



The
**DIABOLICAL
Miss HYDE**

Eliza Jekyll is hiding a dark secret . . .

VIOLA CARR

• AN ELECTRIC EMPIRE NOVEL •

The
**DIABOLICAL
MISS HYDE**

VIOLA GARR

 **HARPER Voyager**
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• EPIGRAPH •

I do not like thee, Doctor Fell,
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this I know, and know full well,
I do not like thee, Doctor Fell.

—MOTHER GOOSE NURSERY RHYME

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The Diabolical Miss Hyde

an Electrifying Tale of Mystery and Murder!

STARRING

DR. ELIZA JEKYLL

intrepid practitioner of legal medicine,
also appearing as the bold adventuress

MISS LIZZIE HYDE

AND FEATURING

INSPECTOR HARLEY GRIFFIN

esteemed Detective of the Metropolitan Police

CAPTAIN REMY LAFAYETTE

Investigator for the Royal Society and
renowned hunter of unspeakables

The mad pharmacist **MARGELLUS FINCH** *and*

MR. MALACHI TODD, unmasked

as the homicidal lunatic **RAZOR JACK**

ALSO ONSTAGE: nefarious denizens of the infamous
Criminal Rookery of St. Giles, namely

WILD JOHNNY of the notorious Swell Mob

The thieving seductress **SALLY FINGERS**

BILLY THE BASTARD, a vile and desperate Hooligan;
and the foul **KING OF RATS**, Lord of the London Underworld

The New and Splendid Scenery, Machinery, and Effects

produced by **Miss VIOLA GARR**

A SHUDDER IN THE BLOOD

IN LONDON, WE'VE GOT MURDERERS BY THE DOZEN. Rampsmen, garroters, wife beaters and baby farmer poisoners and pie makers and folk who'll crack you over the noddle with a ha'penny cosh for the sale of your flashy watch chain and leave your meat for the rats. Never mind what you read in them penny dreadfuls: there ain't no romance in murder.

But every now and again, we gets us an artist.

See here, now. A woman lies dead, in a bleak slum alley just yards from the glittering theaters and smoking purple arc-lights of Haymarket. He's bunched her petticoats around her thighs, a black mess of blood. And above the knee, smart as a slice o' bacon, he's hacked her legs clean off.

Her face is twisted, shock and terror and *sweet-baby-Jesus-just-let-me-die*. Takes his precious time, this cove. What a charmer.

A ragged crowd has gathered—naught more invigorating than someone else who's dead when you ain't—and the coppers have put up a screen of bedsheets to keep 'em back. But no one can see me, not where I'm hiding, and I get meself a real good look. It's mid-morning—I've spent a fitful night here, let me tell you, trapped in my bleak nightmare of chains—and the watery sun's already blotted out by the city's pall of filth. Here in the slums, where the *weird* lurks, the gutters run with shit and the air chokes me, thick with cholera and black lung and the forbidden stink of spellwork. Rats the size of tomcats snigger glint-eyed in the shadows, coveting that tasty corpse. The rotting alley walls lurch inwards, threatening to crush us all.

And here's Eliza, examining the dead meat for evidence. Sweet Eliza, so desperately middle class in those drab dove-gray skirts, with her police doctor's satchel over her shoulder. She's a picture, ain't she? Gaffing around with her gadgets and colored alchemy phials, those wire-rimmed spectacles pinched on her nose. Her shiny brass goggles, with their electro-spectrual this and telescopic that and ion-charged the other, perch on the brim of her tiny hat. Her little clockwork pet scuttles beside her four spindly brass legs splashed with muck.

Here's Eliza. And here's me, the canker in her rose. The restless shadow in her heart.

"As I thought!" exclaims Eliza, poking at the dead woman's severed thighs with a pair of iron tweezers. "A bayonet, Inspector. Or some other blade shaped thus. And a saw for the bones. Our killer came prepared."

"Wonderful. Another lunatic. Must be something in the water." The plain-clothes copper with the mustaches—yes, he, the pompous prat—strides over. Detective Inspector Hoity-Toity, in his tall hat and fine black morning coat. *What's the color of a tuppence piece? Copper, copper . . .* Blue-uniformed constables—coppers, crushers, bobbies, peelers, whatever, they're corrupt scumbags and I'd give 'em a sprightly chase, so I would—the crushers mill around, parroting their foolish questions, chasing away nosy broadsheet scribblers, and kicking at dirty urchins with rat's tails and cloven feet who try to sneak in.

"Any sign of the missing limbs?" says Eliza.

"None." The detective strokes his mustaches. "But I don't imagine they walked away by themselves."

"Amazing. Your deductive powers are truly uncanny."

He grins. "One does one's best."

I itch to spit in his face. Detectives are London's new golden demigods, with eyes and ears

everywhere, guardians of the shady line between *them* and *us*. What with coppers plus government spies and the god-rotting witch-burners of the Royal Society, it seems these days everyone's a snout and we weird-city folk don't take kindly to being lorded over.

Still, to be fair, they're dab hands at catching bad men, this copper and my Eliza—more than one bloke gone kicking to the hangman who'd testify to that, not to mention the ones moldering in Bedlam or starving their skinny arses off in electrified dungeons at Coldbath Fields—and I for one won't shed no tears if the charming cove who sliced up this poor dolly swings on a chilly morning to sate the bloodthirsty Newgate mob.

My blood boils, alive with all the rage Eliza don't dare to feel. I want to throttle the bastard who did this. I want to grab that copper by his immaculate throat and squeeze until the lights in his eyes wink out.

Eliza's fist crushes tight . . . but then she blinks, and shivers, and shoves me away. And like a married wife locked in the attic, I'm helpless.

God's poisoned innards. I scream and fight, clawing for her eyes, but she ignores me. Me, Lizzie Hyde. Her own blood. Her own SOUL.

I hate this. I want to get out. To roam where I choose, feel skin under my fingers, harsh winter wind on my face. To put a match to this ugly world and dance while it burns.

But I can't escape. Not without her help.

If I could, d'you think I'd be pissfarting around here, flapping my gums with the likes of you?

“Dr. Jekyll?”

“Eh?” Eliza blinked, dizzy, and the world shimmered back into focus.

Beside her gaped the dark hole of the theater's stage door. Bills plastered on the walls advertised GISELLE and THE ETHEREAL MISS IRINA PAVLOVA and THE IMPERIAL RUSSIAN BALLET! alongside painted slogans that announced THE QUEEN IS DEAD and KILL ALL THE CRUSHERS and BREAD BEFORE PROFITS. Her little clockwork assistant, Hippocrates, twittered self-importantly at her skirt hem, his square brass body gleaming on long hinged legs.

At the alley's end, on Pall Mall, electric carriages rattled by, their glowing blue coils spitting sparks. Prostitutes prowled, a riot of feathers and colored gowns. Clockwork servants in frock coats clicked and whirred, striding to and fro on brass legs as they ran their errands, their painted plastic faces impassive. The ground rumbled as the Electric Underground hurtled by, and from an iron vent in the street, black smoke and sparks billowed in the stink of hot copper wire.

