

# LITTLE DEATHS

BY

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**Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill  
To pangs of nature, sins of will  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;**

**Behold, we know not anything;  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last – far off – at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring.**

**So runs my dream: but what am I?  
An infant crying in the night:  
An infant crying for the light:  
And with no language but a cry.**

**– Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, LIV**

## CHAPTER ONE

Lady Alicia Fairhaven lay decorously in a quickly congealing pool of her own blood. A creature of habit, she was found as she often was at daybreak, in the morning-room of her neoclassical West End townhouse, the modish decor of which she had personally supervised with her usual taste and flair. This morning, however, Lady Alicia was dead, her hands folded modestly over the wound under her left breast, as if she were embarrassed by the gaping exposure of flesh, muscle and sinews for all the world to see. Her pale blonde hair, not a strand of which appeared in disarray, was still capable of catching the blanched early morning sunlight, and her marble skin was only made more perfect by the loss of blood. The skirts of her layered gown, scattered with tinsel so that she seemed to glitter and glow, were neatly aligned and unwrinkled, suggesting that her assailant had regretted the necessity of marring such a comely lady and had tried to reduce the peripheral damage.

It was all too decorous, in the captious opinion of Detective Inspector Simon Wise of the H Division of the Metropolitan Police. As a Whitechapel detective, Wise had initially been puzzled by his assignment to such a high society murder. However, he quickly realized there would be complex political ramifications to consider and the Force wanted an outsider involved. If the case was successful, it would redound well on the often-maligned branch. If, God forbid, things went badly, well, what could you expect from a Whitechapel bobby. To Wise, at this point, it was a matter of supreme indifference whether he investigated a death in the aristocracy or a gang's protection

racket. He was, however, glad Superintendent Walker had permitted him to bring his trusted sergeant and a handful of constables. He needed men on whom he could rely, now more than ever.

As he surveyed the scene, instinctively looking for unintentional residue of the crime, Inspector Wise felt himself becoming increasingly unsettled. It was simply too pristine, too *aristocratic* a demise. Simon Wise had seen enough violent and messy death in his life to know that the upper classes were in no way exempt from its grasp. Yet in this case, the immaculate surroundings, even the corpse herself, seemed to have successfully eluded the disordered consequences of dying, so that only its barest, most elegant intimations remained.

Walking over to the mantelpiece, Inspector Wise absentmindedly glanced at the carefully arranged miscellany, adorable porcelain cherubs, carved oriental boxes, ornately framed photographs of unsmiling, perfect children. Briefly, he wondered whether, in the tangled scheme of the lives and deaths of this family, each item in the room was a kind of symbol, perhaps of Piety, Affection, even Guilt, as in a pre-Raphaelite painting, that might point him in the direction of solving this crime, if only he could unlock their secrets. Indeed, he mused that the entire composition had such an aesthetic aspect that it seemed he was not looking at murder so much as a painting of murder.

A young, uniformed constable strode by. When he saw Inspector Wise, he saluted awkwardly, then hastily shoved his hands in his pockets. The Inspector nodded, and, despite the gravity of their surroundings, smiled slightly. He knew that among his men he was legendary for requiring perfect preservation of the crime scene. He also knew that in the minds of these same men, often no more than mere boys newly arrived

in London from the countryside, this need sometimes seemed to border on obsession. Once, rumor had it, he had docked a sergeant a week's pay simply because the man had picked up an overturned lamp. Now, commonsense told most members of the force that whether a lamp was horizontal or vertical was not going to shed much light – as the self-styled comedian of the group expressed it– on the identity of the culprit. Apparently, this lad, Brown was it, was taking no chances.

Inspector Wise had sent his ranking officer, Sergeant Thomas Murdoch, to begin inquiries at the “bottom” of the house, as Murdoch liked to say. The sergeant's rough, yet cheerful manner with the servants was often effective in eliciting the carelessly guarded downstairs secret. Having befriended Mrs. Shaw, the housekeeper, by praising the cup of tea she offered, Murdoch was in his element. He knew she held the keys not only to the household but to organizing an orderly interviewing of the staff. Murdoch liked the downstairs world, indeed felt at home there. His own wife Nancy had once been a washerwoman in one of the big London houses, then a hospital aide before the desire to tend the sick and wounded twenty years ago led her to a field hospital at Balaclava, where she nursed a young soldier stricken with cholera back to health and love. Thinking of Nancy's plump and somewhat reddened arms, Murdoch smiled. Yes, he liked downstairs.

The presumably grieving family was sequestered, the husband, Sir Gregory Fairhaven, fuming in the library, the children with their weeping nanny in the upstairs schoolroom. As far as Murdoch was concerned, they could stay there, until the Detective Inspector saw fit to deal with them. At this usually reassuring thought, however, Murdoch noticed a slight unease. No telling how the Inspector would handle them.

There were still flashes of his old self, to be sure, but like as not he might simply gaze at them impassively, say nothing at all, and slam the door. Murdoch knew that the social standing of this genteel corpse, wife of a baronet who was also a Member of Parliament, made it imperative that no stone be left unturned in the case. There would be none of the usual concerns about limited budgets or wasted man-hours. He could not repress a grin of anticipation that at last they had a crime that might restore the Inspector to his rightful reputation. Murdoch was determined that no one should botch it, least of all the Inspector himself.

While Murdoch felt gleeful at the prospects ahead, Inspector Wise felt only dispirited. He was glad to be located at the eye of the storm, where stillness seemed intentional. In fact, although he could not prevent his well-trained mind from automatically proceeding through its investigative paces, seeking another meteorological metaphor, he felt as if he were submerged under water. He was perplexed when he spoke that his words did not bubble out of his mouth as they rose to the surface.

These were not new feelings, although those loyal to him attempted to ignore them and Thomas, God bless him, protected his every step, or misstep, much as he had in the Crimea. But since the death of his wife Rachel in childbirth three years ago - easy to remember, as though he could ever forget, because it coincided with the baby's inexorable birthdays, each one taking him farther and farther from his beloved -- Simon had become increasingly detached from his work, indeed from life itself. Perhaps he *was* at the bottom of the sea.

What did it matter? he wondered. He had tried to do his part to stand fast against the forces of evil and chaos, in the words of his religion, to contribute a little something

to *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world. Yet in the end it all seemed meaningless. The good, the innocent, the guiltless proceeded to suffer and die at an appalling pace, and usually he was powerless to stop them. In his own home, senseless, cruel death had slipped in and stolen what was most precious to him. Faced with Rachel's agonal breaths, his best efforts to resist death's greedy grasp had been useless, and worse than useless. So if one more aristocratic lady had been murdered, what did that matter really? He had lost Rachel, and that was the ultimate injustice.

Nevertheless, despite these morbid thoughts, the Inspector felt an inkling of compassion for the corpse, this Lady Fairhaven who lay so close to him in such apparent serenity. Simon knew that, although death could be a blessing, the final gift, this was rarely the case in the deaths he saw. No, these were usually brutal, violent ends, full of terror and wretchedness, and Lady Fairhaven's must have been no different. She looked beautiful now, but she must have suffered shock and frightful dread, like any other murder victim, must have frantically tried at least for a moment or two to forestall her inevitable demise. The tidiness of the crime scene made a mockery of the torment of Lady Fairhaven's last moments, and Simon Wise found himself resenting the person who, even in the act of murder, wanted to pretend it made sense, and had meaning. Gazing at the corpse, Simon Wise knew with certainty that the murderer must have tidied the body post-assault.

## CHAPTER TWO

“Well, Thomas, what do you make of it?” Simon Wise asked as his sergeant entered the sitting room. They had both served in the Crimea, although in different regiments, and together had once been sergeants under the exacting but gruffly compassionate Inspector Turner. In a certain way, they had been good comrades. Simon Wise’s elevation seven years ago to the rank of inspector, despite his being a Jew, remained stuck in Murdoch’s craw, although in his heart the Scotsman knew it was not only his own lack of ready literacy that had held him back from advancement. Still, Murdoch was scrupulous about acknowledging the Inspector’s authority, especially in front of the other men. And Wise was careful to acknowledge his sergeant’s skills whenever possible.

“A burglary, sir?” The remnants of his Scottish burr were still present in Murdoch’s growling bass, despite the years in London. “Looks like things were messed up a bit, desk drawers pulled open, lamp knocked over, chair toppled. Might be some valuables missing.”

The Inspector could see Constable Brown, hovering too conspicuously at the door of the sitting-room, cringe at the mention of a lamp. Simon Wise glanced about him. It was a lovely room that would have made Rachel gasp with delight, the wallpaper bright yellows and greens, the furniture elegant yet comfortable, a rich Turkey rug covering the floor. In addition to the tell-tale lamp, a delicate escritoire in one corner was covered with scattered papers. An overstuffed armchair lay on its back, its curved legs reminding Simon Wise of a large dog playing dead in the hopes of a biscuit. Shards of glass from a broken pane in the French doors leading to the garden, artfully scattered in an expanding semi-circle, caught the faint morning light.



“Perhaps, Thomas. Still, look at the unnatural way her hands are folded. And it almost appears as if the skirts of her gown have been rearranged to mask any sign of unsightly blood from the wound.”

Murdoch reddened slightly. He hated to miss anything. Normally the Inspector would have dealt more tenderly with him, but now Wise felt annoyance. Why couldn't other people see what was right before their noses, so he wouldn't have to bother? All he wanted to do was sleep.

“Did any of the servants hear noises? Thumps, bumps, sounds of things crashing to the floor?” Interpreting Murdoch's silence as negation, Inspector Wise went on. “Take a close look. These objects were placed on the floor, not knocked over in a struggle. The only struggle that took place was in the killer's imagination.” He frowned in Murdoch's direction, then relented. After all, what did it matter? Burglary and incidental killing or purposeful murder disguised as robbery, it all boiled down to the same thing. Dead was dead.

Murdoch was about to reply, when he heard a voice from an unexpected and, as he thought, foolish quarter. Although made anxious by the reference to the lamp, Constable Brown, involved in his first murder case, vacillated only a moment before opening his mouth. He didn't want to make a blunder, but he did keenly want to impress Inspector Wise, who held the young man's future in his finely sculpted hands.

“Sir,” he ventured, “the glass pane is shattered in the French doors leading to the garden. Doesn't it look as though someone broke in that way?”

. “And your name would be?” Because of their long history, the Inspector was willing to give Murdoch a little leeway. But he did not intend to give any leeway at all to

this callow upstart. He rarely indulged his sarcastic streak, especially with subordinates, but suddenly he felt overwhelmed by the pointlessness of it all. Of course, he knew the fellow's name perfectly well, but he wanted him to squirm just a little.

“Brown, sir. William Benjamin Brown.”

