thought their new boss was insane or eccentric, or whether they believed him, Jonathan didn't know. Nor did he care. He just didn't want any collateral damage in the fight with the Resurrectionists. He didn't need the blood on his hands.

As the workers cleared out, Jonathan headed down the hall to Palmer's office. He wondered how Roderick had fared with finding the staircase in the library. Jonathan was supposed to have taken the tailor's entrance, according to Annabel's plan. No time for that now.

The elevator was the most obvious entrance, and it was also the loudest. No doubt the Resurrectionists would hear him coming. But it was also the quickest way down, and Jonathan wasn't about to waste time looking through the tailor's shop. He opened the door to Palmer's office, grabbed the trick book that activated the elevator, and waited.

A gap opened up in the floor. The elevator rose through it. Jonathan stepped inside, flicked on the lights, and pulled the lever. The elevator clanked noisily, and began to head down into the dark.

Chapter Thirty-Four

Chapter 34

Annabel stared hard at Abraham Palmer. Although she'd never trusted him for a second, she still felt betrayed. She realized it was because she was thinking of how Jonathan felt about Palmer. Jonathan had trusted Palmer with his life. He would be devastated when he learned of Palmer's deceit.

"Kick the crossbow over here," he said.

She did as she asked without arguing.

"And your other guns," he said, gesturing meaningfully at the pistols in her belt.

She did as he asked. Tense silence followed, as he continued to point his gun at her. She wondered if this was how she was going to die. After all the zombies she'd encountered, the thought that she'd be killed by a living, breathing human being seemed a cruel twist of fate.

"Why?" she wanted to know.

He shrugged.

"At first, I really was loyal to Charles Grimmer and his secret society. I truly believed we could fight back against the Resurrectionists from the inside, as did Mrs. Grimmer. But we were too late. I'm simply trying to be realistic, as we should have done from the onset. Much as I'd love to see them pay for what they've done, we need them. I truly believe they are our best chance."

"You saved my life," she said. "You helped me get out of this place. You shot at your fellow Resurrectionists. You took a bullet for me!"

"Yes, well, that wasn't the plan," he admitted. "And I only helped you to keep Jonathan from getting caught up in all this. Whatever you may think of me, you should know that I never meant for Jonathan to get hurt."

"So what happens now? Are you going to kill me?"

"Guess we'll see what Anthony Tidkins wants to do with you. Maybe he'll want to ship you off to Chateau D'If to join Mr. Sinews."

He gestured with the gun, directing her to the hallway. He closed the door behind him, keeping his gun trained on her all the while. But even with the gun pointed at her, this might be her best chance to regain control of the situation.

She stepped towards him suddenly, sidestepping to anticipate his gunshot. As predicted, Palmer's eyes widened, and he pulled the trigger. The bullet grazed her left arm, and exploded into a test tube behind her.

Wincing in pain, she struck at his gun arm. The weapon flew from his hand. She watched as it slid along the floor, well out of reach. She slammed her knee into Mr. Palmer's gut. He doubled over, but she wasn't finished with him yet. She followed up with an uppercut to his jaw with her mechanical arm, knocking a tooth loose.

He spat blood onto the floor and retaliated with a right hook, catching her off guard. He hit her cheek, and she staggered back. Even as she was struggling to regain her balance, he hit her again, this time square in the eye. He hit her again, each blow more brutal than the last. She fell to the floor.

She watched as he turned away from her, slowly, confidently making his way to the gun. She crawled to her feet. The scientists, recognizing that the tables had turned, had retrieved their weapons, and had them pointed at Annabel. Dr. Jekyll, fortunately, was unarmed, and was preoccupied with breathing through his oxygen tank. Palmer was headed over to grab his gun.

"I'm not finished with you yet," she told him.

He paused, turned around, and scoffed at her. Her lip was bloody, her eye was swollen. She looked like she could barely stand upright. He turned away, again going for the gun.

Sizing up the scientists whose guns were trained on her, she slowly backed towards the door.

"Stop!" they warned her, but she kept backing up, until she had reached the door. Still, they didn't shoot. Finally, she turned around and dashed through the door. As she did, they began to fire, but she was through the door before they began firing.

She ducked into the hallway. They ceased fire, and Annabel took a moment to wipe the blood from her nose. She listened as a set of footsteps made their way to the door. A moment later, Palmer strode through the door, gun pointed. Annabel was waiting.

She grabbed Palmer's wrist, twisted it until he was forced to drop it. He cried out in surprise. He must have been expecting her to run. He probably thought he'd be able to shoot her in the back while she was running away. But Annabel wasn't interested in running away.

She leveled a kick at Palmer's shin, making him cry out in pain. She thought she heard the crunch of bone. She hoped she'd broken something.

Palmer limped, grasping his leg, and tried to retreat into the lab. Annabel attacked while his back was turned, this time kicking him hard in the soft spot behind the knee. He hit the ground hard and landed on his knee. Annabel gave him a hard shove on the back, and Palmer fell flat on his face.

She grabbed the gun, relieved to feel it in her hand.

She stood up, aimed the gun at the back of Abraham's skull, and cocked the pistol. But before she could pull the trigger, she heard a voice from behind her, muffled by a Resurrectionist's mask.

In the heat of the moment, she'd almost forgotten where she was. She should have been on the lookout for more Resurrectionists. She kept her foot on Abraham's back to keep him pinned to the floor, and looked over her shoulder. She felt her heart leap up into her throat.

How he'd crept up on her so silently, she hadn't the slightest idea, but she recognized him immediately.

His mask was strapped to his head, but he'd pulled it up so that it sat atop his forehead instead of on his face. It was him. Anthony Tidkins. The Resurrection Man. Scientist, leader of the Resurrectionists. The man who destroyed London.

"Jack," she breathed.

#

While Mrs. Thompson left to speak with the kitchen staff about preparing the tea, Roderick was left alone in the company library. This was not Roderick's first visit to the printing company's library, but he'd never noticed a staircase in here before. Of course, that was the whole point of a secret staircase. It wouldn't be in plain sight, he reasoned.

The library was one of the largest rooms in the company, and one of the most decadent in its decor. It had high ceilings to accomodate the tall bookshelves, and ladders on wheels were used to access the books on the top shelves.

The room was decorated with the busts of some of the company's most famous authors. The library was divided into several sections, with the newspaper archives on a slightly lower level and the literary magazines and society papers up a few staircases on the east side of the library. The main section was dedicated to the penny dreadfuls and gothic novels.