And the corpse, at Eliza's feet. Another murdered girl, in a city haunted by murdered girls. Another killer, to be brought to justice with careful detective work and the miracles of science.

But faintness rinsed her thin, a fevered warning. A dark specter shifted inside, a restless shadow yearning to be free . . .

Unwilled, an image hovered: the elixir in its black glass flask, locked up safe in Eliza's secret cabinet. Crouching in the dark, a sniggering demon. Whispering to her. Waiting . . .

Her mouth watered. Rage, ecstasy, sweet oblivion. The dark pleasure of doing whatever she pleased, saying what she felt. Not the impotent mutterings of lawyers and judges, but the keen slice of a blade . . .

“Are you quite all right?” Harley Griffin steadied Eliza's elbow. The dark-haired inspector wore plain clothes—smart black coat, tall hat, neatly knotted necktie. Even the dirt of this greasy theater side alley didn't seem to rub off on him.

“Perfectly well, thank you. Shall we proceed?” Briskly, Eliza smoothed her skirts and adjusted the

heavy brass optical atop her head. Thick metal rims, with a set of glass lenses of differing colors and properties. The latest scientific equipment. She'd designed it herself. Not strictly orthodox, but what useful gadget was?

Griffin flipped the pages of his notebook. "Victim's name is Irina Pavlova—"

"The ballerina?" Eliza's fists clenched. Not a poor woman of the street, then, savaged by some evil predator, all too replaceable in the eyes of polite society. The Imperial Russian Ballet's veteran principal dancer, famed for her beauty and grace. No less an outrage. No more a tragedy. Truly, no woman, celebrated or forgotten, was safe.

"The very same. It was to be her swan-song tour, I'm informed." Griffin looked mildly pained. "That certainly is now."

"A ballerina with no legs," mused Eliza. "Can that be random? Seems . . . lurid, wouldn't you say for a typical recreational murderer?"

"No legs," muttered Hippocrates, his little electric voice sullen. "Recreation. Does not compute. Re-examine reasoning."

Griffin shrugged. "Hardly a fit target for radicals, either. Still, these Muscovites are known to be rash and hot-headed. Perhaps a family feud, an act of vengeance. Teaching the enemy a lesson."

"Evil Russian slayers? You do enjoy your wild-flung theories, Harley. Have you considered a crazed rival ballerina wielding a hatchet?"

Griffin grinned, and made a note in his book. "Rival ballerina, hatchet. You mentioned it first. And my wild-flung theories have paid dividends before, as you well know."

Oh, aye. That warm, secret murmur tickled her spine. *Razor Jack and his glittering steel princes. You can't forget Jack, Eliza, his fingers in your hair, warm metal whispering against your cheek. Do you even want to?*

Eliza shivered, sweating. "Indeed. What I can tell you is that the blood on Miss Pavlova's dress is still rich. A large quantity has pooled without disturbance on the cobbles, and there's one bright splash on the wall. Which points to syncope as the mode of death."

"The Queen's English would be adequate."

She rolled her eyes. "Exsanguination, Harley. Miss Pavlova bled to death. Also, the lividity—that's the post-mortem bruising, as the blood pools in the corpse, you can see there, beneath the petticoats—that indicates she died where she lies. Our man knelt here." She pointed to a pair of smears in the blood beside the body, the imprints of trouser-clad knees. "And worked undisturbed. For at least four or five minutes, I'd say, to get this done."

"You're saying he amputated while this poor woman was still alive? God's blood." Griffin stroked his impeccable mustaches. Since the sensational trial of Razor Jack, he'd been the Metropolitan Police Commissioner's darling. Which was why he was permitted to employ a lady legal medicine specialist with dubious antecedents, when his Scotland Yard colleagues regarded her with suspicion and scorn at worst outright mirth.

"Yes. A professional could do it faster, but it doesn't take an expert to sever a limb in this fashion. Any able man with these tools could have done it."

"But why didn't she struggle, for heaven's sake? She's within earshot of the busiest street in Haymarket. No, there must be something more."

Eliza crouched and sniffed the dead woman's lips. "Aha!" She dug in her satchel for a swab, wiped it carefully over the woman's tongue, and applied solution from a glass bottle. Drip, drop. The golden liquid spread and soaked in, and the swab turned bright green.

"Just as I thought," she exclaimed happily. "Our victim was drugged. A narcotic, or . . ."

She tipped her optical down over her spectacles and flicked a few spectroscopic filters, frowning. ~~How strange. Perhaps an alchemist's concoction . . .~~ "Ah, I see," she covered briskly. "How delightfully mysterious. I shall require further tests—"

"The short version?" Griffin interrupted, with a long-suffering smile.

"For shame," she scolded, but her skin prickled. If it was alchemy, she'd have to find a way to cover it. To keep the evidence and omit its origins. "Don't you know one ought to avoid conjecture in the absence of basic facts?"

"Flirt with disaster, then, and give me your best guess."

"If I *must* speculate so irresponsibly? A substance that rendered her insensible, unable to complain. Though it might not have deadened the pain."

"Ether, then," suggested Griffin. "Or chloroform?"

"Chloroform," echoed Hippocrates hopefully. His blue glass *happy* globe flashed atop his head. Even Her Majesty had breathed chloroform while giving birth, to ease the pain. Chloroform was respectable. It didn't get you burned at the stake.

"No," said Eliza, taking another swab of the substance and storing it carefully away for analysis. "That stupefies slowly, over a period of minutes. Our man had a few seconds, at most, to subdue himself . . . that is, I venture no screams were heard?"

Griffin snorted. "How did you guess? Dozens of noble citizens strolling by and no one noticed anything. Not even a man covered in blood, carrying a woman's legs. My astonishment knows no bounds . . . here, get that fellow away at once!"

Crack! A magnesium flashlamp erupted in a puff of white smoke. The constables dived on the skinny man wearing a ruby-red waistcoat and dragged him away, knocking over the camera he somehow managed to erect just beyond the linen barrier.

Griffin shrugged. "Damn fool writers. They encourage more crime than they expose. As I was saying: our killer seems to have escaped rather easily."

"Perhaps the murderer lives or works nearby," offered Eliza, secretly satisfied. She was acquainted with that particular damn fool writer, and good riddance to him. "Or, he brought a change of clothes. Such an elaborate scenario isn't enacted on the spur of the moment."

"Agreed." He flipped through his notebook again. "Two . . . no, three different witnesses say they heard an arc-pistol going off, around two o'clock."

Eliza frowned. "But I see no gunshot wounds. Strange, that the killer should give himself away after going to such effort to quieten this poor woman. Assuming it was he who fired."

"So why remove the legs? Is he making a point? A warning?"