“Very well, William Benjamin Brown. In fact, you are precisely correct.” A small, hopeful smile started across the constable's lips, only to fade with the Inspector's next onslaught. “It *looks* as though someone broke the glass to force an entry. But if you *look* closely, you will see the glass has shattered outward, not inward, suggesting a blow from the inside of the room. More likely the glass was broken later, perhaps after the crime itself occurred, to give the appearance of forced entry. And, in addition to the doorhandle lock, you should also pay attention to a latch at the top of the door that, had it been drawn, would have been impossible for a thief to free, unless he had an arm as long and as flexible as a rubber hose.” Wise looked at Murdoch inquiringly.

“Indeed so, sir. Mrs. Shaw, the housekeeper, confirms that both locks in the garden door were set and bolted before the servants retired. One of the parlor maids, whose job it is to check, told her so specifically.”

The Inspector went on mercilessly. “If you use your eyes to *see*, Constable William Benjamin Brown, rather than merely to *look*, you will save yourself considerable wasted energy.” As soon as he uttered the words, Wise recognized the futility of this vindictiveness. The constable seemed to shrink into himself. The Inspector felt ashamed.

“Never mind, Brown. Close observation, attention to detail, is what makes a good policeman, but it doesn't happen overnight. You'll get the hang of it soon enough.” Turning to Murdoch, he added, “Show our young friend here how to cast those footprints

in the garden.” The room’s French doors opened onto a small but immaculate area of shrubbery, no doubt filled with sedate color in spring, but now, with the approach of winter, somber and dark.

Murdoch nodded, but inwardly he groaned. Inspector Wise was a great fan of the emerging science of investigative technologies, such as plaster of Paris molds, and crime scene photography. Personally, Murdoch himself put little store in such gimmickry, especially casting. The casts generally turned out to be of poor quality, and it required great skill to prepare them without breaking or losing the distinguishing marks left by a shoe sole. Besides, if anything at all could be identified, they would probably be the prints of the gardener, a parlor maid, or Lady Fairhaven herself.

When his two subordinates left, Simon Wise wandered over to Lady Fairhaven’s writing table, inspecting it with reluctant curiosity. As Murdoch observed, the desk had been riffled through, with papers scattered and drawers hanging open like hungry mouths. He looked through the contents but could find nothing of interest. Then he noticed a day calendar swept carelessly beneath the table. Casting a glance over it, the Inspector saw what he considered to be the usual notations – an appointment with a dressmaker, a luncheon engagement, a meeting with a public school headmaster. An entry for later that afternoon, however, caught his eye.

“Ever heard of Langham Place, Thomas?” Inspector Wise inquired, as the sergeant returned splattered with plaster.

“Can’t say that I have, sir,” Murdoch replied with an injured air. He did not like to be dirty, especially when in uniform.

The name struck a premonition of significance with Wise, but he could not place it. In the old days, he would have flogged his memory till the connection was made. Now it seemed too much bother. He knew the address. He would drop by himself.

“Never mind. I’ll go round on my own. Round up Maximus, would you? We need to immortalize this picture.”

“Already on his way, sir,” Murdoch responded with alacrity, glad to show he was ahead of his superior in some respect.

Inspector Wise often gave thanks for whatever divine intervention or quirk of fate had sent him Theodore Maximus, a German émigré who taught at London University. Maximus was a mathematical genius who could entrance children and adults alike by making up ingenious numerical puzzles on the spot. Wise had once witnessed a remarkable feat with his own brood, when Maximus had joined them once for a rare Sunday afternoon tea. To amuse the fractious children, the professor had written a number on a piece of paper, and handed it to Naomi, at the time Simon’s youngest daughter, and told her to guard it carefully. Next, he wrote another figure on a separate piece of paper and asked Deborah to put down any four figures she liked beneath this number. Intrigued, she interrupted her daydreaming long enough to comply. The professor added another four figures under hers, and David wrote yet another line. Maximus contributed a final line. He then asked Sarah, David’s twin sister who was good at sums, to add the columns, which she correctly did, getting a total that of course turned out to be the answer written on the original paper.

The older girls, Rebecca and Miriam, wanted to know the secret so that they could impress their friends. Rachel, pregnant and smiling, watched her family contentedly.

Wise's father, Zadok, who had been living with the family since the death of his wife from a brain fever fifteen years ago, reminded the children that the German mathematician Carl Jacobi once averred, "Mathematics honors the human mind." None of them seemed particularly riveted by this information, instead clustering around Maximus to beg another trick. Simon Wise was as astonished as his children. It was Miss Gelbstein, Rachel's live-in cousin, who solved the riddle, noting matter-of-factly that she too had once studied mathematics, although at the University of Zurich since universities in her native Germany did not allow women to matriculate.

In addition to his arithmetic predilections, Maximus was also proficient in the popular art of photography and supplemented his meager professorial income by composing artistic images of people in high society and their children. He and Inspector Wise had become acquainted several years ago through the appallingly brutal murder of one of the professor's students. Now, in gratitude for Wise's diligence on that case, he sometimes volunteered as the Inspector's official photographer.

In actuality as the Inspector, after numerous, fruitless altercations on the subject with Superintendent Robert Walker well knew, there was nothing whatsoever "official" about the practice of photographing the environs of a crime. It was not part of standard police procedure, and was considered by Wise's superior an unnecessary expenditure of resources. But to Wise, the photography was essential. Using a quintessentially English sporting analogy, he said it leveled the playing field. One great advantage the criminal maintained was that his handiwork was evaporative. Like ether, little by little it dissolved in time and space, overtaken by the business of living. Each dissolution moved the perpetrator further beyond the grasp of justice. The photograph, with its capacity for

enlargement, turned a penetrating, microscopic eye on the act of evil, and froze it in time forever. No more evanescent deed, hidden by the inexorable motion of the world. Instead, the crime, if not the criminal, was already caught. In pondering such photographs, Simon Wise felt at times he could almost glimpse the shadow of the criminal himself within their depths.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

Within a surprisingly short amount of time, which made Wise doubly repentant for his sharp tone with Murdoch, Maximus arrived and began setting up his equipment. It was a laborious and time-consuming procedure that often drove the living to distraction. Fortunately, the dead were much more accommodating. Nevertheless, the Inspector noticed that Maximus seemed pale, and sweat hung on his upper lip. He was mystified. The professor was usually not so squeamish.

“Are you unwell, Maximus?” Theodore Maximus shook his head, then altered the curtains until the feeble November sun shone directly on the corpse. Lady Fairhaven was transfused with light, so that she appeared almost to pulsate. Wise wondered if this were what the resurrection of the dead looked like. Then he wondered if Christians resurrected differently than Jews.

At that moment, the door to the main house flung open, and Sir Gregory Fairhaven, the husband of the deceased yet glittering corpse, entered the room, apologetically trailed by the constable assigned to the library, who mumbled, “I’m sorry, Inspector. His lordship insisted, said he warn’t goin’ to wait no longer.” Sir Gregory was

a large, blond, rawboned man of perhaps forty-five or six, elegantly but carelessly attired with a fashionable cravat askew around his neck. Now his face was flushed, and he looked angrily about him.

“What’s the meaning of this? Who’s in charge here?” Wise hoped briefly that someone else might reply. Already he did not like this man. Then, with an imperceptible sigh, he stepped forward.

“Detective Inspector Simon Wise, Sir Gregory.”

“I don’t give a good goddamn who you are. What are you doing to my wife?”

“We are photographing the body as evidence,” Wise explained, wishing he were at home in bed.

“I won’t allow it. Stop at once,” the baronet commanded Maximus, who looked flustered but continued working. To interrupt now would mean the waste of significant effort and supplies.

“I will not have this violation. I won’t permit it.” Sir Gregory moved surprisingly quickly for a large man and grabbed Professor Maximus by the arm so violently that the camera fell from his grasp.

Wise stepped forward equally quickly. “Let him go.” Sir Gregory was not used to taking orders from anyone, least of all someone who was no better than a servant, but something in the Inspector’s tone caused him to release his hold on the astonished professor. The paralyzing despair that so often engulfed Simon Wise these days receded for the moment, as he concentrated his energies on staring down the baronet. “We mean no disrespect to your wife, Sir Gregory, but you must permit us to get on with our work. I will join you in the library momentarily.”

Sir Gregory held himself erect. He had seen military service and knew the importance of bearing in a potentially humiliating situation. He avoided looking at the still lovely body of his wife. Instead, he glared back at the policeman. “I expect our discussion will be brief. My children are waiting.” He thought with satisfaction that he had turned the tables on this uppity fellow, exchanging order for order, blow for blow. Class counted for something after all.

Watching the baronet make his exit, Wise remembered that Sir Gregory too had served in the Crimea. He struck Wise as the kind of officer he had despised, sending men into hopeless conflicts, literally walking over the bodies of people like himself and Murdoch, stinking foot-soldiers dead from wounds or disease, covered with mud and filth, and not thinking twice about it. The Inspector felt his stomach muscles tightening. They were not in the Crimea now.

After a suitable pause, which gave everyone a chance to collect themselves, Wise turned to Murdoch, who had watched the exchange with satisfaction. This was something like the old Inspector.

“Be sure you have that cocky young constable, Brown, guard the sitting room and garden until it has all been thoroughly gone over. Make sure he understands no one - not the baronet, not the butler – is to touch anything until we are quite finished.” Murdoch nodded his approval and left.

Alone in the painterly chaos of the room, the Inspector looked at the body again. The fitful rain had paused for the time being and the pale sun filtering in through the doors caught motes of dust in motion around the corpse, bathing Lady Alicia in a silent, glistening powder. Her gown was low-cut, and the skin of her shoulders seemed



translucent. It was on a shimmering, unreal morning such as this that Rachel, his wife, had died just three years ago. But there the similarity ceased.

Unwillingly, Simon remembered the screams, the moans, the terror, the blood. Everyone in the house had panicked on that day, the rooted center of their world was tearing apart, but the blood had all been Rachel's. In his memory, a bright red filter distilled all the images of those moments, so that they were forever saturated with blood. He saw Dr. Baumgarten bending over Rachel as she lay contorted in sanguineous sheets, then looking up with a miserable, helpless expression. He could hear the doctor's words, seemingly drenched in gore as well. "I can't help her, Simon. She's hemorrhaging." Hannah, who never wept on principle because she judged it a fatal sign of weakness, watched as Simon watched his wife die. She moved efficiently but uselessly about the bed, tears running ignored down her cheeks. The midwife, Mrs. Cowen, who had delivered their seven other children without incident, held Rachel's hand and sobbed, leaving fingerprints of blood on the coverlet.

Ushered peremptorily out of the room, Simon could still hear Rachel begging for chloroform. Although at the moment of death, the religious Jew is supposed to have the *Shema*, the declaration of God's unity, on his lips, when Rachel died, there were nothing but screams. Rebecca, his eldest, hovered outside the door, pleading to be allowed to enter, and he had shouted at her, meaninglessly, to mind her brother and sisters. As a contrapuntal backdrop to the chaos of dying came the frail cries of the new child.