It could take Roderick days to find the hidden staircase. Palmer had explained that the hidden elevator in his office was accessed by activating a hidden lever, attached to a false book, but he didn't know how to open the staircase--only that it existed. Roderick was reasonably confident that it would be accessed by activating another hidden lever, probably one attached to a false book. The question was--which book? Mr. Grimmer had enjoyed his secrets, and so even Palmer hadn't been privvy to that information. Thus, it was up to Roderick to figure it out, and he needed to do so in a matter of minutes. Before Mrs. Thompson returned with the tea.

He scanned the shelves and tried not to be disheartened. There were thousands of books. Thousands of possibilities. Roderick needed to narrow it down to just one.

He folded his cane under the pit of his arm, and strode purposefully over to one of the bookshelves. Palmer's secret elevator was accessed via Tales of Dead London, a compilation of penny dreadful tales of zombies. Naturally, it had some significance to Palmer and Grimmer, who had built the underground facility in order to improve their odds in the fight against zombies. Whichever tome was used to activate the hidden elevator, it was likely to be one that held some significance to Charles Grimmer. Something to do with zombies, Roderick supposed. It was unlikely, however, that Mr. Grimmer would have reused Tales of Dead London.

He scanned the titles on the shelves, hoping that one of them might jump out at him. The Flying Dutchman. Ela The Outcast. The String of Pearls. Varney The Vampire. The Children of the Night. It was easy enough to eliminate the titles that didn't fit. The trick was finding the one that did. Roderick was still running his fingers over the spines of the dusty novels, when the door swung inward, announcing Mrs. Thompson's return.

"Find anything, Mr. Steen?" she asked innocently.

He managed to hide his disappointment at her return, offering her a smile, as she directed the servant to lay out a spread of tea on the table.

"Extra honey for Mr. Steen," she said, giving him a conspiratorial wink. "He likes it sweet."

Roderick flushed at her flirtation, but he considered that perhaps he could use her to his advantage. She'd already proved helpful in getting him into the library.

"Perhaps you could help me to remember a title I was thinking of," he said.

"Of course. I've been with the Grimmer Company a long time. I'm familiar with most of the titles. Though," she added, making a sweeping gesture at the numerous books, "Certainly not all of them."

"The one I'm looking for would be about ghouls," he said. "Creatures that had returned from the dead, and which consumed human flesh."

"Ah. That's an easy one," she said with a smile. "You're thinking of Tales of Dead London. One of our most popular titles."

"Is there anything else that meets that description?" he asked. "Something other than Tales of Dead London? Something, perhaps, that held some significance to Mr. Grimmer?"

Roderick saw a flicker of recognition in Mrs. Thompson's expression. She nodded thoughtfully and adjusted her spectacles. At last, she said. "I'm not sure this is what you're thinking of..."

"Try me."

"Well, following the success of Dead London, Mr. Grimmer commissioned another series to be written in a similar style. He turned down hundreds of submissions, however, dismissing them all as cheap imitations. Eventually, he ended up writing the series himself. It was a commercial failure, however, so the series ended prematurely, but Mr. Grimmer was always quite fond of it."

"That's it!" Roderick said. "It must be! Mrs. Thompson, you brilliant woman!"

Her cheeks dimpled, and she flushed, scarlet.

"Do you remember what was it called? Where might I find it?"

"Now, let's see," she said, and began to walk up and down the shelves, looking for the title in question. Eventually, she paused. "Yes, here it is."

The Hunting Society, Roderick read, by Charles Grimmer.

There were tiny screws sticking into its spine, hidden to the unobservant but plain as day to Roderick, who was specifically looking for anything out of the ordinary.

"It's about a secret society that hunts ghouls," said Mrs. Thompson, who seemed delighted to have found it. "Quite gruesome. Do you read penny dreadfuls, Mr. Steen?"

"Not generally," Roderick replied. "But I do make the odd exception."

He grabbed the book, thinking its interior might contain some further clue, but rather than sliding easily off the shelf, the book pulled out at an angle and clicked into place at a forty-five degree angle and would budge no further.

The book must have activated a switch, hidden behind the shelf. A hidden panel in one of the walls began to slide forward, and the cacophonous sound of an enormous machine began to swell like the crescendo of an excessively percussive orchestra. When it was finished, Roderick could see the spiral staircase, hidden in the alcove behind the panel.

Mrs. Thompson shrieked with alarm.

Roderick let go of the book, and the panel began to slide back into place.

"Mrs. Thompson, would you be so kind as to hold on to this?" he asked.

Her face was frozen in shock. "Mr. Steen, what's going on?"

"Just hold this," he said.

She had every right to probe further, to demand to know what was going on, but she nodded and grabbed hold of the book.

"Thank you," he said.

He headed towards the staircase. Once through the gap that had been hidden by the sliding panel, he stepped onto the staircase and began to descend. He paused. While Roderick flattered himself that he was a handsome enough gentlemen and that he had a certain charm that tended to affect women, somehow he thought there was more to Mrs. Thompson than that.

"Mrs. Thompson, why are you helping me?" he asked.

She flashed him a matronly smile. "I've been with the Grimmer Company a long time, ever since Mr. Grimmer was just a boy. I know you're a friend of his. My loyalty is to Mr. Grimmer. I trust that yours is too, Mr. Steen."

Roderick nodded. Mrs. Thompson must have observed enough suspicious activity to know that something was going on beneath the Grimmer company, even if she didn't know exactly what it was.

"You can let go now, Mrs. Thompson."

"Be careful, Mr. Steen."

The panel slid closed, shutting Roderick in to the dark stairwell. With one hand on the railing, he began to climb down. He could hear the harsh, ululating sound of a hand-cranked siren resonating throughout the compound. Whatever chance they'd had at stealth, it was gone. The Resurrectionists already knew they were here.

Chapter Thirty-Five

Chapter 35

Jonathan crept along the dimly lit hallway, the undulating tones of the siren reverberating throughout the facility. Their plan had already failed, if the Resurrectionists knew they were here. He could have killed Palmer for his betrayal. If Roderick or Miss Monday ended up hurt because of it, he really would.

He needed to hurry, though. Abandoning stealth, he raced down the hallway toward the laboratory. As he rounded the corner, the siren sound cut off, and Jonathan nearly ran straight into a pair of Resurrectionists. He came to an abrupt halt and held his breath. They had their backs to him, but it was nothing short of a miracle that they didn't turn around and face him.