"Perhaps. If you still favor your vengeful Russians."

"Or a souvenir," suggested Griffin grimly. "A trophy from the hunt. Perhaps we have another collector on our hands. Like the Lincoln's Inn Toe Merchant . . ."

"Or the Mad Dentist of Fleet Street. The world is alive with strangeness, Inspector."

"Most of it in my division, apparently," he grumbled. "Always with the lunatics. Why don't you ever get a good honest bludgeoning anymore?"

"Indeed. This decline in boring murders is most distressing. But . . . hmm." Eliza flicked on the buzzing electric light, a tiny filament set into a small half-globe of brass, clipped to her waist on a short chain. She slotted the correct filter into her optical. A violet glow blossomed, and she scanned the body swiftly before the filament burned out with a bright metallic flash. The blood glared, a black accusation. But no smears, no creeping gleams.

"As I suspected." She stood, skirts swishing. "The absence of fluids on her clothing suggests the

was probably no intimacy. Miss Pavlova was not assaulted.”

“Absence of evidence . . .”

“ . . . isn’t evidence of absence, no. But such *interesting* killers are not often so meticulous, nor so restrained. It does rather tend to rule out a purposeless crime of passion.”

Griffin cleared his throat and fingered his necktie.

Eliza glanced at her gadget, the goggles still boggling her eyes, and grinned. “Oh. Yes. Fascinating, isn’t it? It is called ‘ultra-violet.’ A gift to my father, many years ago, from Mr. Faraday.”

“The Royal Society burned Faraday,” reminded Griffin gruffly. “You should be more careful.”

Eliza tucked the ultra-violet coil back into her belt purse, uneasy. Griffin had a point. In the past twenty years, while bloody revolution swept the Continent at the behest of sorcerers and charlatans, the Royal Society had become sole arbiters of what was science and what was witchcraft. Anyone found disputing the Philosopher’s Laws—or deliberately defying them by dabbling in classical unexplained phenomena—was mercilessly re-educated . . . or worse.

“Yes, well,” she commented dryly, “if given free rein, the Royal’s Enforcers would burn everyone who dared study any science published since Newton’s *Principia*—”

“Do you take argument with the *Principia*, madam?”

Eliza’s heart somersaulted. At this new voice, the crowd shuffled and muttered, and the constables suddenly grew deeply fascinated with the contents of their notebooks.

“Oops,” muttered Hippocrates, and jiggled on jittery feet.

Inwardly, she groaned. *Oh, bother.*

GRIFFIN SHOT ELIZA A DARK TOLD-YOU-SO GLANCE and arranged his polite, professional face. “Not at all, Captain. The doctor was merely being amusing.”

With what she hoped was a primly confident air, Eliza turned to squint up at her accuser. “And you are, sir?”

“Captain Remy Lafayette, Royal Society.” The fellow bowed, but his grin was insolent. His hair was flaming orange, his eyes dazzling azure. He wore a glaring purple tailcoat with flashing epaulets.

Eliza frowned. How peculiar . . . Ah. She tugged off the optical, leaving just her spectacles. Better than the immaculate red-and-gold officer’s uniform, white trousers, tall black boots, and a jaunty black hat. Some infantry regiment? Saber—cavalry, then—sheathed at one hip on a black sash, a polished electric-coil pistol holstered at the other. He looked about her age—not old, but no longer especially young—and his rainbow of campaign jewels indicated far-flung theaters of war: India, Calcutta, Samarkand.

A career officer. How mind-numbingly tedious.

But unruly brown curls spilled carelessly close to his collar, suggesting a disregard for authority that she rather enjoyed. His open, attractive face was permanently suntanned, his hands scarred with gunflash burns. He’d seen some combat.

And his eyes, *sans* optical, hadn’t dimmed. Dazzling, electric sky blue.

Her corset suddenly seemed to be laced too tightly. How inconvenient.

She lifted her chin. He was alone, no team of clockwork Enforcers behind him. It didn’t make him any less threatening. “Well, Captain Lafayette, I trust you’ve good reason for interrupting our investigation. Last I heard, murder was still a police matter.”

“Police matter,” repeated Hippocrates smugly. Eliza swiftly shoved him behind her skirts, eliciting a buzz and an indignant whir of cogs.

“Just a routine check. I trust you’ll all cooperate.” Lafayette studied her boldly, sizing her up. Examining her simple gray gown, her tightly wound hair, her wire spectacles, and the doctor’s satchel slung over her shoulder.

Plain, clumsy, middle-class Eliza, twenty-six years old and unmarried. Police physician and alienist, with a world of dark secrets to hide.

Old resentment frothed in her breast. No wedding ring—nothing so radical—no fraying on his uniform or wear on his boots to tell of the interwar poverty many officers suffered. And a cavalry officer’s life was notoriously expensive. No doubt he’d purchased his commission, in the army or the late and sincerely unlamented East India Company, using some indecently vast family fortune—and spent his half-pay leisure time killing foxes on his country estate, lounging in his private box at the opera, and romancing dashing *equestriennes* on Rotten Row.

That didn’t explain his commission with the Royal. Or his attendance at her crime scene.

Her mind spun in circles. Did the Royal suspect her? Had they tracked her from Finch Pharmacy? God forbid, was Mr. Finch in danger? Or had she simply made some trivial slip at a crime scene, conducted some test that wasn’t strictly orthodox? Uttered some careless remark that smacked of sorcery, within earshot of the Royal’s numberless spies?

Heaven knew, she was more conspicuous these days than she liked. Her name and likeness had made not only the garish penny pamphlets, but the daily newspapers too—notoriety, that horror of a

middle-class horrors—in the sensational reports of Razor Jack’s trial at the Old Bailey. But the trial was months ago, the murderer long since locked away at Her Majesty’s pleasure. And purely by chance, the Royal chose *today* to review her crime scene?

No. This wasn’t because of Razor Jack. It was something else. Something more.

Captain Lafayette cocked a single eyebrow, still expecting some reply.

Hungry shadows tugged inside her, a dark undertow. *Ooh, I say. The very devil in scarlet. Sparks fly there, let me tell you.*

Eliza sniffed dismissively. Such romantic fascination with danger was for fools who read too many novels. She preferred a more mathematical approach. But the Royal’s witch hunts were anything but mathematical. The sooner she got rid of this Lafayette—with his scandalous French name and impeccable British self-importance—the better.

She straightened her satchel with a sharp tug. “Very well. I will cooperate. Now kindly move aside and cease trampling my crime scene.”

“Trampling,” squeaked Hipp, muffled beneath her skirts. “Move aside.”

Lafayette rested a cocky hand on his sword. The iron badge pinned to his lapel was engraved with the Royal’s motto, fine silver letters glinting in pale sun: *NULLIUS IN VERBA*. “You didn’t answer my question, Miss . . . ?”