Another child. Another girl. Eight children. Even in these times, a fair number, and Simon had heard that young couples at all levels of society were beginning to want smaller families. Once, after her fourth confinement, he jokingly called his wife Mother

Rachel, and predicted an even dozen offspring for them. She replied tartly that if the Queen could produce twelve, then why not the wife of a Metropolitan Police Force Detective Inspector? He had hugged her, laughing, happy, relishing the smell of her thick, curly dark hair, which he still loved playing with after she removed her matron's polished black wig when they retired each night.

Of course, on that day of birth and death, they had not yet known that the child was damaged. After Rachel was gone, truly gone, and the agonizing screams had been replaced by a soft harmonious sobbing of the various women who had somehow crowded into the already cramped house, Simon had thought to ask, dully, about the child. Dr. Baumgarten was washing his forearms in a basin, pouring water from the pitcher with a carefully controlled motion in a futile effort to bring back some sense of order after the horrific chaos of the last six hours.

"Simon," he said, at first evading the Inspector's question, "women die in childbirth. Approximately one in two hundred. No one is immune. You both knew it was a risk. Each time, it is a risk."

Inspector Wise turned savagely on his friend. "Don't throw your facts and figures at me, Elias. Rachel was my wife." He closed his eyes and breathed deeply, trying to compose himself. "What about the child?" He could not bring himself to utter her name, although Rachel had carefully chosen it weeks before in honor of Simon's deceased grandmother.

The doctor paused for a moment in his task. "Of course, it's a girl," he'd said, focusing on his arms covered in lather, the thick black hairs slicked down like recalcitrant strands of wire.

"Damn it, Elias, I know that!" said Inspector Wise, who rarely used profanity.

"There are some signs," Dr. Baumgarten mumbled evasively.

"What do you mean, signs?"

"Let us not be hasty, Simon. There is nothing to be done now in any case. Time will tell. You need to tend to the rest of your family." And then the doctor, who was not a religious man, murmured the ancient Hebrew blessing, "Blessed art Thou who variest the creatures."

Within three months, time had indeed told its tale to the Wise family, and they understood the extent to which the variety of God's creatures had been visited upon them. The slanting eyes, the flat nose, the creases in the hands, the lack of proper muscle tone meant only one inescapable fact. The Inspector's youngest daughter was a Mongoloid.

## CHAPTER FOUR

"Sir?" Sergeant Murdoch asked with an intonation that suggested it was not the first time he had made the query.

Inspector Wise shook himself free of the past. It did no good to dwell on events that could not be changed and could not be helped. No good at all.

"Yes, Thomas?"

"Sir Gregory Fairhaven is demanding that he speak with you, sir."

The Inspector nodded. If he felt any annoyance, he tried his best not to allow his face to show it. After all, the man had just lost his wife, and that was something Simon Wise understood. With measured steps, he walked to the library and knocked firmly.

“Enter,” came the baronet’s voice, strangely querulous, as though what had occurred was more than any decent fellow should have to contend with. Inspector Wise remembered the devastating depths of his own grief, his rage at Baumgarten for his incompetence (though in reality the man had done his best), at Rachel for deserting him, even at the Divine Master of the Universe in whom he was no longer sure he believed, and reflected that men grieve in different ways. He noticed with relief that Sir Gregory appeared in control of himself again. The baronet remained standing as the Inspector entered and did not invite him to sit.

“Let me be quite clear, Inspector. If even one of those photographs finds its way to the press, you will be sweeping horse manure from the gutters. That is not an idle threat.”

“I did not hear it as such, Sir Gregory. I assure you every precaution will be taken. I am simply trying to determine, through every means possible, what has happened here.”

"*What* has happened? This whole situation is beyond comprehension, damn it all. *How* can this have happened?" Sir Gregory sputtered to a stop, the remainder of his horror forever suspended between thought and utterance. Indeed, thought Wise, therein lies the rub. An event like the violent death of one’s wife was such a cataclysmic violation of the natural order of things, such a defiant laugh at the assumption of meaning and predictability in God's kingdom that it simply could not be comprehended. He felt a sudden burst of sympathy for the man. Through his tears and his fury, he himself had asked the same question. But he knew better than to try to address the baronet’s outburst on a philosophical level.

"We don't know yet, Sir Gregory," he replied respectfully. "As I said, that is what we need to determine."

"What is there left to determine? It must have been an intruder, a thief caught in the act," Sir Gregory continued in a peculiar, tight voice. "I heard your man say you'd found a footprint. Well, track down the miscreant!"

"We'll do all we can, Sir Gregory. At the moment it would help us a great deal if we could get a bit more information concerning..." he paused, about to refer to the body as Sir Gregory's wife but deciding this would sound too intimate. "...Lady Fairhaven," he concluded.

A faint moue of disgust distorted the baronet's bland, handsome features. Was there something else there? Inspector Wise considered him dispassionately. An image of himself wildly grabbing Rachel's sweat-covered, bloody body came unwelcome to his mind. His pleading cries to her filled his ears. He still felt a flush of mortification that he had not been able to conduct himself in a more dignified fashion in front of his children, Hannah, Dr. Baumgarten, and the assembled female onlookers. Perhaps one was not a baronet for nothing. Yet there seemed something cold and remote in Sir Gregory's reaction.

"Sir Gregory, you were not at home when Lady Fairhaven was attacked?" asked the Inspector.

"Lord, man, how could I have been?" exclaimed Sir Gregory with petulant irritation in his voice. "Do you think I would have permitted this kind of vicious assault on her ladyship?"

"Of course not, sir. I am merely trying to establish a chain of events." Inspector Wise was used to dealing with individuals from the upper classes who, while not hesitant to call upon the police with the most trivial complaints, barking dogs or traffic congestion, still betrayed a barely concealed contempt for them. This was, he supposed, because when all was said and done, even superintendents and inspectors were simply not their sort, no better than glorified minions.

"Why aren't you out looking for the burglar? You are wasting time here."

"Sir Gregory, several constables are scouring the surrounding streets even as we speak. I assure you no effort or expense will be spared in solving Lady Fairhaven's murder." The Inspector hoped that this reference to expenditure of resources would mollify Sir Gregory at least slightly, but it didn't seem to have the desired effect. Still, Wise pressed forward. "At this early stage of the investigation, we must make no assumptions. Although the culprit might well be a burglar, suppose this is not the case?"

Sir Gregory looked startled. "What are you suggesting?"

Beneath the baronet's forceful demeanor, Inspector Wise thought he seemed ill at ease, and decided to capitalize on his advantage. "I am not suggesting anything. But indulge me for a moment if you would, Sir Gregory. As you can see, the lock on the door to the garden has not been forced. The evidence of a struggle seems contrived. Further, and forgive me for the indelicate mention of the body of her ladyship, but it appears as though the murderer took the time to rearrange her dress and hands. All this argues against a random intruder. Also, look about the room. Do you notice anything missing?"

Sir Gregory did as he was asked but, in the Inspector's opinion, it was a superficial glance, not really taking anything in. "No, but of course I have not had a chance to make a complete inventory... perhaps later..."

"Precisely my point, sir. If you do find valuables taken, it will provide strong support to the intruder theory. Until then, we must gather all possible information, whether it appears immediately relevant or not."

"I see," replied the baronet, recovering his composure, although he did not look particularly illuminated. "Very...ah, scientific of you, I'm sure. Well, since you appear to feel you must make my whereabouts your business, I was in the City on affairs having to do with our country estate. Damnably inconvenient coming into town this time of year, I must say. Missing the hunting season, and a good bit of the shooting season too. Well, couldn't be helped." He appeared to weigh the various accumulating sorrows in his life, then resumed speaking. "One of the servants found Lady Fairhaven, and a messenger was dispatched post-haste to fetch me. Of course, I came directly."

"And that would be at what time, Sir Gregory?" Sergeant Murdoch was not one to be intimidated by the airs of a baronet, even if he was a Member of Parliament to boot.

"I arrived home at approximately eight o'clock. It took me a bit under an hour to come by carriage. The streets were damnably crowded even at that time."

The Inspector tried a different tack. "What can you tell us, Sir Gregory, about your wife's habits?"

"Habits? Habits?" The note of irritation returned. "How should I know? I don't keep track of how Lady Fairhaven spends her time," he continued, unconsciously referring to his wife in the present tense. "She occupies herself as does any other woman

of her birth and breeding, overseeing the management of the house and the education of her children, charitable works, social visits to acquaintances, that kind of thing. She shops, she makes calls, she writes letters. She often goes riding on Rotten Row early in the morning when we are in town. She loves to ride, you know. And she takes great pleasure in her little garden. She strolls about in it at all hours, even in winter, says it reminds her of our country home." After a moment he added more softly, "She was a fine woman, a fine woman."

"I'm sure she was, Sir Gregory." The Inspector tried to match his tone to the baronet's. "And today? How was Lady Fairhaven planning on spending her time?"

The conversation was interrupted by a high-pitched mewling sound. As if connected by an invisible thread, the three turned around as one, alarmed expressions in their eyes. In the doorway stood a blonde-haired girl of perhaps seven or eight, holding the hand of a smaller boy in an immaculate sailor suit.

"Mama, mama, mama," the boy whined monotonously, his eyes big with unshed tears.

Sir Gregory gazed at his children as if he had never seen them before. His carefully composed features suddenly crumpled.

"God. Oh God," he murmured. Then moving toward the small bodies, he clutched them in his arms, simultaneously crying out to the nursemaid, "For God's sake, Abigail, take them from here." Mortified, the hapless Abigail ushered the children out of the room, Sir Gregory following close behind.



In all the commotion, Inspector Wise realized that the baronet had neatly evaded the necessity of answering his question about Lady Fairhaven's activities. He wondered if this were mere convenience or connivance.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Shortly thereafter, Inspector Wise and Sergeant Murdoch departed the Fairhaven townhouse, leaving the enthusiastic Constable Brown on guard, determined to defend the perimeter of the crime scene with his life if necessary (Sergeant Murdoch had assured him drily that such devotion would very likely *not* be necessary). Nevertheless, a backward glance showed Constable Brown standing rigidly at attention, as if the defense of the Empire lay entirely in his hands. Although they could not have known it, into the minds of his two superior officers came the same awful, noble image of young soldiers holding the Thin Red Line, similarly courageous and foolhardy. Inspector Wise sometimes worried that the exclusive cult of physical hardiness, devotion to comrades, and love of country which seemed increasingly to define the notion of manliness these days was breeding a generation very good at taking orders, but not much else.

The day was typically gloomy, with a fine drizzle that could not be called rain making everything it touched sodden. Wise pondered on the irony that he, a lowly inspector out of the Whitechapel station, had become involved in a posh West End murder.

Around seven a.m. that morning, just as he was wolfing down a piece of buttered toast, dutifully sipping the scalding tea that Martha, the family's maid of all work, had prepared for him, a constable had knocked at the door.

"The Superintendent wants to see you, sir."

Wise was amused at the early hour of the summons. "What, now?" Superintendent Robert Walker was not known for being a lark. But the humor was lost on the fresh-faced constable, who looked as though he would be more comfortable behind a plough than in the dirty streets of London.