He drew his gun just to be ready. Quietly, he doubled back around the corner, and positioned himself so that he could see them, but they could not see him so easily.

The one on the left was a woman. He watched as she pulled her mask down over her face and looked out through the tinted glass of the mask's eyes.

"Put your mask back on," she said to her partner. "My fiancée's gaze can be somewhat intoxicating."

The man snorted. "I'm sure I can resist Mr. Sinews' charms."

Jonathan clamped his hand over his mouth to suppress a gasp. Parson Sinews' fiancée was a Resurrectionist? He wondered if Sinews knew. No wonder she'd been at Lord Connor's.

"I wouldn't be so sure, Mr. Grundy," she replied.

Jonathan's eyes widened. Of all the Resurrectionists Jonathan could have run into, here was Solomon Grundy, the man he'd first met at Lord Connor's masquerade, along with Miss Lucy Marshall. The woman with Grundy now was not Miss Marshall, but another woman, who Jonathan didn't recognize.

As they rounded the next corner of the hallway, Jonathan followed, gun at the ready. If they turned and spotted him, he would enjoy putting a bullet into Grundy's arrogant face. As for Mr. Sinews' fiancée, he wasn't so sure. Could he really shoot an unarmed woman, even if she was a Resurrectionist? He was about to find out.

He followed them around the next corner, then came to a halt. The Resurrectionists stood in front of the holding cells. Jonathan could make out the shadowy figure of the prisoner in the cell. It was Parson Sinews.

"Hello, Parson," said the woman. "My name is Dr. Mircalla Karnstein, and this is Solomon Grundy. We're here to take you to Chateau d'If."

Again, Jonathan's eyes widened at what he was hearing. He recalled Miss Monday's story about going to Haiti with Anthony Tidkins. They'd met with Mircalla Karnstein, whose real name was--

"Camille," said Parson Sinews. "Did you think I wouldn't recognize you?"

"Darling," she said, soothingly.

"Mircalla?" he said with a sneer. "A clever alias, I grant you. A pseudonym within a pseudonym."

"So you've read, Carmilla?" she asked.

"The name suits you. Carmilla was a deceptive whore."

"Time to go, Mr. Sinews," said Grundy, interrupting the lover's quarrel.

Jonathan wondered how Mr. Sinews had guessed Dr. Karnstein's identity so easily. Was her voice so familiar to him that he could recognize it despite the strange distortion of the gas mask? Or were her movements and mannerisms so distinct that he could recognize her in spite of the mask? Or perhaps it was simply a familiar perfume that she wore, which gave her away.

Jonathan watched as a couple of guards appeared, opened the door of Sinews' cell, and led him from it. Jonathan stepped out into the hallway and raised his pistol. Sinews saw him first, and ducked to avoid being shot.

Jonathan fired, hitting one of the guards in the shoulder. The Resurrectionists cried out in surprise. Though Sinews was bound at the wrists, with his arms tied behind his back, he leapt into action. He twisted his arms, with a sickening pop as his shoulders dislocated, to get his arms in front of him. Then, grabbing the second guard around the neck, he used the ropes that bound his wrists to begin strangling the man.

Jonathan fired another shot, putting yet another bullet into the first guard. Meanwhile, Solomon Grundy managed to grab the guard's gun out of his belt. He leveled it at Jonathan and fired, missing narrowly. Jonathan ducked back around the corner as another bullet struck the wall he'd been standing in front of just a second ago. The smell of cordite filled the air.

Grundy fired another shot as warning, forcing Jonathan to stay put. He wondered how Sinews was faring, and risked sticking his head out to look. Grundy nearly took his head off with another bullet. Jonathan sucked in a breath, and retreated behind the wall again.

If he'd known what type of gun Grundy carried, he might have been able to count his ammunition, and mount his counter-attack while Grundy was reloading. As it was, he had no idea how well-fortified his adversaries were. He couldn't risk firing without seeing what he was looking at, or he'd be just as likely to hit Parson Sinews as to hit the Resurrectionists. And he couldn't risk stepping out without being fired upon himself. For now, the Resurrectionists had the upper hand. There was nothing he could do but wait and be ready.

He heard Grundy's voice, distinct only in that it was deeper than Dr. Karnstein's. "Take him. I'll deal with Mr. Grimmer."

Jonathan grinned. Outnumbered, the Resurrectionists had the upper hand. But given the chance to fight Grundy one-on-one, Jonathan would take his chances any day. He still had four bullets in his pistol, more than enough to take out Solomon Grundy.

"Come out and face me, Jonathan," he called out arrogantly.

Instead, Jonathan waited. He would fight Grundy, but he would do it on his own terms. He didn't need to risk a fair fight.

"Solomon Grundy," he shouted back, taunting, "Born on a Monday, christened on Tuesday."

"So, you know the rhyme?" Grundy shouted back, his voice drawing nearer. He fired pistol, shattering bits of brick only inches from Jonathan's face. "Married on Wednesday."

"Took ill on Thursday," Jonathan replied, sticking his arm out to fire back at Grundy.

"Got worse on Friday," Grundy sneered, firing again, getting still closer to Jonathan, the bullet ricocheting loudly.

By the sound of Grundy's voice, the angle of his gunfire, Jonathan had formed a picture in his head of where Grundy was standing, and where his gun was pointed. He only hoped he was right.

He stepped out into the hallway.

"Died on Saturday," he said as he fired the first bullet. He put two more in Grundy's chest. "Buried on Sunday."

He watched as Grundy hit the ground and lay still. The two guards lay dead by the door to Sinews' cell, but there was no sign of Karnstein or Sinews.

"That was the end of Solomon Grundy," he muttered as he stepped over the body, not feeling the least bit of pity for the man.

He hurried along the hallway, reloading his pistol as he went. He rounded the next corner, hoping to catch sight of Sinews and Karnstein. Instead, the hallway was overrun by zombies.

#

The scientists were sounding the alarm, a deafening, undulating sound that Annabel had heard the last time she'd visited the Resurrectionist facility.

She returned her attention to Palmer, who was trying to get up. She kicked him in the back, and he grunted in pain. She looked again at Anthony Tidkins.

"Is it really too late?" she asked him, having to shout to be heard over the alarm.

"For us?" he asked.

Tidkins had taken off his mask, which he now held in one hand. His face was as familiar to her as her own. In all the time she'd known him, he'd barely changed in appearance. But his demeanor had changed. The way he looked at her now, he was a completely different person, a stranger. Part of her wondered, though, if he had really changed at all. Maybe it was just her.