“Doctor,” she corrected coolly. “Doctor Eliza Jekyll. And since you ask, Captain, I’ve no argument with the Philosopher’s science. Just with the mis-educated apes who interpret him. Do excuse me. And she stepped neatly around him and crouched again by the murdered body.

Ha ha! Mis-educated apes, eh? That’ll tell him. Jesus, you can’t even insult the man properly, let alone make a decent effort at flirting . . .

Fuming, she kept her gaze down and yanked out another swab to check for matter under the fingernails. Offending this Captain Lafayette was probably not the wisest course. The Royal had burned poor Mr. Faraday. They’d not think twice about doing the same to her, Eliza Jekyll, medical practitioner of dubious orthodoxy, daughter of an infamous dabbler in arcane diabolicals.

God help her if they ever discovered the rest of it.

Griffin was already covering. He had his career to think about. “I do apologize, Captain. If there’s anything you require—”

“Naturally.” Captain Lafayette cut him off breezily. “Witness statements, drawings, that sort of thing. I’ll have my people examine your findings. You know the drill. It’s all just routine.”

“Naturally.” Griffin bristled like an angry badger, but, with ill grace, he handed over his notebook.

Lafayette digested the inspector’s careful handwriting in a few seconds and tossed the book back to Griffin. Then he squatted beside Eliza, his shiny black boots creaking. “What do you make of this?”

She eyed him coolly, slipping her sample into a glass tube and jamming in the cork. “Are you addressing me, Captain?”

Brr. Chilly in here, ain’t it? Royal or not, he’s a man like any other. Lift them prim-and-prissy skirts o’ yours, and orthodoxy will be the last doxy on his mind . . .

“You’re the police physician, aren’t you?” He prodded the corpse’s lips, exposing the small white teeth. He wore a silver chain around his wrist, locked with a seal of some kind. How odd.

Eliza swatted his big hand away. “Kindly cease contaminating my crime scene, sir.”

“Contaminating? What do you mean, pray?”

She sighed. Crime scene science was new and mysterious. Few understood it. “Every contact leaves a trace. Our villain, however careful, has unwittingly sprinkled the scene with clues. Clues I am unlikely to unravel once you’ve smeared your clumsy paws all over them.”

He flashed her his smile, a half-sheathed weapon. “Clumsy? Ouch. And I’ve such a reputation for elegance.”

She held up her slim hands, which she’d encased in white cotton gloves.

“Ah! I see. My apologies, Doctor.” He peered at the wounds on the body, this time careful not to touch. “What would you say about the time of death?”

She’d already opened her mouth to retort to some snide remark of his about lady doctors and their hysterical fancies, and her cheeks warmed. “I’m sorry, did you just ask for my opinion?”

He grinned, full force this time, charming as any swell ruffian. “I’m a Royal Society investigator, madam, not an ignorant. Show me science, not detectives’ guesswork.”

She glared over her spectacles. “Your flattery is wasted on me, sir.”

“Is it?” His blue eyes sparkled. “What a shame. It’s the part I’m so good at.”

His good humor was infectious. She refused to contract it. “Then kindly flatter yourself with an explanation. What, pray, is the Royal’s interest in this case?”

“That remains to be seen, doesn’t it? Time of death?”

She looked around for Griffin, but he was studiously keeping his distance. “Ah . . . well, the body temperature in these outdoor cases is notoriously unreliable. But from the clotting and lividity? Not before two o’clock this morning.”

“The very hour of our famous arc-pistol shot.”

“Legal medicine is not an exact science, Captain—”

“*Science* is an exact science, Dr. Jekyll. Material results must have material causes. For an arc-pistol shot to sound, someone must fire an arc-pistol.” He inspected the corpse, tugging the bodice fabric with one finger. “Yet we have no wound. Ergo—”

“The killer must have missed,” she suggested. “Or someone else fired the pistol.”

“Well? You’re a doctor, madam, not an ornament.”

A back-handed compliment, if she’d ever received such. Chastened, she rummaged in her bag for a test for gunflash. An arc-pistol would leave a tiny charged carbon residue on the wielder’s palm. She adjusted her optical and swabbed the corpse’s hands. “Nothing,” she reported. “She was almost certainly not the shooter. Which means . . .”

“Do you smell that?” Abruptly, Lafayette strode to the stone wall, three feet behind the corpse, and glared about in the shadows, lifting his nose to the stagnant air.

How peculiar. She rose and followed, Hippocrates trotting in her wake. “Smell what?”

“That.” Lafayette’s nose twitched, and he bent to the ground, sniffing. “Like a storm. Or . . .”

“Electrical discharge,” she finished eagerly. “Yes! I smell it, too. But where . . . ?”

He pointed to a patch of ground, close beside the alley wall. “What’s this?” he demanded. “Can you identify?”

She crouched. A small pile of black particles, like coarse dirt. Luminiferous aether, burned by electrical voltage. A large quantity. Too large for a pistol.

She traced a fingertip up the wall, where the stone was . . . melted. In a jagged line, dripping down like glass. As if extreme heat had been applied. She’d never seen anything like it outside a raging house fire.

Inside her, shadows stirred. An alchemical drug. And now this strange heat. How dangerous and fascinating.

“Gunflash,” she reported, trying to cover her excitement. “Or something similar. Your pistol, sir, if you please.”

“I’m sorry, are we under attack?”

She stepped back. "One shot, there, beside that mark. Medium range." He cocked that arrogant eyebrow again, and she smiled sweetly. "*Nullius in verba*, Captain. "Take nobody's word for it. You're an investigator, not an ornament."

"*Touché*," he murmured, and fast as a wild-frontier gunslinger, he drew his pistol and *crack!*

Eliza gasped, her hand flying to her chest. Jagged blue voltage sliced into the stone. Static crackled in her hair. Steam hissed, a swirl of blue-burning aether and the sharp scent of thunder. Hippocrates yelped and scuttled away.

The burning purple coil in Lafayette's pistol glimmered and died. Neatly, he holstered the weapon. Not exactly a flourish, but he didn't need one. Everyone was already staring at him.

She caught her breath, indignant. He'd done that on purpose. But my, he was fast. Accurate. Dangerous. She'd barely seen him move.

He grinned. "Impressed yet?"

Apparently, also an insufferable show-off. Behind Lafayette's back, Griffin rolled his eyes. She could almost hear the inspector grumbling. *Bloody Royal show ponies, all flash and no fire . . .*

"Entertaining as well as decorative," she remarked coolly. "Perhaps you should consider joining the circus. Shall we take a look?" She slotted her magnifying lens and peered at the resulting scar on the wall. Just a faint charcoal smear. Certainly no melted stone. She pointed to show Lafayette. "*A* you see."

"Hmm. Then what could have carved this furrow? Is it a new kind of weapon?"