"He said I was to tell you immediately, sir. In his office."

A sense of urgency impelled Wise to hail a hansom, although he often enjoyed the walk. It being Saturday, on the ride over he wondered whether the Superintendent took special pleasure in profaning his Sabbath. Not that in his seventeen-year career on the Force Inspector Wise had ever objected to Saturday work. Indeed, Saturday was one of a policeman's busiest days. Yet he sometimes suspected that Walker resented him and tested him in ways he did not test others of similar rank and proven loyalty.

With his transportation immobilized momentarily between a four-wheeled Clarence and a flying dustman's cart, Wise first assured himself of his cabman's vocal capacity to prevail in this entanglement, then sat back and speculated as to what sins he might have committed to warrant a summons at what, for Superintendent Walker, must truly have seemed an ungodly hour. Was it the barroom brawl in Duck's Foot Lane where he had let the participants off with a warning? Or the young lord caught in flagrante delecto in Devil's Acre with not one but two underage boys? Perhaps there he

had pushed too hard, bringing full charges to the fury and humiliation of his noble relations.

On the other hand, it could simply be his failure to apprehend the latest set of swell mobs assumed to originate in the Ratcliff district that had begun to prey, and quite skillfully too he had to admit, on the respectable foot traffic about Westminster. Dressed as elegantly as any of their victims, and with the impeccable manners of a gentleman to match, they worked in teams, surrounding the target front and back. Once the victim was hemmed in, there would be pushing and jostling, a commonplace on the crowded London streets. As the pickpockets in front indignantly cried out not to press so closely, the thief's fob and vest pockets were quickly emptied, the trouser's and coat's pockets turned out. Before the poor man knew what had happened to him, the goods were passed along to other accomplices, so even if he confronted his assailants, a careful search produced nothing but an apology to an indignant gentleman. It was difficult to apprehend such criminals, and the Inspector thought ruefully that his failures as an officer of the Queen's peace sometimes appeared endless. Yet in fact his record was better than most, he knew. So why this unexpected meeting?

It was quickly apparent that, though Inspector Wise might feel keenly his own inadequacies, none of these were currently on the mind of the Superintendent, who appeared badly shaven, ruffled, and thoroughly out of sorts.

"Sit down, Wise," Superintendent Walker ordered shortly. He would much rather be returning to bed than embarking on a full day's labor. Besides, he did not really like this Jewish policeman, although he had to admit he knew his business.

"There's been a West End murder. Worse, a titled woman, Lady Alicia Fairhaven."

"Related to the MP?" Inspector Wise was startled. He could not understand what a murder in the most fashionable district of London could have to do with the Whitechapel station.

"His wife."

"Shocking, sir." Murder, of course, was shocking, although secretly Wise always found it curious that his superiors seemed to find upper-class murder so much more shocking than its lower-class counterpart.

"The Fairhavens have all the necessary trappings that make for importance - two carriages, large numbers of servants, plenty of land, a distinguished family, a title, and of course Sir Gregory being a consequential parliamentary voice." Superintendent Walker scowled. "All the necessary trappings to make a big headache for us." The Inspector said nothing.

"You might be wondering what you're doing here, Wise," the Superintendent said, feeling inexplicably peeved that Wise had not yet asked. Damned arrogant fellow!

"Whatever you wish to tell me, sir, I'm at your disposal." Privately, however, Inspector Wise had been asking himself this same question. The West End was far outside his jurisdiction.

Superintendent Walker rose from behind his mahogany desk and began to pace nervously. Despite the cold, Wise could see perspiration on his brow. "It's complicated, Wise. Damned complicated." He looked hopefully at the Inspector as though this intelligence might be sufficient. Wise returned his gaze expectantly.

Superintendent Walker exhaled noisily. "Apparently the baronet and Lady Fairhaven attended a ball last night. Sir Gregory decided to spend the night at his club, the Reform club," he added with distaste, favoring the Conservatives himself, "and Lady Fairhaven was escorted home by Mr. Abraham Rothstein." He looked meaningfully at Wise. "The banker," he added.

Wise nodded with sudden sardonic illumination. The Superintendent had said, "the banker," but what he really meant was "the Jew." "Your co-religionist." "A powerful man who will now be involved in a messy scandal." "A man we don't want to offend, but whom we have no idea how to deal with, since we are God-fearing Christians, and he is a Jew, highly respected, very wealthy, received in the best society, a 'rational Jew' distinguished from his primitive superstitious brethren, but still fundamentally a disturbing presence on our tidy little island." And the most absurd and troubling message of all: "You are only a poor police inspector. Rothstein hobnobs with the elite of the financial world, is hand in glove with Disraeli, is a confidant of the Prince of Wales, and does not blink at conducting confidential business for Whitehall. But scratch the surface and you're the same breed, a people apart. So deal with him. Find a way out of this embarrassment."

And if I fail, thought Wise, I am an oh-so-easy target. "Of course, no wonder things have not progressed. The investigating officer is a Jew of all things. These people stick together, they are more loyal to each other than they ever could be to England."

"The banker," Wise repeated.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

As soon as the Inspector approached Langham Place Circle, the throng of hats ranging from simple bonnets to imposing headdresses recalled to him its function as home to a group advocating equal rights for women. The National Society for Women's Suffrage, he thought they now called themselves, having changed their name from the more innocuous Kensington Society several years back. In fact, it seemed to Simon Wise that Hannah had even attended a meeting or two here and come home with her head filled with all sorts of ideas about the woman question, as she chose to refer to it. It was not unlikely – he had heard that the gathering encouraged involvement of women of all classes and religions and, although most of the attendees this evening appeared to be from the middle and upper strata of society, here and there Wise glimpsed someone more shabbily attired.

The Inspector lingered outside as long as he dared, made uncomfortable by such a multitude of females. In the fading light, they somehow suggested bees swarming at sunset, and he thought warily of potential stings. When he judged the time right, he ducked discreetly in the front door, only to bump into a small, dignified woman in a well-tailored dress of deep mauve, with a contrasting green half-jacket. Her eyebrows raised in a half-ironic, half-quizzical expression.

“Good evening, sir?” With only a slight inclination of her head, she made clear she wanted identification.

“Simon Wise, ma'am.”

“And I am Lady Gertrude Rothstein.” The Inspector immediately recognized the name. This fortuitous encounter might either help or hinder his mission.

“Mr. Wise,” continued Lady Gertrude, “our Society being opposed to bigotry and discrimination in whatever guise, we have no prohibition against the male of the species attending our humble meetings. Nevertheless, it is unusual to see a man here.” She looked at Wise inquiringly.

“Lady Rothstein, I am of course not incognizant of who you are, and of course who your husband is. I am honored to make your acquaintance, albeit in this somewhat unusual manner. As a matter of fact, ma’am, I am an inspector with the Metropolitan Police Force, and I am here as part of the investigation of the murder of Lady Alicia Fairhaven. Her calendar suggested she planned to be here this evening.” The Inspector waited to see the effect of his words on Lady Rothstein, but although a strange expression crossed her face, it was not shock.

“Indeed, I learned of Alicia’s death earlier today. I cannot adequately convey my horror and grief. Lady Alicia was an acquaintance of mine. In fact, I saw her just last night at a ball in honor of the Prince of Luxembourg, who happens to be in London at the moment. And yes, she was a member of our Society.”

“I wonder how it is that you already knew of Lady Fairhaven’s death, when there has been no public announcement as yet.”

The Inspector searched in vain for any sign of discomfiture. Lady Rothstein was not easily rattled. Immediately his conversation earlier that day with Superintendent Walker popped into his head. He thought it likely that was not the only conversation his usually late-sleeping superior had had this morning. “You alluded to my husband’s... prominence. He hears a great many things, from a great many sources, and by extension so do I.”

“I see. Lady Rothstein, you could oblige me greatly by telling me anything you know of Lady Fairhaven that might shed light on her death.”

“I would be most happy to do so, although indeed I wonder what any of us really knows about anyone else.” Again, Simon noticed the odd look. “However, at the moment, I have a meeting to conduct. Perhaps we can talk afterwards. You are more than welcome to stay.” Smiling in a way that conveyed challenge as well as invitation, Lady Rothstein made her way to the front of the room with an attractively confident gait. Simon slunk into a seat in the back row and tried to ignore the curious stares of the women in the adjoining aisle.

“Ladies,” began Lady Gertrude, when she had called the room to order, “we are here to discuss the unconscionable situation that has developed in Aldershot, yet another shocking outcome of the Contagious Diseases Acts.” A few women murmured “Hear, hear” in imitation of parliamentary procedure, while others looked puzzled. One raised her voice above the tumult. “What has happened, Lady Gertrude?”

“As you know, Aldershot is one of the regulated towns under the provisions of the Contagious Diseases Acts. All prostitutes residing there must be registered and regularly inspected, supposedly in an effort to control diseases that are transmitted...” here Lady Gertrude stopped for a moment, then forged bravely on. “...through intimate contact. Mrs. Percy, a respected actress and widow who resided in that town, somehow earned the enmity of the local police, who took it into their heads to accuse both her and her young daughter of prostitution. With no real evidence, as far as can be determined, they demanded that Mrs. Percy and her daughter register as... ah, ladies of the night... and forced them to submit to medical examination. When Mrs. Percy attempted to appeal her



case, she was rejected.” Lady Gertrude paused, and her pleasant, intelligent face took on a look of great seriousness. “To draw attention to their plight, which she apparently felt to be hopeless, Mrs. Percy has committed suicide.”

There was a horrified murmur. Someone gasped audibly, “Suicide is a sin!”

Lady Gertrude turned in the direction of the gasp. “When we have not lived another’s life,” she said calmly but severely, “perhaps we should keep our certainties to ourselves and rely instead on God’s mercy.” After an abashed silence, a tall, heavysset woman in a severe black dress rose to her feet. The absence of aitches emphasized her Cockney accent.

“And the govmint says h’it’s only protectin’ our morality. Wot they’re really about is persecutin’ poor women which is just tryin’ to survive, while as usual lettin’ the men get off scot-free.” A few of the better-dressed women exchanged glances, apparently disapproving the boldness of the speaker, but there were also nodding heads and more cries of “Hear, hear.”

Wise knew that the Contagious Diseases Acts was an extremely controversial piece of legislation. Many people, appalled by the decline in public morality, applauded the effort to contain prostitution, especially in military towns such as Aldershot, where large numbers of soldiers were stationed. However, radical politicians and women’s groups such as the NSWWS pointed out that the only ones penalized by the Acts were women, while the men who freely availed themselves of the prostitutes’ services were not held accountable. This double standard, they argued, did nothing to advance public morality, but simply perpetuated a system that unfairly discriminated against women. Although the Inspector did not generally approve of the suffragists, in this case he agreed

that the Acts were bad law. They brought dishonor on the government that passed them and on the police who enforced them.