"For London, I mean," she said. Careful not to let her emotion show, she looked him in the eye and with careful inflection, she said, "It is most definitely too late for us."

He nodded. "Fair enough," he said, as the siren sound came to an end.

Perhaps she was mistaken, but she thought she detected a hint of regret in his pale pink eyes, a note of sadness in his voice. Damn him. What did she care about his feelings? He was a mass murderer. She felt sick just thinking about what he had done. And yet, at one time, she had thought of him like a brother. A part of her always would feel that way about him, she realized.

"It isn't too late for London," he said. "Once I find a cure--"

Her stomach tightened. "If you find a cure," she said, "And even then it will still be too late. What about all those people who've been killed by your zombies?"

She thought about Rémy. She hadn't really known him, but he'd seemed like a sweet young man. Innocent, and in love. And now he was dead. A victim of Dead London.

"It will be worth it," he answered. "I will have cured death. No one else will need to die. Not ever."

Annabel thought she might be sick. She couldn't concentrate on Anthony Tidkins and on Palmer at the same time. She decided to simplify things. She slammed the butt of her gun into Palmer's skull with her mechanical arm. He slumped to the floor, unconscious. Or dead, Annabel could hardly care less.

"You want to cure death so bad you'd destroy a city of millions? Why is this so important to you?"

"Because my father is dying," he said simply.

It took her only a moment.

"You mean Dr. Allen?" she asked. "Not your real father."

"Dr. Allen is my real father," he said. "I was his bastard son. He and my mother gave me up for adoption. Dr. Allen's wife wouldn't let him keep me, and the mother was in a similar position. My adoptive parents were unable to have children of their own. When my adoptive mother died, my father came to resent me, as if it was somehow my fault. He sent me to live with Dr. Allen; he and his wife had divorced by then. My adoptive father told me I was to be Dr. Allen's apprentice. Allen was a renowned surgeon, and my father wanted me to be trained by him. It was only later, much later, that I learned the real reason I'd been sent to Dr. Allen. Dr. Allen was my father."

"And you thought you could save him?"

"I can save him," Tidkins said with passion. He had tears in his eyes. "I have to save him."

"Even if it costs the lives of millions?" Annabel asked.

"I'm sorry," he said, and Annabel believed him.

At last, Annabel understood. Anthony Tidkins was insane. He was brilliant. But he was insane.

Her hand was trembling, her vision unclear. She steeled herself. Before she could put further thought into it, she raised the pistol. Point blank, she aimed its muzzle at her oldest friend and put her finger on the trigger.

Tidkins' skull errupted in a spray of blood.

Annabel screamed.

Tidkins's blood spattered across her cheek, hot and wet. It seemed to sting as it struck her skin. She heard Abraham Palmer gasp, but her attention was focused on Anthony Tidkins. His eyes and mouth wide with surprise, a gaping hole through his left cheek.

"No!" Annabel cried, even as Tidkins' body collapsed to the floor.

Annabel stared at her gun and blinked in confusion.

"But I..." she gaped, "I didn't pull the trigger."

She'd wanted to. She had desperately wanted to put a bullet in his skull for everything that he'd done. But for all of her resolve to be more ruthless and less sentimental, she still hadn't been able to bring herself to kill him. Even if he deserved it, she had to consider that Abraham Palmer might be right. Anthony Tidkins--Jack--might very well have been their best hope for a cure. Now it was too late.

She stared at the gun in her hand. It was still cold. Which meant she couldn't have fired it.

Then who could have--?

She spun around, looking for the shooter, and found a familiar face staring back at her, gun still smoking.

Chapter Thirty-Six

Chapter 36

It was Roderick Steen who stood before Annabel. His gun was aimed at the spot where Tidkins had been, and a cloud of smoke trailed from the muzzle. Roderick's teeth were gritted, his eyes narrowed and fiercely focused on Tidkins' body. He seemed to be blinking back tears.

"That was for Rémy," he said.

Annabel's knees threatened to buckle, and tears formed in her eye, but she managed to keep herself upright. She wanted to launch herself at Roderick and tear his throat out, though all he'd done was the very thing she'd wanted to do herself. She growled in frustration, unable to say a word to Roderick, even to acknowledge his presence.

Finally, she returned her attention to Mr. Palmer, who was beginning to regain consciousness.

"Let me up," he was saying, as Annabel fought to recover her nerves and steadied herself. "You've got to let me up."

He was gesturing towards something off in the distance. She blinked the tears from her eyes and looked. There were zombies staggering down the hallway, heading towards them.

She cursed. "Where the hell did they come from?"

"Resurrectionist Emergency Protocol D," said Palmer. "If the facility is compromised, they open the cages as a diversionary tactic."

"They have zombies in cages?" asked Roderick.

Still, Annabel refused to look at him. Wiping the blood from her face, she let Palmer up. "If it comes down to it, I won't hesitate to shoot you," she warned him.

Palmer got to his feet, a little worse for wear. He rubbed his injured jaw.

Annabel tried not to think about Anthony Tidkins, or to look at his body. There was no time to mourn or to think about it. The zombies were coming, and they were surprisingly fast for walking corpses, converging upon them from both directions. There was not nearly enough ammunition to deal with all of them.

She tried the door to the Beta Laboratory, but the scientists must have locked it behind them. She banged on the door. She cursed as she scanned the hallway for another door. There wasn't one, at least not between them and the zombies, and it would take too long to pick the lock without her tools.

"We'll have to make a stand," said Palmer.

"I don't like our odds," she said, banging on the door again.

When no one answered it, she raised the pistol. There was nothing else for it but to put as many bullets in their skulls as they could, and then fight their way out with their bare hands.

Annabel closed her eye, relying on the prosthesis for her vision, squeezed the trigger, and one of them fell to the floor. He disappeared under the sea of zombies, who climbed over him without seeming to slow.

She aimed and fired again with deadly accuracy, moved the revolver half an inch to the left, pulled the trigger again. Without pause, she fired into their midst, one bullet at a time. Each bullet hit its mark, but it was not enough. They continued to advance, their numbers practically unaffected by the onslaught of bullets.

"There's too many of them," she said.

"Just keep shooting," Roderick shouted back.

They were inches away from each other, but the sounds of gunfire ricocheting down the hallway and the carnivorous moans of the zombies were deafening.

Abraham grunted, kicking at the doorknob to the laboratory with all his might. If they couldn't pick the lock, maybe he could break it down. It was up to Annabel and Roderick to buy him enough time.