A trick question? Uneasily, she thought of nice Mr. Faraday, burned in the shadow of St. Paul's for his insistence that luminiferous aether was a fallacy, that light required no medium, that unseen lines of force held the universe together. He'd never been able to prove it, and the creaking ancients at the Royal sniffed dismissively at his experiments and dragged him away to the Tower.

The Royal didn't use burning as their execution method for religious reasons, as in days gone by. They cared nothing for cleansing the soul. It was merely a horrible death. A warning. Defying the authority was treason, and traitors burned.

Distantly, she recalled her father's secret laboratory, the smell of hot metal, electrical coils glowing in glass globes. His chemical apparatus, bubbling and smoking: retorts; pipettes; flasks gleaming liquids, green and blue and violet. And little Eliza, just a tiny girl in dusty skirts, blinking short-sightedly under the table. A lonely child, left to her own devices in the big old house with its secret passages, dusty clerestories, and concealed rooms.

She'd listened wide-eyed to his clandestine midnight meetings, arguments, cursing in German and French as well as English, the rapid squeak of chalked equations on a blackboard. She'd understood little of it, of course. Faraday was young, then, barely educated but brilliant, his plain face shining with ideas. Magnetism, electricity, the secrets of the stars, the radical experiments of Volta and Lavoisier, Lamarckian evolution, alchemy and mesmerism and the search for eternal life.

All scientific and political suicide, naturally. Faraday was burned, her father nearly twenty years dead and disgraced. She'd not discovered the elixir until later, in her adolescent years, when the shifting longings drove her to desperation, and a mysterious man hid behind the curtain at midnight in her flickering firelit parlor and offered her a strangely warm, bitter drink . . .

All of which was no concern of Captain Remy Lafayette, IRS. No matter how charming his address or skilled his handiwork.

"Doctor?" Lafayette's question hung.

"I've no idea," she replied shortly. "What a fascinating conundrum." She peeled off her cotton gloves, heedless of baring her fingertips in public. "Sergeant? I'm finished here. Kindly transport the

remains to the morgue.”

~~“Very good, Doctor.” Griffin’s plain-clothes sergeant signaled to his constables, and two men~~
began to wrap the body in linen.

She tugged on her plain gray day gloves and adjusted them with a snap. “Come along, Hippocrates
Captain Lafayette, I’m due in court. How nice to make your acquaintance. Good-bye.”

And she jammed her optical into its leather case on her hip and swept away.

A FOOL FOR A PATIENT

ON NEW OXFORD STREET, THE TRAFFIC CLOSED IN around her. Clanking metal and whirring gears, brass wheels turning and blue sparks showering. Hansom cabs pulled like rickshaws by frantic two-legged clockwork runners careered madly between top-hatted gents and ladies in crinolines and corsets. Black was the predominant color. Mad Queen Victoria had put on mourning for her beloved Prince Consort (murdered by sorcerers, indeed; more likely the poor man died of typhoid fever, but hunt for witches and witches are what you'll find), and fashionable ladies liked to follow suit.

Real horses, too, and donkeys plodded along, pulling carriages or sellers' carts, ears twitching at the noise. Wheels squeaked in their refuse, and beneath the carriages scuttled crossing-sweepers, tiny ragged children who scraped up the dung and darted away before they could be flattened.

Eliza was late, and hurried along, clutching her bag to her hip. She was used to traveling unescorted—good gracious, how scandalous—but no need to take chances on being robbed. Among the well-dressed gentlemen and ladies lurked the swell mob: professional thieves in disguise, with elaborate ruses and fingers deft enough to rob tie-pins, brooches, even earrings without the wearers knowing.

Hippocrates trotted beside her, clucking, his tiny brass head at the level of her thigh. Cogs whirred inside his boxy body, and his hinged legs pistoned up and down. "Time," he grated in his electric voice. "Old Bailey, one o'clock. Make greater speed."

"Thank you, Hipp, you're a great help." She dodged a young dandy on a speeding two-wheeled scooter and tripped over her skirts, barely keeping her feet. The dandy's umbrella twirled above her head on a tall stick as he swerved along.

"You're welcome." Hipp's *happy* light twinkled. Blue for happy, red for sad. She should install one for smug. No doubt it would flash constantly.

As if to remind her, a distant clock tower chimed a quarter to one. She'd never make it in time along the crush of Holborn to the Old Bailey, not on foot.

"Dr. Jekyll!" A hand tugged at her elbow, that familiar, hyper-energetic voice. "Just the lady I wish to speak to. Quite a mess, wasn't it? What's your opinion of the victim's condition? What kind of madman do you think the killer is? Is it the Moorfields Monster?"

She sighed and turned to see the young writer in the red waistcoat, whom Griffin had unceremoniously ejected from the crime scene. "Mr. Temple," she said pleasantly, "truly, you are the worst kind of pest. Whoever said the murderer was a madman?"

"Isn't he? How many people must one kill and dismember in this town before one qualifies?" Matthew Temple grinned, and it split his pointy face in half like a puppet's. Ragged autumn-leaf hair stuck out from beneath his cap. Under one arm he clutched a sketch pad and a boxy brass clockwork recorder. "I'll have to think of a name for him. The Ballet Beast, perhaps. The Footlights Fiend. Or . . . The Chopper!" He sucked in a theatrical gasp of horror. "What do you think?"

"Matchless. Verily, we have a new Shakespeare in our midst."

"Walpole, surely. King of the gruesome Gothic! And such wonderful material you provide, Doctor. Razor Jack killed seventeen. The Monster has dispatched five so far. Do you think this killer will match that?"

"First, Mr. Temple, we have only circumstantial evidence that there *is* a 'Moorfields Monster.' A few slashings do not a rampant beastly killer make. And second—" She cut him off with a raised

finger as he started to interrupt. “Second, sir, I find your enthusiasm for multiple murders disturbing. The only answer I have for your bloodthirsty questions is ‘clear off.’ Print *that* in your sordid dreadfuls.”

“Clear off,” echoed Hipp, and danced a saucy jig, his blue light flashing.

“Oh, come, madam.” Temple winked, cheerful, her insults washing off like dust. “You’re one of my most popular characters! The pretty lady doctor who caught Razor Jack, both intrepid criminal fighter and damsel in distress—”

“I am not a ‘lady doctor,’” she interrupted coldly. “I am a doctor, no more and no less. And if you persist in pestering me, you’ll be the one in distress. Good day, sir.”

She hailed an electric omnibus, and it squealed to a halt, sparks spitting from the engine’s purple glowing coils. She clambered on, squeezing in amongst black-frocked serving maids and clerks in threadbare suits. A mustached fellow at the end smoked a cigar, and the fug clogged the small cabin.

Hippocrates sprang onto her lap, folding his legs, and she absently petted him as the omnibus lurched onwards. He clicked like a cricket, contented, his lights twinkling, and she felt a small twinge of envy.