Later, as the women filed out, hats bobbing enthusiastically, Lady Gertrude approached. "We can talk in the foyer for a few minutes, Inspector Wise. Then I must return home. Please tell me what you can about what has happened to Lady Fairhaven."

"We know that she was murdered – brutally – but we are at a loss for a motive." Wise watched Lady Rothstein closely. She did not betray the avaricious delight in the details of death that so often materialized in those peripherally involved in crime but, unless he was mistaken, she appeared somewhat guarded.

"I suppose I assumed it must have been a burglary gone awry, a motiveless killing so to speak."

"It is possible, but we think it unlikely. The evidence points in other directions."

Lady Gertrude considered the Inspector a moment before replying. "I was not intimate with Lady Alicia, but we were involved in several activities together: The Ladies Sanitary Association, which attempts to teach rudiments of hygiene and diet to the poor in order to help them raise healthy children. The Women's Union of the Church of England Temperance Society, dedicated to saving unfortunate women from the evils of drink, especially laundresses and barmaids for whom alcohol is an occupational hazard. The Institute for Research into the Deformities of Children, with the goal of improving the fate of children with various deficiencies. And, as you no doubt gathered this evening, the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts. All perfectly respectable, if not equally popular, I assure you."

Simon Wise did not really approve of such mobilizing and politicking on the part of women, especially married women. It was all very well when they spent Sunday afternoons distributing baskets of food to the deserving poor. Rachel had always engaged in *tzedakkah*, charitable acts, not only within the Jewish community, but toward Gentile poor as well. He admired and respected her for it. But women speaking in public, interfering with the political process, even demanding a *voice* in government seemed brash and unwomanly. Women had no business pretending they were men. He reflected sourly that Hannah was much too enamored of such radicalism, and he worried she would adversely influence his young daughters.

“I wonder you have the time.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN

If Lady Gertrude heard the disapproval in his voice, she gave no notice. "You may not realize it, Inspector, but women of my class can become quite bored. It is more and more the case that the inability to do anything useful is the distinguishing sign of a lady. If one is of a flirtatious mind, one can ward off dullness with the occasional intrigue. Otherwise, the only possible outlet for one's energies is the rehabilitation of the deserving poor and downtrodden. It is a social constraint that forces goodness on many of us."

“And do you think all of this agitating serves any useful purpose?” Inspector Wise had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being diverted from the main thrust of

his interview, but he could not help himself. He wanted to hear more about this woman's ideas. Perhaps it would improve his understanding of Lady Fairhaven.

"To be perfectly honest, Inspector, I have my doubts about the effectiveness of these voluntary organizations. They are supposed to counteract the centrifugal effects of competitive individualism, but I think the lower classes tolerate our efforts at best, and do not see them as material to their lives. From what I have heard, working-class associations, the friendly societies, the building clubs accomplish a great deal more. And why?" For a moment, Lady Gertrude delayed answering her own question, a mischievous glint in her eyes. Her former hesitation had vanished. She seemed to Wise completely in her element. "I may sound like a disciple of Robert Owen, but I suspect it is because they stress the collective and communal, rather than attempting to affix individual blame and identify personal failings, as we upper-class do so well... toward the poor, that is."

Inspector Wise was astonished to hear such radical views espoused by a prominent member of high society. Lady Gertrude continued, blithely ignoring his stunned silence.

"Consider our temperance societies if you will. We promote temperance as the primary solution for poverty and misery. But it is something of a chicken-and-egg situation, do you not think? In other words, perhaps it is more likely poverty and misery that compel the poor to drink and, if we solved their suffering, they would not find it so necessary to drown themselves in alcohol."

Wise, who had spent a good deal of his professional career clearing poor drunks out of the paths of wealthy drunks, was startled but intrigued. Since the Crimea, he had

not touched liquor, except a swallow or two of Sabbath wine. His teetotaling had contributed to his already well-established reputation on the Force as an outsider and a "serious stick," but he had seen drink do too much damage to enjoy even a small indulgence. Yet here was Lady Rothstein espousing the point of view, certainly unusual in someone of the leisure class, that drink was the consequence rather than the cause of working-class misery. Again, he had the uneasy feeling that she had skillfully sidestepped his queries.

Lady Gertrude smiled sweetly, as though reading his mind. "And now that I have made you an unwilling audience to my militant views, I have said quite enough. Perhaps I have dared to disclose my thinking because we share a common heritage which places us always in the role of gadfly, no matter how much we seem to have achieved in our adopted society." The reference to their shared Jewishness did not escape Wise, although he felt he had very little in common with this incredibly wealthy, powerful woman. He wondered too at Lady Rothstein's certainty regarding his religion. No doubt he could thank the Superintendent for this as well. He suspected that Lady Rothstein was staking a claim, however subtle, on his sympathies, in the eventuality that it would be useful to her later. He decided he had better plunge ahead, before the opportunity for an interrogation drifted away in the clouds of Lady Rothstein's philosophical patter.

"What is Sir Gregory like?"

"He is a very typical upper-class Englishman, I believe, a true country gentleman. He feels more at home at his club than his home, he is more comfortable with men than with women, and when he can't be out riding, hunting, or betting, he likes to talk about horses, hounds, and gambling. It is of the greatest interest to him whether a ferret or a dog

can kill more rats. I believe he belongs to several card clubs in the City - the Baldwin, the Cavendish. He wins a little, loses more, but pays his debts. At bottom, he is the kind of person who believes that all time not spent in the hunt is time wasted.

"He generally brought the family to town around Christmas to prepare for the opening of Parliament. This year, some dreadfully boring business affairs required him to remove his establishment at the end of October, so that he is missing a good part of the partridge season, much of the pheasant season, and virtually all of the fox-hunting season. This necessity has put him in a permanently bad mood since their arrival."

"I confess I am astonished that, as the wife of an MP, even a Liberal one, Lady Fairhaven could risk association with such radicalism as is espoused at Langham Circle."

"Alicia was not completely dependent on her husband. She had her own money and, within reason, could support what projects she chose. Nevertheless, you are correct that this was a source of friction between them."

"Earlier you mentioned intrigue as a hobby of the rich, Lady Rothstein. Was this a past-time that attracted Sir Gregory's wife?"

Lady Gertrude's intelligent brown eyes gazed steadily at the Inspector. "Alicia was a vibrant, intelligent woman. She had great curiosity for the world beyond her narrow social stratum. She was lovely as well, and attractive to men, although perhaps that is not something you could determine from the state in which you found her." Wise saw an indefinable sadness in Lady Rothstein's eyes, and wondered whether it was envy for the unique loveliness that Lady Fairhaven possessed, a quality that for all her intelligence and poise the baroness did not; or grief at its wanton destruction.

“Yes, she flirted with some of the men whose acquaintance she made through her charitable activities... and they weren't all lords and titled nobility either. Usually, they were a great deal more stimulating. That's what fascinated Alicia... it wasn't romance, it was encountering people from other walks of life, industrialists, academics, explorers, reformers, people who lived interesting lives, and had interesting thoughts. Sometimes they reciprocated her attentions. Besides, it wasn't as though Alicia was jumping in and out of bed with men.” Lady Gertrude paused to appreciate the Inspector's shocked expression at her forthright vocabulary. “She chose her relationships carefully, and most of them never went beyond harmless coquetry.”

“And just how did Sir Gregory view his wife's romantic entanglements?” The latitude extended to the sexual peccadilloes of gentlemen did not usually hold for their wives.

"Gregory respected Alicia, or at least he appeared to. I think he recognized that she was more intelligent than he was. He himself took his sensual pleasures elsewhere, so he really had nothing to complain about. I have heard gossip that Sir Gregory has a dollymop stashed away somewhere, although of course it was not the sort of thing Alicia would ever mention to me. Alicia didn't seem to mind. She had three beautiful children, and I know she feared frequent confinements. Death in childbirth is a risk some women do not entertain lightly." Lady Gertrude thought she saw a strange expression cross the Inspector's face, but before she could be certain, it vanished.

"I find it difficult to believe that a husband – or wife - could take the affairs of a spouse so lightly," the Inspector said, wondering whether, had he "taken his pleasures elsewhere," Rachel would still be alive.

"I understand that, Inspector. But most of us are forced to make compromises in life that we had no idea could ever be made. Do you not agree?" Again, Wise saw a enigmatic look in her eyes. She looked at him deeply, then attempted a small laugh. "Really, Inspector, the idea of Sir Gregory committing violence against Alicia over a love affair seems so... so out of character. I can't see Gregory murdering Alicia in some sort of jealous rage. He is simply not a passionate person." Thinking of the baronet's fury at the scene of the murder, Simon doubted this summation of Sir Gregory's character. Most people, he had learned, rarely showed the complexities of their natures to the outside world. It was only in the unexpected moment, or in the solitude of lonely brooding, that the demons emerged. And despite Lady Rothstein's somewhat contemptuous, but benign assessment, he sensed that Sir Gregory had no shortage of demons.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

Simon Wise walked toward his home later that evening. A lamplighter was afoot ahead of him. Simon watched as the man extended his pole, the tip of which flared like a firefly to ignite the flame of a lamp whose light had somehow become extinguished. From light, light, he thought. And from darkness, darkness.

The Fairhaven case and other work had kept him at the station far past the time for *havdalah*, the simple yet luminous ceremony acknowledging the termination of the holy day, and the return to the profane world. Portions of the service came to his mind: "Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe, Who distinguishes between holy and secular, between light and darkness..." He imagined Naomi, his youngest (*except*



for Emily, he reminded himself), holding the single braided candle, and the family passing around the spice box, an antidote to the sadness at the departure of the Sabbath Queen. After the appropriate blessings and the sipping of cheap, sweet kiddish wine, the candle would be extinguished in drops of the red liquid poured into a dish. The Talmud taught that on the Sabbath, every person receives a *neshamah yetairah*, an additional soul, which then returns to the Master of the Universe until the next Sabbath arrives.

Although Simon sometimes doubted the existence of even one soul, much less two, still a murder on the Sabbath seemed to him a particularly heinous crime. Idly, he wondered whether Gentiles received an additional infusion of spirit on the Jewish Sabbath and, if so, what had happened to Lady Fairhaven's two souls. Had she been able, before the knife entered her breast, to draw strength from some doctrine similar to the Havdalah prayer: "Behold, God is my deliverer: I trust in Him and am not afraid..." Or had she entered the great void alone, filled only with terror and dread. He no longer trusted the efficacy of prayer, but at that moment he prayed fervently that it had not been so for her, nor for Rachel.

Of course, while for Simon last night and today still held remnants of sacredness that no amount of assimilation could dissolve, he knew very well that these deeply imbedded meanings were irrelevant to the large masses of Londoners who swarmed to the public houses and theaters on Saturdays. He reflected that the previous night, the last night on which Lady Alicia Fairhaven had been alive, for most of London had not been the commencement of a holy day, but the boisterous and surely godless annual Guy Fawkes celebration, commemorating the foiling of the Gunpowder Plot two hundred and seventy years ago meant to send King James and his parliament to Kingdom Come.