Annabel aimed again, pulled the trigger, and fired her last bullet. She hadn't been counting, and only realised she was out when she fired again and heard the hollow click of an empty chamber.

She stuffed the gun back into her holster, and looked to Palmer. The latch still hadn't broken. The zombies were almost upon them.

Roderick still had a few bullets left, but he wasn't the marksman Annabel was. She watched him waste three bullets just to put one zombie down. She was about to ask him to hand over his gun, but before she had the chance, he ran out of bullets too.

There were still hundreds of zombies and there was nowhere to go.

"This is it," she said.

She rolled up her sleeve, revealing her bare, mechanical arm, and gave it a twist of the key. It clicked like clockwork as it wound, but the sound was all but drowned out by the snarling of the dead.

She marched forward, towards the zombies.

"What are you doing?" Abraham grunted.

"Just get that damned door open," she shouted back.

She grabbed the first of them by the face, careful not to let his jaws seize upon her hands, and slammed his face into the wall. His skull cracked, and he dropped him to the floor. She stomped on his head for good measure, and caved in the next man's face with a wicked right hook from her brass hand, all in one swift motion.

Roderick seemed suitably impressed, as he let out a whoop of joy and applauded her efforts.

"Don't get too excited," she said. "It's not over yet."

Already, another zombie was grabbing at her, this time from behind. She grabbed his arms as if to fling him over her back, using his momentum against him, but his body was rotten. His arms popped out of their sockets with a nasty plop, the skin and meat ripping from his rotting limbs like a snake sloughing off its skin.

"Sorry," Roderick replied, "It's just that I'm not used to fighting beside anybody remotely competent. No offence intended to Inspectors Hargrave and Taggert, god rest their souls."

Annabel grinned. It was difficult, in the heat of battle, to remain angry at him. "Why, Mr. Steen, if I didn't know you better, I'd say that sounded like a compliment."

She dropped one of the arms, but she held onto the other, brandishing it like a weapon.

She whirled around to face the zombie, and recognized him. This was the creature from the tank. He was beyond rotten. He was wet, soggy even. No wonder his arms had ripped out so easily. She raised his limb and swung it at his skull, knocking him over.

He twitched on the ground, trying to get up, but Annabel didn't let up. She stood over him and used his own arm to cave in his skull.

"Very neatly done, Miss Monday," Roderick called.

Beside her, Roderick had drawn his swordstick and was doing a decent enough job of hacking at the zombies, cleaving their faces apart with neat thrusts of the sword.

"You're not bad at that, yourself," she told him.

She was honestly surprised. While Roderick exuded confidence and had the poised, refined manner of an English dandy, she hadn't expected that fighting zombies would be his forté. She'd half expected him to cower in the corner while she did the hard work.

"I've trained in bartitsu," he replied, even as he grunted with the effort of slicing through a zombie's legs. "Not to mention fencing. My father was rather determined to make a proper man out of me."

"Is that what makes a proper man? Sports?"

"My father seemed to think so," Roderick answered, thrusting his sword into the eye socket of a zombie that had grasped Annabel by the hair. "And what do you think makes a man?"

"Thank you," she said, as she returned the favor, fending off a zombie that had its fingers on Roderick's arm. "And to answer your question, typically smaller breasts and the freedom from having to wear corsets and bustle skirts are about the only things of any significance that distinguish men from women."

"Well, if men didn't insist that women wear corsets and bustle skirts, how else would we slow you down?" Roderick wondered.

He breathed heavily with the effort of sweeping out the legs of a particularly large zombie. As the creature crashed to the floor, Annabel finished him off with a solid blow to the head with her mechanical fist. She tried to lift her arm again, but it seized up.

"Buy me some time," she said. "I need to wind my gears."

She backed into a corner, quickly gave her arm a turn of the key, and flexed her mechanical fingers to test it. It didn't always require such extensive maintenance, but she didn't always put it to such heavy use. She rejoined the fight just in time to pull one of the zombies from Roderick's shoulders.

"How are we doing, Palmer?" she called.

Even as Annabel continued to fight, heart pounding as she kicked at the nearest walking cadaver, she heard Palmer's voice, rising above the din.

"It's open!"

She hurried to the door, ripping out the trachea of the nearest zombie fiend that assailed her in order to disengage from the fight. She landed a devastating blow with her mechanical arm that knocked its head clean off.

Still, she had to fight her way through the mob, as the zombies moved clumsily in their efforts to sink their teeth into her flesh. At last, she found the open doorway and practically fell through it. Roderick was right behind her.

Remarkably, Annabel was unscathed. She heaved, struggling against her corset for breath, as Roderick launched himself bodily at the door. It slammed, but it wouldn't shut. Several cadaverous limbs jammed in the door, their fingers still grasping for living flesh. Palmer added his weight to the door, and together the men strained against it. Still, the door thudded inward, threatening to cave beneath the combined weight of the zombies on the other side.

"We can't hold it," Roderick grunted.

The door shuddered again. With every bang against it, the door creaked open a bit further. There was nothing they could do to stop it. Eventually, the zombies would get in. They were trapped in here.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Chapter 37

The scientists had deserted the room.

"How did they get out?" Annabel asked Palmer. "Your map didn't indicate another way out of this lab."

"I don't know," he said. "It's possible the Resurrectionists made some additions to the facility without my knowledge."

"Never mind that," said Roderick. "They're going to get in."

"Give me my gun," Palmer asked.

Annabel stared hard at him. The door shuddered again. The zombies were going to get in, and soon. They needed Palmer's help, if there was any chance at all they would survive this. She didn't like giving Palmer a weapon, after he'd tried to hand her over to the Resurrectionists.

"I don't have the right bullets for your pistol," she said.

As for the guns she'd discarded earlier, they were still on the floor where she'd left them, with her crossbow. She had loaded up on Jonathan's airship, and she hadn't been shy about taking whatever she fancied. She picked up her crossbow first.

Then she grabbed a pepper-pot revolver, a Webley, and a pocket-sized derringer. She gave the Webley revolver to Palmer, the pepper-pot to Roderick, and tucked the derringer into her belt.

"Why does the Penny Dreadful have so many weapons on board, anyway?" she wondered.

"Jonathan's father and I used to use the airship occasionally for our missions," Palmer answered.

"Hunting zombies, you mean?"

"The tools of the trade," he said, brandishing the Webley.