If only *she* could be made content so easily. Fatigue tugged at her limbs, and her breath felt too warm in her throat. Her pulse was elevated, the beginnings of an all-too-familiar fever. The air in the omnibus was stifling, smoke and hot breath and sweaty skin. She pulled the window sash down a few inches, but it didn’t help.

Temple’s idiotic questions, his cheerful disregard for the victims’ dignity, only irritated her more. And Captain Lafayette’s sly insinuations—his very *presence* in her world, with his smug Royal Society attitude and poorly veiled threats—still itched under her skin like a parasite.

Were the Royal onto her? Or was it just an unhappy coincidence? And why had they sent a flesh-and-blood investigator when an impassive mechanical Enforcer would do?

She thought back to the last time she’d visited Mr. Finch, several days ago now, at his utterly respectable Mayfair pharmacist’s shop. Naturally, alchemy was forbidden by the Royal. The Philosopher himself had long ago concluded its aims to be futile. There was no *aqua vitae*, no vital force that held the universe together and sparked life into lifeless matter. Alkahest, the so-called universal solvent, did not exist. You could not make gold from lead, and eternal life was an impossible dream.

But Mr. Finch was a crafty veteran, with a convincing line in “doddery old man” and the mildest, most innocent blue eyes. No one who hadn’t seen firsthand his dark, smoking laboratory, with its furnaces, bubbling phials, strange symbols, and crucibles of mercury and molten gold, would even believe him a criminal. Little chance he’d let something slip to a stranger.

Eliza squirmed in her cramped seat as the omnibus rattled past the ornate turrets of Lincoln’s Inn. Perhaps she should warn Mr. Finch. Perhaps she’d been followed to his shop . . . and besides, she was running low on her remedy.

Not her *elixir*. No, she still had some of that, locked away in her secret cabinet like an embarrassing relative. But Finch also brewed her a prophylactic against the addiction, a tranquil balm that—temporarily at least—banished the need that chewed in her veins, ever hungrier the longer she let it fester. The remedy let her sleep, reduced her fever, kept the gibbering nightmares at bay.

Theoretically.

She hadn’t sampled the elixir for weeks now. Hadn’t slept properly in days. And the famine in her blood was getting nasty. She needed to see Mr. Finch. But if Lafayette was following her . . .

Her heart sank. He didn’t need to. She’d stupidly told him where she was going. Such a fool she

was.

“Hipp, I want you to wire Mr. Finch.” She wound the little creature up with a few brisk turns of her ornate brass key. “In cipher, if you please. Tell him I won’t be calling for my prescriptions until tomorrow morning. Oh, and ask him what he knows about a Captain Lafayette, IRS, cavalry officer.”

“Yes, Doctor.” Cogs and springs clicked as he recorded the message. He could use the telegraph at the courthouse to transmit.

The omnibus pulled up, with a *bang!* and a blue crackle of voltage, on the corner of Old Bailey where Newgate Prison’s blackened stone walls loomed out of the grimy pall, topped with electrified wire. She paid the conductor threepence, hopped out into blessedly cool air, and lifted Hippocrates down.

Distant wails drifted from the prison’s dark depths, and a fetid stink hung like fog, a vile gray miasma thick with disease. Typhus was so common and deadly within that they called it “prison fever”—and during particularly bad seasons, they even moved the courtrooms outdoors in search of clean air.

Prison warders and thief-takers in dirty suits mingled with the street mob, those attending trials visiting inmates or simply raising mischief for its own sake. Most of the visitors were women, dirt sleeves pulled down at the shoulder, hair falling loose from pins as if suggesting the condition of the wearer’s virtue.

Everything was for sale to prisoners awaiting trial (or execution) in Newgate, from better food and rum to fresh air to whores and conjugal visits, so long as you knew someone who was willing to pay. Half the inmates had been put there by the Queen’s spies—political *agents provocateurs* who fanned the flames of working-class discontent and then exposed the ringleaders for traitors and revolutionaries—or by corrupt thief-takers, who arranged elaborate criminal plans specifically in order to entrap the perpetrators. Those same officials were only too happy to accept bribes now. Even the Metropolitan Police weren’t immune to payoffs and sly dealings. Not all officers of the Detective Branch possessed Harley Griffin’s moral courage.

Eliza shouldered through the crowd, Hipp clunking at her heels. The system was crooked. Everyone knew that. But she, Eliza Jekyll, would do her part for justice. Honor demanded it—and if she didn’t, who would?

Who, indeed?

At the big studded doors of the Central Criminal Court, a huge clockwork sentry frisked her impassively, its magnetic hands fanning her skirts, ready to buzz and flash warning lights should it detect iron. Judges were fair game for radicals and criminal types with a grudge, and civilians weren’t permitted to carry weapons into the Old Bailey.

The sentry clicked in satisfaction and waved her inside. Hippocrates scuttled off importantly to dispatch his telegraph, and Eliza trotted down the wide stone corridor and slid into a seat in courtroom two, just in time.

Eliza jams her padded behind on the long wooden bench in the witnesses’ gallery, catching her breath and not a moment too soon, because here’s Billy Beane climbing into the dock, in the moldy green frock coat and jaunty top hat that’s his habit. His scrawny wrists are shackled in front of him, his lice-ridden hair clipped ragged from the Newgate cells, and he’s grinning like a penny-gaff clown. Billy “the Bastard” Beane, pimp, defiler of little girls, and all-round stinker.

Now I’m all for justice, me. Innocent until it’s proven he done it, and all that. Don’t want no dirt on my copper fitting me up for some lay I had naught to do with. But in Billy’s case? March in the guilt

scumbag, my friends, because you gotta be twelve to say “yes” to a man, and mothers and daughters all over Seven Diats know this dirty child-raper for what he is.

If Billy the Bastard’s innocent? I’m his friggin’ maiden aunt.

The prosecutors make their case. The crusher what arrested Billy, the little girl’s mother, some ratty-haired snout says he seen Billy lurking nearby, on-the-night-in-question-guvnor-sure-as-I’m-standing-straight.

And then they call Doctor Eliza Jekyll, who tells ’em some fine palaver about scratches and bloodstains and fluids on Billy’s clothes that sure sounds a whole lot like he’s guilty as Cain. I cheer loudly in her ear. You tell ’em, Eliza, my love. Can’t argue with bloodstains, can they?

But the beak is a patronizing prick—ain’t they all?—and puts air to some tosh about hysterical lady doctors that makes me want to grab him by those dusty black robes and smash his pudgy nose flat with my forehead. Eliza protests, but he cuts her off. Billy’s grinning. The coppers don’t say nothing. And now I know what’s going on here.

Prison screws, coppers, jurymen, snouts. Everyone’s for sale. And it seems His Honor is too.

Not guilty.

It ain’t right. The little girl’s mother is crying. The Bastard is laughing and joking with the crushers as they let him go. A woman in a green dress yells and throws old fruit from the gallery. Eliza just stares, her prim little throat aching with unshed tears.

And inside her, I rage and scream and tear my hair, and yearn with all my heart for a jagged blade.