Fortunately for last night's celebrants, the cabal was thwarted, the conspirators killed, and terror and rage transformed into a holiday that burned poor Guy, or whoever was a current public target of animosity. Last night, the streets had been jammed with hawkers carrying clumsily crafted effigies of unpopular figures, not to burn, but to attract the crowds who would then buy their wares. In Whitechapel, as well as elsewhere, additional foot patrols had been put on duty, as the thieves and drunk rollers were out in full force. Later came the requisite fireworks in the pleasure gardens of Cremorne, rocket-powered pinwheels and brilliant, chemically colored lights that never failed to move him. Perhaps after all it had been an impressive night on which to die, if one had to die, he thought.

Tonight, by contrast, it was quiet and not very late, and Simon dreaded returning to the house. Strangely, the sounds of children equably teasing one another, playing games that started out politely but often ended more wildly than was proper, happy tumult that he had once taken such pleasure in, now filled his heart with a smoldering anger, a covered-over hurt.

"I was such a fool," he muttered, blaming himself for the way he had blindly taken life for granted. Out of habit his fingers brushed his lips, then reached out to touch the *mezuzah* on the doorframe. As so often happened these days, he wondered why he bothered. Increasingly, he felt his observance, such as it was, to be an empty ritualistic husk, religious practices meant to connect him to God, but that now connected him to... nothing.

Despite Simon's fears, the house, carefully fenced off from the rest of the street, was mostly quiet and dark, although a gas lamp burned softly in the entrance. Hannah

and Rebecca must have managed to get the younger children to bed early. The Inspector could hear only vague rustlings from the tiny back yard, as the pigeons, cock, and hens arranged themselves for the night. Contemplating the white ceiling, the walls papered in a simple geometrical pattern, the windows framed by snowy lace curtains, he still experienced his home's aura of neatness, cleanliness, and order. How happy Rachel had been when they had the means to move out of their squalid rooms in Whitechapel to this peaceful corner of Islington. How she had loved this little house. But to Simon Wise, it was no longer a haven from the ugliness of the outside world. For him, its sanctuary had been irreparably breached.

From within the depths of the house, Inspector Wise thought he detected muted laughter. He strode through the central passageway, taking off his overcoat and top hat as he walked. When he reached the open door to the kitchen, however, he paused, reluctant to disturb the picture confronting him.

Rebecca sat at the large wooden table hunching intently toward Emily, securely fastened in her high-chair. The light was dim and soft, a solitary candle illuminating Rebecca's skin with a faint flush, and casting highlights onto her dark, curling hair, escaping from the braid which hung down her back. Her mother's hair, the Inspector thought. Rebecca wore a white cotton night chemise that reached down to her feet, with long sleeves covering her arms. To her father, she looked incredibly sweet.

"Becca," he said, using his pet name for his daughter, "what in God's name are you doing?" Entering the room, he almost stumbled over the bucket of water kept in the house for washing, and for religious ablutions before eating.

Rebecca was making a particular motion to Emily, repeating the gesture over and over, concentrating with the intensity which had first unsettled Simon when he first observed it in her ten-year old self, but which over the past eight years he had since come to accept as a facet of her character, as much a part of her nature as her quick temper and even quicker compassion for the less fortunate of the world. It evoked a vivid memory of a younger Rebecca, seated at a desk in the nursery, reading a book. Around her pranced in madcap glee the twins, David and Sarah, while Miriam argued with her doll, Deborah tooted a miniature bugle, and Leah, his darling Leah, only two then, toddled about crying for her blanket. Watching his eldest's serene expression, Simon Wise knew she had entered an unknown private world, and had left her noisy siblings far behind.

"Becca," Simon said again, bothered that he felt himself an intruder in the self-contained world of his children.

Rebecca looked up with a blank gaze, until her concentration shifted to her father, at whom she then smiled animatedly. The sheer vitality of her expression made Simon's heart ache.

"It's sign language, Abba," Rebecca said with the enthusiasm that she brought to any new project. "I've been to the Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb in the Old Kent Road. I've been going there now for over a month," she continued in a slightly defiant voice.

Simon looked nonplussed. "What are you doing there?"

"I've been learning sign language and finger-spelling."

"What on earth for?"

"For Emily." Simon was still puzzled, but he recognized the stubborn cast on his daughter's face.

"Why, Rebecca? We don't think Emily is deaf."

"Maybe not. But I think she may have trouble hearing. It wouldn't be surprising, considering all the earaches she's had, poor thing. And she can't speak, not properly anyway. She becomes so frustrated when we ask her things. In any case, I think it might be a better way to communicate with her, at least while she's small. She might be able to grasp it better, you see, so she could be more like us."

"More like us? She'll never be like us." Simon spoke more harshly than he intended, and instantly regretted his tone. He hated to wound Rebecca, whose spirit seemed at once so indomitable and so fragile. But Emily's upbringing, in fact Emily herself, was a source of constant tension between them.

## CHAPTER NINE

After Rachel's death, at first Simon had wanted Emily to die, and then he had wanted to put her away, which is what everyone advised, and which would probably have amounted to the same thing. Even Hannah had not interfered, a restraint which continued to astonish Simon three years after the fact. "Find an asylum that is reasonably clean, espouses a humane moral treatment, staffed by people of a kindly disposition," was Dr. Baumgarten's recommendation, "and forget her." She would be well looked after, she would not suffer, it would be better for all concerned. And, although it was not said directly, she would doubtless die quickly. For someone in his position, eight motherless children, a modest income, to have abandoned Emily at the workhouse steps, where infant mortality rates ranged as high as ninety percent, would not have been unthinkable.

Even boarded with a reasonably conscientious dry nurse who would necessarily be compelled to feed her some indigestible pap or the latest fad, Nestle's condensed milk, her chances of survival would have been small.

From the beginning, however, Rebecca vehemently opposed this plan. Then only fifteen but determined to be a little mother to her siblings, every fiber of her will was directed toward keeping Emily at home.

"Abba, you'd give away your own child?" she had wailed, while casting accusatory eyes in his direction.

"Not one of you," Simon reassured her.

"But she is one of us," Rebecca said adamantly, as though that settled things.

Despite his daughter's pleadings, Simon had been sorely tempted to be rid of the infant. Although he was ashamed to admit it, Emily to him was loathsome, a creature not fully human who had been responsible for his beloved Rachel's death. Of course, he knew it was wrong to blame an innocent baby. "God is just," the rabbi had intoned, and Simon knew that according to the principle of infinite value found in Talmudic teachings, the life of a physically or mentally deficient human had exactly the same worth as any other person, but he blamed the child nonetheless. Who else was there to blame? The fact that Rachel had traded her life for this idiot only made her loss more intolerable.

He had reconciled himself to daughters, with six girls how could he not, but this enfeebled, half-witted creature...! As she passed out of infancy, and her physical differences became more pronounced, at times he could hardly contain the despair he felt when he looked at her. He presumed this was not an atypical reaction, as one of the leading rabbis of the century had explicitly ruled that it was forbidden to destroy even a

grotesquely misshapen child, suggesting to Inspector Wise that at the least one person had inquired into the permissibility of such a step.

Accompanied by Miss Gelbstein, Simon had visited several charitable establishments for crippled children and orphans and a series of women who boarded infants by the week or adopted them for a lump sum, with the intention of depositing his infant daughter forthwith. But even his anger and resentment did not prepare him for what he found - severe, desolate-looking brick structures, filled with half-washed children, some demented, most deformed, some perhaps only abandoned and powerless, a steady backdrop of crying, sobbing, moaning small humanity that had not the understanding to grasp the hopelessness of its collective fate. Some of the caretakers seemed kind, some he suspected of outright cruelty, many smelled of drink, all were exhausted, uneducated, pitifully underpaid and overwhelmed. The conditions in the homes of the dry nurses he found little better, with unnaturally quiet infants he suspected of being drugged with Godfrey's Cordial or some other opiate, rampant debility, marasmus, and miscellaneous illnesses. In the face of all this, Hannah's usual unflappable self-possession wavered slightly, and she pronounced their discoveries "disappointing." Rachel's dark eyes haunted him on these tours. Coupled with Rebecca's ceaseless importuning, at last, acceding to her wishes, he agreed to keep Emily at home "for a little while."

After a week of indecision, with the assistance of Dr. Baumgarten, the family obtained a wet-nurse for Emily. For six months, Charlotte Underhill lived with the Wises, feeding Emily breastmilk from a rag when the baby could not suck properly. Although they called her Mrs. Underhill, they knew she was a single woman, formerly an

upstairs maid in one of the great houses in Berkeley Square, who had recently given birth to a child out of wedlock. Charlotte was a sweet enough person, happy to have the good fortune to be fed well and pampered, but Inspector Wise avoided her. He was wracked by guilt, for he knew that to wet-nurse Emily, her own child had been put out to be dry nursed, possibly even by one of the well-meaning but incompetent women he and Hannah had visited. He rarely spoke to Charlotte, and never asked her if her baby had lived or died.

## CHAPTER TEN

Later, Dr. Baumgarten referred him to a colleague, a Dr. Michael Talbot. Baumgarten was clearly impressed with his eminent young colleague. "His family is quite distinguished, you know. Trace their roots back to the Norman conquest," he mentioned, with the awe of an immigrant. "The father was the embodiment of landed aristocracy, lived the good life, some said excessively so. Died of cirrhosis, I believe, when Michael was still a boy. Michael is the second son, you see, so there was nothing for him in terms of property. Of course, he could have bought a commission in the army, or made a name for himself in the colonies, or received a parish living. But he was not fond of swordplay, nor was he an adventurer or religiously inclined. Indeed, he had what his family considered to be a perversely scientific bent. He went up to Oxford, was the chief wrangler in mathematics, won the prestigious Bruce Pinkerton medal for research excellence, and awed even the most jaded dons with his brilliance. Despite the protestations of his mother and maternal uncle who raised him, he elected to stay on to



study medicine like his father." Baumgarten chuckled. "His family was grateful that at least he agreed to keep his hands clean and did not train as a surgeon. They took some small measure of comfort in the idea that eminent physicians could still be received at court and resigned themselves to his peculiar choice of profession.

"But he disappointed them again by concentrating on pediatrics, a low-prestige branch of medicine not fully recognized as a specialty and given very little attention in the medical curriculum. Nevertheless, he devoted himself to the diseases of childhood, and has a special fascination with malformations of the body and mind. Gossips say that a favorite sister, with whom he was extremely close, bore a severely malformed infant. The shame triggered a fit of melancholia from which the poor woman never recovered, and she ended up shut away in a private asylum.

"Talbot's surgery is located in Russell Square, near the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, where he has an appointment that has brought him the favorable attention of several of the aristocratic and well-connected lay governors of that institution. He has developed quite a following treating nervous disorders among the children of a socially elite clientele but devotes one afternoon a week to providing free care to children of the poor. He is one of the founding members of the Infant Life Protection Society and has advocated legislation making prosecution of maternal infanticide more feasible."