Then the door burst open, and all hell broke loose. It was impossible to count all the zombies that suddenly flooded into the room. They crammed into the wide doorway three at a time and spread into the room. Annabel, Roderick, and Palmer fanned out. She started firing the crossbow, and didn't let up until she was out of bolts. Still, they poured into the room, climbing over the fallen until a pile of bodies lay blocking the doorway.

She tossed aside the crossbow and reached for the derringer as a zombie came flying toward her. She put a bullet in its skull and emptied the chamber of the pistol. The gunfire was deafening as they made their final stand.

Annabel discarded the empty derringer and cast about for something else she could use as a weapon. Something heavy and blunt, like a wrench, or something sharp. She didn't have to look long. The room was filled with deadly objects.

Her eyes settled on a long, jagged knife of surgical steel. She snatched it off the table and returned to the fight with a dangerous gleam in her eye. If she was going out, she was going out fighting.

Dripping sweat, she grabbed the nearest cold body by the back of the head and jammed the knife into his eye. With a slurp like slicing open a watermelon, she slid the knife free. It tore against rotten flesh and bone, gore dripping from the shining instrument.

Cold surgical steel sliced into rotten flesh, cutting through gristle and tendons as easily as carving a roast. Her heart was racing, pounding madly in her chest, but she wasn't afraid. Somehow, slicing through those rotten bodies gave her a strange sense of catharsis. It was exhilirating.

Grinning madly, she flicked her wrist and carved a piece out of any zombie that dared get in her way. She was drenched in blood, her white pants stained a deep, dark red.

Slabs of rotting meat began to pile up in the doorway, but still, they pressed forward. Annabel tried to get a count, but it was impossible to gauge how many there were with the door half-closed and their grunting, snarling faces so close to her own.

She planted a firm kick at one that had gotten too close for comfort, sending him sprawling backwards, but another one took his place. Intestines dangling, utterly naked, with blood in her blond hair, the zombie snapped her teeth, inches from Annabel's neck. She heard a cry of pain from beside her, Abraham's voice, but she had her own problems. She thrust her blade into the woman's skull, heard the crunch of bone and brain, and moved on.

Killing the zombies was simple enough, now that she had the hang of it. She only had to destroy the brain. Any other wound would not suffice. Destroy the brain, and the body would go limp and cease attacking.

Easier said than done. Annabel grabbed the hilt of her blade, pulled it from the skull of her latest kill, and went for the next one. Her blade caught him beneath his jaw, aimed upward into the brain. He went limp. Again, she set her sights on another that had gotten too close, pulled the blade from the man's jaw.

She cried out as two zombies grabbed her at once, one of them by the hair, the other by her mechanical arm. The blade clattered to the floor and disappeared as the zombies climbed over it. She felt another set of hands seize her as she fought to fend them off. Suddenly, her bloodlust turned to cold fear.

Her hair had come loose. One of the zombies had gotten hold of it. It was in her face. She couldn't see. The zombie was pulling at her hair, sending searing pain into her scalp. Pulling at her hair, the zombie was trying to bring her head closer to his gaping mouth.

The second one was trying to get at her throat. She managed to hold him off with her arm.

The third one had suddenly let her go, and she heard the disturbing slop of something juicy being eaten. A squelching sound like rotten fruit being squished.

She couldn't see with her hair in her face, but she detected the smell of warm blood mingled with the smell of rot. She heard the crunch of gnashing teeth, the zombies moans with pleasure.

Finally she managed to tear her hair free, and she saw Palmer's body being ripped apart. It sent a jolt of fear through her--a horrible reminder of her fateful day in Haiti, her eye being ripped from its socket. She could almost feel Palmer's pain as her own. Their grimy fingernails digging into his skin, pulling hot, steaming organs from his body. Their rotting teeth breaking the skin, tearing out layers of flesh. Palmer was already dead. She knew he couldn't feel what was happening to him any more, but she started to scream.

She cast about for Roderick, but she couldn't see him through all the carnage. Her screams fell silent, turned into a whimper as the zombies began to finish their meal. Once they were done with Palmer, they turned to Annabel. They set their blood-stained fingers on her cheeks and on her neck.

She raised her arm. It was all she could do to keep that one from getting at her neck. Her mechanical arm was dead weight; its gears were clogged with gore. Exhausted, disarmed, and terrified, she raised her left arm--her good arm. It was the only thing she could put between the zombie and her throat.

She felt a clump of hair tear out of her scalp, but suddenly she couldn't see again. Her hair was in her face. She couldn't see the dead man's jaws close around her arm. But she could feel it.

He clamped down until his rotten teeth ripped through the fabric of her shirt and bit into her arm.

Suddenly, she heard gunfire, and she felt the cold hands being pried off of her. She dealt with the one on her arm, bashing him in the skull with her own, until his brittle bones caved in, and he stumbled back.

Clutching her wounded arm, she broke his legs with a sharp kick, and he fell to the ground. With a cry of rage and adrenaline, she stomped on his skull with her boot, killing him.

Panting with exhaustion, her face and hair slick with cold, resinous blood, she turned to see whoever had saved her. At first, she'd thought it was Roderick, firing his pepper-pot pistol.

But it was Jonathan she found before her. He was looking at her with a mixture of horror and relief. She offered him a smile, which given her current state, was probably not very comforting.

"What took you so long?" she asked. She'd intended it to sound playful, teasing, but relief crept into her voice.

Ignoring the question, he took a cautious step towards her. The last of the zombies were dead. She saw Roderick in the corner of her eye, leaning on his cane. She was glad to see he'd survived the fight.

"You've been bitten," said Jonathan.

Annabel nodded.

"We should amputate," he said. "Palmer said that might stop the virus from spreading."

"There's no way in hell you're taking my other arm," she said. "Besides, I've already been exposed to Lazarus. If it hasn't killed me yet, I might actually be immune. We'll have to wait and see what happens. Kill me if I turn zombie, but you're not taking my damn arm."

"Alright, alright," said Jonathan. "We won't take your arm. I'm just...I'm glad you're alive."

#

"Where's Palmer?" Jonathan asked as Miss Monday cleaned the gore from her mechanical arm with her surgical knife. She wound her gears yet again, and gave her fingers an experimental turn. She clenched and unclenched her fist.

Satisfied, they headed back into the hall.

Roderick took up the rear, watching their backs while Jonathan took the lead. Miss Monday stood at his side, ready with a surgical knife in case they ran into zombies. For the most part, it seemed that the zombies had all been dealt with. The floor was littered with their bodies, however. Jonathan kept a cautious distance from them, half expecting the dead bodies to twitch back to life and grab him by the legs.