Darkness had swallowed the sun by the time Eliza trudged up to her town house in Russell Square. Moonlight glared red through smoky clouds, spreading on the cobbles like a bloodstain, filtering eerily over the shadowy park. Electric streetlights glimmered, blue filaments buzzing. A walking carriage lolloped along, its six insectoid feet clattering over the stones. Mist drifted, wrapping wisplike along the fences and wrought-iron gates, settling over her smart brick town house. The smell and sounds of the foundling hospital along Guildford Street—waste, vomit, the wails of sick children—made a ghastly backdrop.

Normally, Eliza didn’t mind. She was used to it. But tonight, it only made her think of Billy Beane, the horrid things he’d done, his depraved giggles, his damp fingers on that little girl’s skin, his smug grin in the courtroom as they let him go. And when she thought of Billy, her unladylike anger swelled like a monster . . . and the dark shadow inside her growled to be free.

Eliza’s own mother had died in a senseless accident, with those responsible never held to account. Would the man who’d killed Irina Pavlova escape justice, too? Vanish into the night like an evil dream, a habitual monster drifting from victim to victim, unable to understand or stop? Or had it been an aberration, the only blot on a blameless character, a horrible secret that some guilty gentlemen would take to his grave?

Unlikely. In Eliza’s experience, most murderers didn’t feel guilty. At best, they were angry and careless and sorry they’d been caught. At worst, they were beasts in human disguise.

Mostly. Some—an unfathomable, frightening few—defied diagnosis.

The polished brass shingle nailed to the doorpost read ELIZA JEKYLL M.D. Wearily, she stumped up the steps and let herself in, Hippocrates trotting after her.

Dim quiet greeted her, the comforting scents of herbs and medicines, a faint whiff of some tasty supper on the boil. A warm yellow arc-light gleamed in a brass wall sconce, and to the right, the doorway of her consulting room lay dark. The walls were papered in cream, the pressed-metal ceiling white. An Indian rug lay soft under her aching feet. A gilt-framed mirror adorned the hall, above a

expensive inlaid mahogany hall table.

Her house was fine. More expensive than she could have afforded on her own, with the meager income from her police work and the part-time position at Bethlem. Female doctors were few and didn't attract many patients, and by the time she qualified, first in general practice as an apothecary, then as M.D. against the wishes of a hostile, all-male College of Physicians, her late father's practice had long since disbanded. Henry Jekyll had been a society doctor, with considerable fortune and prestige in his day—but he'd squandered both on his strange experiments, and now they were gone. Eliza lived prudently, without show or extravagance, but everything cost money.

No, she could never have afforded this address, the servants, the fine furniture. This house was paid for by her guardian, the man into whose care Father had left her in his will. She was a legal adult now, in charge of her own allowance, and she'd barely heard from her guardian since she turned twenty-one, but the house still belonged to *him*.

An odd fellow, to be sure. For a man she'd never actually seen face-to-face, his rough, infrequent letters could be strangely affectionate. But he'd spared no expense and no trouble. And an absent guardian better suited her purposes than an ever-present one. Better by far than a husband, meddling and disapproving, taking up her time with trivia such as housekeeping and mealtimes and children. "Wife" was a busy full-time job, for certain, and not to be sneered at. Just not her career of choice.

"Welcome home, Doctor." Hippocrates squatted by the hallstand, a spindly brass frog.

"Thank you, Hipp. Have a nap, there's a good boy." Gratefully, she closed the heavy door. Her head was pounding. Dizziness lurked, threatening. Her pulse was dangerously elevated. She needed her remedy.

But she had none. Only the elixir. And inside her, angry shadows roiled, thirsting to be free . . .

Someone was talking. She shook herself, trying to focus. "I'm sorry?"

Her housekeeper bustled from the passage, dusting rough old hands on her apron. Mrs. Poole was only five feet tall, the bonnet pinned over her graying hair barely reaching Eliza's shoulder, but she was built like a grande-dame bulldog, fierce and muscular in body and affection. "Supper's ready, Doctor. Lay the table, shall I?"

"Good evening, Mrs. Poole. I'll take a tray in my room, please. I'm feeling a little unwell."

"You do look a sight," teased Mrs. Poole dryly. "You work too hard, young lady. Just like your father, and look how he ended up, God rest him. No wonder no respectable man will have you."

"I say, do you think not? Shocking. I shall mend my unladylike ways immediately."

A twinkle of faded green eyes. "Make a difference, would it, the way you pull your hair back like a schoolmarm, and never wear nice shoes?"

"Mrs. Poole, as always, you are the very soul of comfort."

"Always here to help. You look positively peaky. Shall I break out the leeches and bloodletting myself, or send for one of your charlatan physicians?"

"I am a physician, last I looked. The shingle on the door seems to think so."

"Aye, well," said the imperturbable Mrs. Poole, "a fool for a patient, and all."

Eliza suppressed a laugh. "The saying is 'a fool for a client.' Referring to lawyers who represent themselves, not doctors who self-medicate. A small but important distinction."

"If you say so. Go on upstairs, I'll send for Molly." Mrs. Poole ushered Eliza towards the black mahogany staircase. "Bless me," she added slyly, fishing a sealed letter from her apron pocket. "I almost forgot. This came for you. Hand delivered."

The folded paper was smooth and warm. Expensive stationery, no postage stamp, her address smudged in crude black handwriting, and a red wax seal stamped with a shape that looked like

crooked crown, or maybe a court jester's belled hat.

Eliza's heart clenched, dread and fascination in equal measure. "Forgot," indeed. She knew the seal. What did he want, after so many months of ignoring her? Sometimes his letters were aimless, strange, the wanderings of a lost soul. Other letters were terse missives regarding the dispersal of funds, the house, her yearly allowance. Yet others . . . well, he had the soul of a poet, if an ill-mannered one.

Toss it away. He's a dirty old lecher. Probably hides behind the bed curtains and fiddles with himself while you sleep . . .

Clasping the letter to her bodice, Eliza hurried up two flights of stairs, past her darkened study to her bedroom.

The fire was already lit. Twin candles gleamed in brass sconces on the elaborate marble mantel. Her ruffled bed was neatly made, pale covers beneath a gossamer canopy. Her wardrobe—Eliza's wardrobe—stood in the corner.

Above the dressing table hung her mother's portrait, framed in gilt. Madeleine Jekyll wore an old-fashioned, high-waisted cream silk ball gown. Her lips turned up in a secret smile. A diamond necklace adorned her slender throat, a wedding gift from her bridegroom. She looked young, happy, uncommonly pretty.

Eliza hadn't inherited Madeleine's looks. She'd barely known her mother. Just another scandal that people whispered about. No, Eliza took after her father: gray-eyed, sharp-chinned, compelled to meddle in dangerous secrets.