As Dr. Baumgarten described him, the eminent Dr. Talbot was a leading authority on all sorts of congenital birth defects and anomalies. It would certainly be worth Simon's while to seek him out and learn what he could.

And Simon had meant to. Yet once the agonizing over institutionalization for Emily had been settled, at least temporarily, he could not bring himself to learn more about her condition. Dr. Baumgarten had assured him it was a hopeless case, the child would be severely impaired, mentally and physically. She would probably only live a few months in any event.

But Emily surprised the doctor, surprised them all, by surviving. True, they had almost lost her on more than one occasion. She appeared to have frail lungs and a weak heart as well. She caught cold easily. As a baby, she was particularly susceptible to croup and quinsy. But Rebecca and Miss Gelbstein were indefatigable, the one administering love, the other the latest in scientific nursing. Dr. Baumgarten, after his initial willingness to put the child by, took a special interest in Emily's case. Often, he sat up with the baby throughout the night, administering poultices and soothing inhalants. During these sick spells, while Dr. Baumgarten became a constant visitor, Simon himself avoided the house even more than usual, afraid to be trapped again by death.

Despite his precautions, the Grim Reaper had caught up with his family all the same. Simon should have remembered from the Crimea that death was no respecter of the desires or fears of humans. Only it was not Emily who had died, the one who should have died he bitterly thought, the child who was a malignant joke, who would not have been missed, at least not by him. Instead, it was his beautiful, adorable little Leah, only seven years old.

That first year after Rachel's death the Wise household seemed frozen in a state of perpetual grief, despite Miss Gelbstein's valiant efforts to ensure its smooth functioning and restore a semblance of order and routine. They had not paid much attention to one

another, but rather drew inward, trying only to survive. Without Rachel, nothing about the home made any sense. It was as though the entire family were engaged in a vast conspiracy of normalcy. To Simon's eyes, although they all played their parts, it was like a troupe of second-rate actors. No one, least of all the players themselves, was convinced.

Then, amidst this misery and loneliness, typhoid struck, the result of contaminated milk from the Dairy Reform Company. All the younger children became ill, and Rebecca quarantined Emily in a back bedroom. Miss Gelbstein persuaded Zadok to temporarily stay with an acquaintance from *shul*. In the Wise home, it was a nightmarish situation, Miss Gelbstein, Rebecca, even her fastidious younger sister Miriam nursing their brother and sisters around the clock, Rebecca frantic about the baby. And Leah of the bright eyes and rosy cheeks simply slipped away from them. Simon blamed himself for not being more vigilant, he apologized to his dead wife for unforgivably losing one of their children. Secretly he thought that if so much concern had not been lavished on the baby, perhaps Leah would not have died.

As for Emily, she had a predilection for defying the odds. Dr. Baumgarten had predicted that Emily might never sit up, but she did, although not until she was almost a year. She was not supposed to walk either, but at three was hazarding a few tentative steps. Each time Emily proved him wrong, a warm light would illuminate Dr. Baumgarten's gray, usually somber eyes, but Simon looked at Emily with a hard stare, seeing in her only the cause of his lost Rachel and his lost Leah.

Now, standing in the kitchen doorway, Simon regarded his two daughters again, caught between barely concealed helpless anger at the one and exasperated love for the

other. He resented Rebecca's unwillingness to accept that Emily would remain unreachable, unknowable, something different, and less, than the rest of them.

"So, Becca, precisely what are you 'communicating?'" he queried, using a tone of voice that conveyed his annoyance at Rebecca's indefatigable efforts to "improve" Emily.

"It isn't difficult, Abba. Look." She steepled her two hands together, making a roof. "This is house. House," she repeated for Emily's benefit. Bunching the fingers of her right hand together and motioning toward her mouth, she continued, "This means food." She stretched her right hand out horizontally, making an upward motion from chest to chin. "And this is full, you little piglet," she added, tickling Emily, "not that you'll ever need to use it." Emily giggled and took another bite of the sweet biscuit she held in her hand.

"Your biscuit is delicious. Delicious," Rebecca smiled, with her open hand rubbing her stomach. Then she held three fingers in front of her mouth. "This is how old you are, Emily. You're three, three."

Emily giggled again, then waved her hand in the air. "Good, Emily," Rebecca said, making a fist held with the thumb pointing upwards. "Just bend down those fingers. You're only three.

"And this," she added a little desperately, sensing both Emily's and Wise's flagging attention, "this means sister." The bent index finger of her right hand touched her nose. "This is me, Rebecca, I'm your sister." Wise started to move toward the door.

"Wait, Abba. I want to show you something. This is the sign for father." She extended the first two fingers of both hands and crossed them over each other. "This is father. This is Abba," she repeated.

Wise said nothing. He could not discern his emotions. He was angry, irritated, proud, despairing. Perhaps his heart was breaking, he couldn't be sure. "You mustn't expect too much of her, Becca," he said gruffly, and walked quickly from the room. For some reason, he could see the faces of Lady Fairhaven's little children clearly in his mind's eye.

Rebecca sat very still at the kitchen table. In the high-chair, Emily began to fuss. "I'm sorry, Emily," Rebecca said, rubbing her chest in a circular motion, "sorry, sorry, sorry. He loves you. I know he does."

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

"She was a mistress of good works, was Lady Fairhaven," said Sergeant Murdoch, with a faint note of disapproval in his voice. He instinctively distrusted the patronizing efforts of the upper classes to elevate the condition of the lower ones. He remembered as a boy being on the receiving end of the charity of haughty women in bonnets and huge skirts, administering Bibles and advice about cleanliness in equal doses. As far as he could tell, neither had done his mother, who had to contend with a passle of half-hungry children and an amiable but often drunken husband, any good.

Inspector Wise and his Sergeant were reviewing the Fairhaven case in the Inspector's office, a small, cramped room inside the dull yet forbidding architecture of the

police station at Whitechapel. His back to the one grimy window, the Inspector sensed rather than heard the tentative mizzle of an early November morning. Sergeant Murdoch, standing in front of the Inspector's scarred oak desk, frowned.

"National Temperance Society, Association for the Aid and Relief of Dressmakers and Milliners, Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children, even women's rights, God forbid." While his scorn of charitable acts hovered below articulated consciousness, on this point Sergeant Murdoch was quite clear. Women had no business pretending they were men. "Her latest fancy was the Talbot Institute for Research into the Deformities of Children."

Inspector Wise's ears pricked at the name of the physician he remembered Dr. Baumgarten recommending for Emily. He reminded himself to contact Dr. Talbot. Aloud, he commented drolly, "A regular Mrs. Jellyby. She certainly sounds well-occupied." Struggling to maintain his family's hard-won middle-class status, Inspector Wise also held little truck with the condescending whims of the upper classes, although his ancestors had long survived by catering to such whims.

Sergeant Murdoch, who found Dickens too hard a read, ignored the allusion to pursue his own train of thought. "Perhaps to a fault, sir. It seems some of the more earnest ladies among her social circle questioned her motives, so to speak." Murdoch looked smug, as if he himself had divined Lady Fairhaven's lack of sincerity in the undertaking of her various beneficent projects.

Wise contemplated the large, no-nonsense sergeant with an affectionate tolerance. Several years older than the Inspector, in the Crimea Thomas Murdoch had served with one of the better disciplined regiments, the Highland Brigade, under the young Duke of

Cambridge, and had seen action at Alma, Sebastopol, Balaclava, and Inkerman.

Murdoch did not talk much about his war experiences with the Inspector, a surprising omission for two men whose characters were forged in the same horrifying struggle, although once he had regaled Wise with a humorous account of his unit dressed in full-skirted regalia disembarking at Calamita Bay to the good-natured insults of the British sailors. Remarks about their apparently feminine gender that might have provoked open warfare coming from a Guardsman only caused the kilted Highlanders to clasp hands and skip delicately up the beach. The thought of the brawny Scotsman skipping anywhere brought a smile to the Inspector's face. Perhaps it was the only amusing anecdote Murdoch had to recount about those years. Inspector Wise knew that at Balaclava Sir Colin had told his Highlanders, "There is no retreat. You must die where you stand." A man who had made up his mind once to die might not care to mention the fact afterwards.

Young Murdoch had fallen in love with one of Florence Nightingale's nurses, Nancy Dent. He followed her back home to London, married her and, after a series of random jobs, found himself working for the Metropolitan Police. Both outsiders, the Scot and the Jew shared an implicit, although rarely alluded to, bond in their memories of those absurd yet heroic war years that simultaneously brought them closer and embarrassed them.

"Her motives? How do you mean, Thomas?"

"Well, of course, at this point it is only gossip, picked up from one of the downstairs maids, who was not especially fond of her mistress. Ye know how servants talk amongst themselves, sir."

"Often they have the truth of the matter. What did this woman have to say?"

Murdoch mused that it was precisely this quality of open-mindedness, of fairness, the willingness to respect and value the opinion even of a serving-girl that endeared Inspector Simon Wise to his men. In appearance, he was very ordinary, Murdoch thought. On the tall side and lean, with dark hair and somewhat dark-complected, his close-set eyes gave the Inspector a perpetually intense, concentrated expression. He was very quiet, really, when you thought about it, rarely using two words when one would do. And he'd become even more silent since the death of his wife. Yet, without his saying much, the men under his command sensed that, although he might never truly be one of them, he would give his every effort, even his life if necessary, for them. It was a rare enough quality, in Gentile or Jew, Murdoch knew.

"Thomas," Wise prompted gently.

"The girl heard it said amongst the attendants of certain of Lady Fairhaven's acquaintances that her ladyship was more interested in the intellectual and fascinating gentlemen she met through allegiance to her various causes, than she was in the poor unfortunates she was supposed to be savin'." Sergeant Murdoch snorted, then seeing his Inspector's disapproving face, quickly continued. "Apparently men of all social classes found her attractive, and she seemed more than willin' to reciprocate their interest. The housekeeper hinted she was even carryin' on a flirtation with one of her own footmen, said Mr. Creavey, the butler, was plannin' on dischargin' the fellow because of his liberties with the mistress."

Inspector Wise looked thoughtful. This was indeed interesting information. Victoria's England held its women, and especially its well-bred women, to an uncompromising standard of personal integrity. They were supposed to be pure, elevated



creatures with unflagging commitment to hearth and home, whose modest sexual appetites were invariably satisfied within the confines of their marriages. Even the innuendo of sexual scandal might ruin the reputation of a lady. And her husband.

The Inspector sighed. Human perfidy never ceased to amaze him. "An ungenerous thought indeed. Nevertheless, it is not impossible. Find me the name of one of her acquaintances, preferably someone who shared these charitable preoccupations. And look into the allegation regarding the footman as well."

"I have located such a friend already, sir, a Lady Penelope Abbott." Murdoch was aggrieved that Inspector Wise apparently felt he needed such instruction. "Widow of a Crimean war hero."