"Dead," Miss Monday said, answering Jonathan's question coldly.

Jonathan didn't know how to respond. On the one hand, Palmer had betrayed them. On the other, Jonathan couldn't help feeling sentimental.

Miss Monday seemed to grasp Jonathan's grief. Her voice warmed. "I'm sorry. I know you trusted him, but there's something you should know--"

"I know," Jonathan replied. "That's why I was held up. Palmer knocked me out. He said he was going to try to stop you. I was worried he might have hurt you."

"He damn well tried," she said.

She held up a finger for silence as they rounded the corner. Jonathan marvelled at the movement of her mechanical hand. She had discarded her blood-soaked jacket, and the sleeve of her blouse had been torn, offering Jonathan a rare opportunity to see her bare prosthetic arm. He knew that she was self-conscious about it; he reminded himself not to stare. She gestured that the coast was clear, and Jonathan followed her into the next hall.

Suddenly, he felt something grab him by the ankle. He looked down and saw that one of the zombies he'd assumed was dead was still moving. The creature's mouth had been torn clean off, but somehow it was still alive. It tightened its grip on Jonathan's ankle. Even a scratch could prove deadly, even if the zombie couldn't bite him.

Jonathan reached for his gun, but Miss Monday was already there with her surgical knife, dealing with the zombie. She drove the blade into its brain through the gaping hole where its mouth used to be. Its grip loosened.

"Come on," she said. "We need to find your mother."

"After Palmer helped you escape, they may have suspected she was unloyal, in which case they would have put her in the holding cells where they put you and Parson Sinews," said Roderick.

Annabel nodded. "The cells are this way, if I remember from Palmer's map."

"I've already been by the cells," Jonathan said. "I saw them hauling Sinews off. My mother wasn't there."

Roderick swore. "Where else could she be?" he wondered aloud.

"They might already have her in Chateau d'If," Miss Monday answered.

"I hate to say this, but right now we've got other problems," said Roderick.

Jonathan followed his gaze. His heart sank. Just how many zombies were the Resurrectionists keeping down here? He'd truly thought they'd already dealt with the last of them, but another mob of hundreds was marching down the hall, headed their way.

At the front of the mob was the largest man Jonathan had ever seen. At least eight feet tall, broad-shouldered, and muscular, it was impossible to tell if he was man or zombie; he wore a Resurrectionist mask over his face.

"Mr. Hyde," said Miss Monday. Apparently this was not her first encounter with this behemoth.

"The Irish Giant," Jonathan muttered.

Parson Sinews had mentioned him. Tidkins' hired muscle, the man who had brought Tikdins fresh bodies to practice his experiments on. If he was a zombie, he would be near impossible to kill. His head was protected by the thick leather mask. Anything short of a bullet to the head would be ineffective, and aside from blunt weapons and blades, they were unarmed. Even if he wasn't a zombie, he would be equally dangerous.

"We've got to run," said Roderick.

"But my mother," Jonathan protested, but his resolve was already weakening. He had no idea where to find her, and they couldn't face this many zombies.

Zombies were slow, for the most part, but some of the fresher ones could be surprisingly quick. The quickest of the dead surged past Mr. Hyde, and practically sprinted towards them.

"If she's still alive, she's probably in Chateau d'If," Miss Monday said urgently. "Jonathan, we've got to run."

As if to hammer home her point, one of the zombies dove at them. Miss Monday drove her knife into its head and stepped aside as its body hit the floor.

With that, Jonathan turned and ran. The quicker zombies were still hot on their heels. If they slowed down, the zombies would be upon them in an instant.

"Which way?" Jonathan called.

Roderick paused to draw his swordstick and deal with one of the zombies that had gotten too close for comfort.

"Right," he answered, and tore down the hall after them.

They careened around the corner. Jonathan nearly slipped on the blood-slick floor, but somehow managed to keep on his feet. Ahead, they could see the spiral staircase that led to the library. A female zombie stood blocking their way. She was naked, and had tubes stuck into her arms, dripping thick, resinous blood. A fresh experiment. She whirled when she saw them coming.

She snarled, and barefoot, ran towards them. She was quick, for a zombie, but Miss Monday was quicker.

"I've got this," she said.

Her blade whirled, a swift flash of silver. Zombie blood hit the ceiling and splattered on the walls. The creature's body lay still on the floor. Miss Monday turned and offered a grin.

"I'd hate to be on her bad side," Roderick muttered.

Jonathan looked over his shoulder. No time to admire her handiwork. The dead were still on their heels, the Irish Giant among them.

"Hurry up, you two," Miss Monday called, already stepping over the body and clambering up the stairs.

Jonathan didn't have to be told twice. He raced to the staircase, and hurled himself up two steps at a time. He paused only to send a zombie careening back down the stairs with a kick to the chest. Finally, they reached the top of the stairs.

"How does this panel open?" Miss Monday asked.

"I don't know," said Roderick, "I only ever opened it from the other side. Try to find a lever or a switch."

"There's nothing," said Miss Monday, searching frantically for a switch as she zombies resumed their climb up the stairs. Suddenly, the panel slid open. Miss Monday blinked in confusion. "That wasn't me."

They emerged in the library, and let the panel slide shut, trapping the zombies on the other side. Mrs. Thompson, the secretary, stood among the bookshelves, her hand on a copy of The Hunting Society, by Charles Grimmer.

"I heard your voices through the wall," she said. "Thought I'd better let you in."

Epilogue

Untitled Document

The Penny Dreadful was swift, its propellors and sails and ornithopteresque wings driving it to the edge of the city. Another cup of tea sat empty. Annabel reached for the pot with her mechanical arm and poured herself another cup. Jonathan stared at her with a strange look upon his face.

"I'm just pouring a cup of tea, Jonathan. Nothing to marvel at," she told him.

He grinned.

"On the contrary, you are a constant marvel, my dear Miss Monday."

She rolled her eyes, both the real and the mechanical one. The lens clicked and whirred as it spun on its gears.

"Annabel," she said. "You can call me Annabel."

Jonathan smiled. "Annabel it is."

"So, what now?" asked Mrs. Thompson. "Where do we go from here? Surely we can't stay in London."

"You're right. For now, I've asked the captain to get us out of the city. And then, we need to find out more about Chateau d'If. The Resurrectionists are still out there. And they have my mother."