She sat at the inlaid writing desk, warming her booted feet by the fire. She turned up the electric lamp, and in greenish light cracked the letter's seal.

Snap! Too loud in the silence. Her heart skipped. She unfolded the paper, pushing her spectacles up.

As always, his handwriting was rough, untidy with crossings-out, as if he scribbled in a hurry and didn't care too much for his spelling. The paper was smudged with grime or coal dust, as if his hands were dirty, like a laborer's. An odd sort of gentleman.

My Dear Eliza

Tomorrow midnight in your Study.

You know the Rules. Don't look behind You.

your Servant

A.R. 

And beneath his initials—what did they stand for?—a little sketch of that same jester's crown. Wicked, unhinged, the sly wink of a madman.

She swallowed, excited yet fearful. A little dizzy. Was it the fever? Why did he want to see her? Their meetings were scarce, and always shrouded in darkness, shadows, secrecy. As a girl, she'd been afraid of him, his strange rough voice behind the curtain, his masculine scent of tobacco and leather, once a hesitant hand on her hair that made her whirl, only to see no one. Now, as a woman grown . . .

Rap-a-rap! A knock at the door. Swiftly, she tucked the letter away in one of the desk's many secret drawers. "Come."

Molly, pretty and blond, carrying a dinner tray. "Shall I set it down here, Doctor?"

"Thank you, Molly." The plate held hot pork pie, potatoes, warm bread, a steaming pot of tea. H

stomach swam, as if she'd swallowed seawater. Mrs. Poole's pie was invariably excellent. But Eliza had lost her appetite.

For food, that was. For anything except the elixir, bitter and delicious, stinging her throat like salt, that glorious fire-burst in her belly . . .

Molly busied herself turning down the bed and fluffing the pillows. "Everything all right, Doctor? Mam says you weren't feeling well."

"Nothing a cup of tea and a good night's sleep won't remedy."

"You know," Molly remarked, "when I was just a scullery maid, I broke a cup in the kitchen, and was too scared to tell anyone." Her skirts billowed as she worked. "Ate away at me, it did. Never got a wink of sleep, until at last I owned up. As if a load of bricks tumbled off my back. Ever since then, something's bothering me, I find it's best to talk about it."

"I'll take that on board." Eliza tried a smile, but it stung false. Mrs. Poole had kept house for Henry Jekyll, and though she made a point of pretending ignorance, her sharp wits missed nothing. Molly was Molly Poole, Mrs. Poole's daughter—or granddaughter?—and cut from the same practical cloth. Molly and Eliza were of an age, and though Eliza's secrets were never spoken, such a clever maid had surely heard enough strange happenings late at night in the Jekyll household to realize something bizarre was going on.

But Eliza could not make a confidante of Molly, no matter how tempting. She could have no friends. If she were discovered—if that intolerable Captain Lafayette of the Royal had his way—her servants would suffer along with her.

"Shall I help you undress?"

"That won't be necessary . . ." She sighed at Molly's expression. Keeping up appearances was important. But so very tiresome. "Very well. Thank you."

She unlaced her boots and eased them off with a sigh, wriggling her pinched toes in the fire for warmth. She fidgeted as Molly helped her with her gown, unclipping the dove-gray fabric and the stiffened corset, and soon she stood in only her linen chemise, pale hair tumbling around her face.

She peered at herself in the polished dressing table mirror. Her cheeks flushed pink, her hair humbly damp. Shadows gleamed sickly beneath eyes aglow with fever. Her stomach ached as if she'd not eaten for days. And an ugly pressure swelled in her blood, beneath her skin, in the secret place between her legs. She wanted, hungered, thirsted for . . . satisfaction. Completion. A bold kind of . . . release, something urgent she didn't fully understand.

Escape . . .

Molly reached for the hairbrush, but Eliza tossed her head impatiently. "I can do it meself," she snapped, and flushed. "I mean, that's all for tonight, Molly," she amended hastily. "I shan't need you again. Good night."

The girl's eyes narrowed, but she nodded. "Good night, Doctor."

As soon as the door clicked shut, Eliza sprang to her feet. Turned the key in the lock, *click-clack*, and tossed it onto the bed, out of reach of prying fingers. Ran to the fireplace, grabbed the left-hand sconce, and yanked it downwards on its secret hinge.

Clunk! Hot wax spilled over the back of her hand. She didn't care. Thirst tore into her belly. The sharp-clawed beast had to be sated. *Come on, come on . . .*

Agonizingly slowly, the section of wall beside the wardrobe swung outwards. Silently, without a whisper or a creak. She kept it oiled for that purpose. A dark passageway loomed. Her secret cabinet.

Before the door had even fully opened, she dived in. On her knees, shaking, fumbling the little cupboard door aside. Yearning, sweating, trembling with anticipation yet gripped by terrible fear that

she'd miscalculated, there'd be nothing inside . . .

~~There it sat. Mr. Finch's black glass flask, gleaming evilly in firelight. Bulbous at the bottom, narrow neck, flaring at the mouth. It seemed to snigger like a living creature, hungry for mischief.~~

Yes. Her mouth watered, and her eyes drifted closed. She gripped the flask's warm neck—always warm, this bubbling hellbrew, a vile heat of its own—and flicked off the cork. *Pop!* Tiny drops splattered, and *that* smell drifted out, intoxicating like opium, delicious like bitter chocolate, velvety and delectable and oh, so alluring . . .

A desperate feather of reason tickled the back of her neck. Startled, she opened her eyes.

The long mirror on the cabinet wall reflected her, stark and pale in her white chemise. Her reddened eyes were demented. She breathed deep, shuddering, sweating, the fever sprinting madly under her skin, a dread curse she couldn't escape.

She shouldn't. She mustn't.

But she had to.

She squeezed her eyes shut against the fire's glare and tipped the flask to her lips.

Molten gold, rolling down her throat. Thick salt stung her tongue, coated the inside of her mouth, sickening yet delicious. Thirst ripped her raw, and she gulped, mouthful on mouthful . . .

Fire erupted in her guts, sweeter than any caress. She groaned in pure abandon. Spreading outwards through her belly, tingling along her limbs, a shivering shock wave of delight . . .

Agony, hacking every nerve ragged. Muscles contorting, bones twisting, red mist descending like poison, it's torture, it's being dragged apart on the rack in some rat-infested Tower chamber, beyond endurance, no one can take this, no one. A scream crawls up her throat, she's yelling, *I'm yelling*, she's clawing at her face but it's *my* face, *my* hands, *my* nails catching in her hair. We throw our heads back, arching our spine, joints grating, our muscles shudder and squeal and thrash one final time . . .

Suddenly, the pain falls silent. The red mist dissolves . . . and in the mirror, dark eyes flash wicked and alive with intent.

Sharp intelligent face, crooked seducer's smile, a body with lush, dangerous curves. Long curly hair tumbles over the white chemise, no longer fine and blond but dark, lustrous mahogany.

And here I stand.

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