"Not to mention, Parson Sinews," said Annabel. "You know, there's something terribly odd about that man. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I feel certain he'll have some part to play in all of this."

Roderick looked, for a moment, as though he was going to offer some insight into Parson Sinews, but seemed to think better of it. "There's also the matter of finding a cure," he said instead, "The Resurrectionists managed to escape with most of their research papers, unfortunately--"

"Most?"

"Well, I did manage to abscond with this," he replied, unfolding a sheet of paper, which he took from his pocket. "Nothing to do with the cure, but get this," he said, and turning his eyes to the page, he read aloud, "Certain species of insects are known to react to the Lazarus Virus, undergoing extreme, rapid growth, as well as demonstrating certain metamorphic qualities."

"Meta-what?" said Mrs. Thompson.

"Metamorphic. A transformation, like a caterpillar into a butterfly."

"Wonderful," said Clementine. "Zombie bugs. As if zombie people wasn't bad enough."

"My god," Kip added in agreement.

As they spoke, the ship had been steadily descending. As the fog cleared in front of the ship, an unsettling vision came into view through the windows. An enormous wall had risen up, lining the edge of the city. Zombies were clawing at it, trying unsuccessfully to scale its heights and get at the men in the towers.

"What on earth," Annabel exclaimed, getting out of her seat and heading over to the window for a better view. A moment later she was joined by Jonathan, Roderick, Toshi, Kip, and Mrs. Thompson. They gaped at the wall in silence.

It was vast, stretching as far as they could see in either direction. It was several stories tall, with gun turrets positioned around it. Though the wall was obviously makeshift, pieced together with lengths of sheet metal and plywood, it was enough that the zombies could neither scale its heights nor topple the wall. Even so, it was difficult to imagine how it could have been assembled so quickly, unless it had been built in advance, in anticipation of Dead London. Which meant that it could only have been built by Resurrectionists, or Resurrectionist sympathizers. Annabel remembered what Palmer had said about Queen Victoria. Even she was suspected of supporting the Dead London project.

"They're quarantining the city," said Toshi. "Trying to keep the zombies inside."

"What about the living?" Annabel exclaimed. "There are still survivors living in the city. They'll be trapped inside with them."

"Soon won't be too many living people left," said Kip.

"God," Annabel breathed. "It really will be Dead London. A city of the walking dead. Can we get any lower?"

The ship was circling near the wall, just outside the range of the wall's gun turrets. Just then, the captain's voice came through the speaking tube, distorted and tinny as it resonated from a little metal box in the top right corner of the lounge.

"Mr. Grimmer, you're needed on deck, please."

"Excuse me a moment," said Jonathan. To Annabel, he added, "I'll see about getting us lower."

While he left to confer with the captain, Annabel remained intent on the window. She was staring at the men on the gun turrets. Their weapons were aimed at the zombies, but they weren't firing. So long as the zombies could not reach them, they did not pose a threat, she supposed.

Another minute or two passed in relative silence, the airship hovering in place, until with a hiss of air the ship began to descend. At last, they drew close enough to distinguish the shape of the gas masks that the men at the turrets were wearing. They were corvine in shape, the masks of plague doctors.

"Resurrectionists."

Of course, while they could now see the Resurrectionists clearly, they too could be seen. The Resurrectionists turned their attention from the zombies to the airship. One of them--Annabel couldn't make out which one--spoke, using some sort of device to project their voice. It sounded tinny and inhuman, like the Captain's through the speaking tube.

"This city is under quarantine. No citizens are to leave without clearing inspection. By the order of the British Military, turn your airship around."

She looked at Toshi, but she was stoic and unreadable. She wasn't sure if that was sang-froid or if she was just keeping her fears to herself. Mrs. Thompson, meanwhile, was fanning herself, her eyes wide.

The Resurrectionist's voice interrupted her thoughts, loud enough to hear even over the rumble of the ship's engines.

"Again, this city is under quarantine. Turn your ship around. If you do not comply, it will be taken as a hostile act, and we will open fire upon your vessel."

In reply, a voice came through the speaking tube again. It was Jonathan's voice, however, not Captain Merrick's.

"All hands on deck. We're going to fight back."

"Fight back?" Annabel repeated. "Against their gun turrets?"

Toshi grinned. "Oh, you haven't seen what this beauty can do," she said. "Oh, she might look like a civilian vessel, but Mr. Grimmer had the Dreadful built to support his Hunting Society. She's not exactly unarmed."

"I'll take the portside cannon," said Kip.

Annabel's eyes widened. Cannon?

"Starboard cannon's got my name on it," said Toshi. "I'll raise the shields."

"Miss Monday, the gatlin' gun's all yours," said Kip. "Let's blow these Resurrectionists t' smithereens."

Annabel shared a grin with Toshi.

"Gatling gun, eh?" she said.

Toshi nodded. "I'll show you."

Annabel followed her through the door. They headed topside, and Toshi showed her to her station. As promised, the gatling gun stood front and center, a huge cannon on either side of the ship.

Clementine pressed a button at her side. The airship shuddered and a series of metal panels raised, covering the windows and gasbags. The Resurrectionists' guns were aimed at the ship, but the metal shields afforded them some protection. Hopefully that would be enough to stop their bullets from puncturing the ballonets.

Annabel settled into her station, closing her one eye against the fierce, cold wind. She'd never used a gun like this before, so she took a moment to examine it while the Resurrectionist guns rang out, pinging against the metal shields. The shields seemed like flimsy protection at best. The metal was too thin to hold out for long, and there were gaping holes in their protective space.

With Clem's help, it didn't take Annabel long to figure out how to work the gun. Once it was ready, she aimed with her mechanical eye, and began firing. She cackled wildly as the gun let loose an onslaught of bullets, and the Resurrectionist fell from his post, only to be seized by the zombies below.

"God bless you, Dr. Gatling!" she cried triumphantly.

Clementine left her to her devices, heading for the starboard cannon.

Annabel aimed the weapon at the next Resurrectionist and gave him the same fate as his friend. The Penny Dreadful shuddered as Kip fired his cannon, and again as Toshi did the same. Kip's cannonball missed its mark, sailing over the wall, but Clem's struck home, utterly destroying one of the gun towers.

The Resurrectionists continued to fire back, while the zombies below cried out for flesh. And through it all, Annabel continued to aim and fire, laughing wildly each time a Resurrectionist fell victim to her onslaught. And when each of the turrets in their way stood unmanned, The Penny Dreadful lowered its shields, and continued on its way.

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