Simon Wise picked up the fine quill pen in front of him and toyed with it absently. He had not known Colonel Percival Abbott personally, but he remembered the name. He had had a reputation of tremendous personal courage coupled with a rather alarming lack of understanding of military strategy that repeatedly risked not only his own life, but the lives of those under him. He had been precisely the kind of officer the satirist W. Johnston described a few years earlier as "the dawdling military fop who, when taken to the field of battle, shows not only a courage which nothing can appall, but a cool endurance amid circumstances of distraction and dismay, of which perhaps a quicker sensibility would be incapable."

"Good work, Thomas. Once again, you are in advance of me." The Inspector smiled inwardly, noting that Murdoch seemed suitably appeased by the praise. "What else do we know about Lady Fairhaven?"

A look of distress passed over the bluff sergeant's face. "Of course, there are the children. The two we saw at the manor. The boy, Anthony, is only five, the sister a bit older. There is another boy, away at school. By all accounts, Lady Fairhaven was a dutiful mother."

"No Mrs. Jellyby then, after all," said Wise in an attempt at jocularly, ignoring Murdoch's incomprehension, but inwardly he felt his heart contract. Motherless children. What was it about an orphaned child that made one want to rail against the Lord, to accuse God of wanton cruelty? The uncomprehending innocence, the unfathomable depth of loss of these children assailed the Inspector like a cold wind. Unbidden, the faces of his own motherless children appeared before him, wet with tears, pale, afraid, waiting for answers. He could give them only silence.

"Yes, of course, the children. The ones we saw seemed a handsome pair. Well, they have lost their mother. It isn't the end of the world. They will have to learn to fend for themselves." The Inspector broke off when he noticed the uncomfortable expression on the Sergeant's face. Abruptly, he changed tack.

"Good work, Thomas. Keep talking to the servants. Try to find out if there is any substance to the rumors. Then perhaps we need to have another talk with the baronet."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Before Inspector Wise was able to have another conversation with Sir Gregory, pressures from Superintendent Walker, himself responding to pressures from Commissioner Henderson and the Home Office, sent Wise to see Abraham Rothstein,

husband to the formidable Lady Rothstein and eldest son of Baron Lionel Rothstein, one of the most powerful financial entities in England. Sir Abraham's sumptuous mansion was located at 148 Piccadilly, adjoining Apsley House, the home built by the Duke of Wellington. It was so overwhelmingly grand that the Inspector instinctively searched out the tradesman's entrance. Wise did not like to think of himself as in awe of any man, but he was forced to admit to himself that he was humbled by these surroundings, and the man they represented. Co-religionist my foot! He and Abraham Rothstein, Abe as he was dubbed familiarly by the press, were worlds, nay universes, apart.

The House of Rothstein had been a substantial financial factor in England since the Napoleonic Wars, which the family had helped subsidize, and they had taken a concomitant interest in securing all the rights they perceived due to them as Englishmen, including the right to participate in the electoral process as enfranchised voters and, if it were the will of the people, as elected officials. Almost thirty years ago, when Simon Wise was still a youth, the City of London had elected Lionel Rothstein to the House of Commons. Parliament had refused to install him, in consequence of his unwillingness to take the oath of allegiance which included pledging fealty to the Crown "on the true faith of a Christian." But as a young patrolman eleven years later, Wise and the rest of the middle-class Whig constituency of London had the satisfaction of seeing the distinguished banker, who had been faithfully reelected year after year, finally take his seat in the House, and the last of the Jewish disabilities removed. It was said that Baron Rothstein never made a single speech to Parliament, but then, Wise reflected, he had other avenues for exerting his influence.

When the Inspector stated his business, the maid who answered the door quickly fetched the butler. The butler stared at Inspector Wise and agonized. In and of himself, Wise merited no more than the butler's pantry, if that. On the other hand, Sir Rothstein would be joining him, and there was no question of that august presence sitting with the policeman in the pantry. Yet clearly Wise's presence could not disgrace the drawing room. In perplexity, the butler settled on the library. The poor man's bewilderment made Wise feel somewhat more at ease.

"An inspector, eh?" boomed out a cultured voice, English public school to its core. Wise saw a somewhat stout, full-bearded man of about thirty-five, impeccably attired. He was reputed to have a quick, decisive mind, a phenomenal memory, and a remarkably acute grasp of financial and political affairs. In making inquiries about Rothstein files the phrase Inspector Wise most often encountered was, "He does not suffer fools gladly." Wise felt his nervousness returning. "I thought I might merit a higher rank of officer." Abraham Rothstein was smiling, perhaps sardonically, but the statement appeared to be made without rancor.

"On the other hand," he continued, "as my clever wife warned me, you do bring certain unique... qualifications to our interview." Rothstein smiled more broadly. "One of the wealthiest, most influential men in England and, I mean no offense, a mere inspector of police, but we are joined at the hip. We are the same tribe. Thank goodness England has had the foresight to open its employment ranks, to meet just such a contingency as this."

Inspector Wise found himself at a loss for words. It was as if Sir Rothstein had immediately penetrated the irony of the situation and put into words thoughts he himself

would never have dared articulate. A slight change in the baron's demeanor conveyed the impression he had decided to take pity on the Inspector.

"Please have a seat, Inspector Wise. If we are brothers under the skin, then let us act as such." Rothstein made himself comfortable in front of a fire that was blazing strongly despite the relative mildness of the day.

"The English don't know what to make of us, Inspector Wise. We are an enigma to them and one that generates perpetual ambivalence. Although the island expelled its Jews wholesale in 1290, we are a resilient race, and were ready when Cromwell engineered our return some three hundred years later. Ostensibly this was to encourage the Second Coming, but on a more pragmatic plane, he counted on our financial connections to consolidate his power.

"Today, enlightened Englishmen are willing to grant that the civilized Jew, stripped of all his embarrassing superstitions, antiquated customs, and primitive religious practices, can be a model of tolerance, justice, and equality. Look at Sir George Jessel, our much-admired former Solicitor General, the first Jew to become a minister of the Crown, and now an esteemed High Court Judge. Dare I say, look at Disraeli, once again Prime Minister of England who, despite his baptism, treats his Jewish heritage as evidence of membership in a racial aristocracy far superior to the petty caste fixation of the British peerage. If we are willing to give up our outlandish modes of dress and behavior, we seem to be accepted with good grace more often than not by the English.

"But the untransformed Jew is forever other, the outsider, the alien, deceptive, manipulative, scheming, untrustworthy standard-bearer of a culture-destroying commercialism. Just ask our friend Trollope, who as he grows older seems to become

progressively more obsessed with Jews who won't stay in their proper place. To the English, our identity is elusive. Because they can never know us, fundamentally they fear and mistrust us, no matter how friendly we are with them, no matter how much we bet together, shoot together, drink together." Rothstein smiled with a slightly patronizing demeanor at Inspector Wise, who noticed that, despite his satirical turn of phrase, his eyes were kindly and humorous. "Read Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*. You'll see what I mean."

These sentiments were only a more eloquent version of inchoate ideas that had floated uncomfortably in the Inspector's mind since his Crimean War experiences, but to hear them given voice by this witty, cynical fellow Jew was a bit alarming. Unaccountably, Wise felt that agreeing with Rothstein would make him a party to the very sort of conspiratorial behavior that the banker was mocking. It might be understandable to worry about one's place in the social order in the privacy of one's inner thoughts, but for him to admit his doubts, especially to Rothstein, seemed disloyal and unpatriotic. "I wouldn't know about such things, Sir Abraham," he said cautiously. "I only try to do my job."

"Wouldn't know! Why, man, you are the embodiment of the dilemma. Whoever heard of a Jewish policeman? Yet here you are, straddling both worlds every day of your life, as I do, perhaps even more than I do, as wealth is indeed a great equalizer. The real question that should engage both of us, my dear Inspector, is whether there is really any such thing as a transformed Jew."

"I am simply a loyal Englishman, sir. I happen to be of the Mosaic persuasion, but I trust that is my personal life, and I can attest it has never interfered with my work."

"Indeed not," replied Rothstein in a humorous tone. "I understand you to have a fine reputation." He seemed to be enjoying the peculiarities of this encounter immensely. "In any event, if Dizzy and I have our way, we may pull off an Eastern coup in the next month that will make the English glad that Cromwell invited us back." Rothstein enjoyed hinting to this lowly co-religionist at his family's role in financing the British government's impending acquisition of a significant number of shares in the Suez Canal to an ordinary London policeman. It was a sign of his standing that he could break whatever social conventions he wished. "That is knowledge not everyone knows yet, but keep an eye on the *Times*."

Wise did not have any idea what the banker was referring to. He felt an urgent need to extricate himself from these hazardous topics, and take command of the situation. "Sir, I am here to ask you a few questions about Lady Fairhaven. Excluding a handful of servants, you appear to be the last person to have seen her alive. With the exception of her murderer, that is," he added unnecessarily.

"Are the two mutually exclusive?" Rothstein wondered with unconvincing naiveté. Wise had the distinct sensation that the banker was toying with him.

"Perhaps that is up to you to tell me, sir."

Rothstein regarded Inspector Wise with something akin to respect. "You are quite right about that, Inspector. And although I consider it beneath my dignity to have to address this question directly, I will state categorically, on my word as a gentleman, an English gentleman," he added with emphasis, "that I did not harm, much less murder, Alicia Fairhaven." He stopped, perhaps imagining that this statement represented the close of the interview. Inspector Wise dug in his heels.

"How did it happen that she returned home in your carriage?" Rothstein stood up suddenly, a series of conflicting emotions crossing his face. Politeness, albeit politeness on a very short leash, won out. It occurred to him that this inspector might be so socially inept that he did not realize what a condescension it was for Abe Rothstein to speak directly with him at all.

"How shall I put this? Lady Fairhaven is, was, a beautiful, intelligent, intriguing woman. Much more interesting than her Liberal MP husband, a colleague of mine in the House of Commons, as a matter of fact. This husband was unable to escort her that evening, due to a previous engagement requiring him to remain at his club overnight, as I understood it. To be in the enchanting presence of a cultivated, fascinating woman was an opportunity I could ill afford to ignore. Besides, if I had not chosen to accompany Lady Alicia, then my younger brother Alfred, who is still sowing his wild oats, assuredly would have, and that might have been unfortunate for both parties. Discretion is not Alfred's strong suit."

Inspector Wise made a mental note to investigate further the precise nature of the relationship between Lady Fairhaven and the blond, good-looking Alfred Rothstein, who was known to be flamboyant, eccentric, irresponsible, extravagant, a buffoon, and an intimate of the Prince of Wales. But for the moment he simply said, "How did Lady Fairhaven seem to you during the ride to Mayfair? Was she agitated, fearful, distressed in any way?"

The banker considered the question as carefully as he might have weighed an investment proposal. "I would say she was in the grip of some strong emotion. Perhaps excited, but not fearful."



“Did you inquire as to the cause of this emotion?”

“Lady Alicia was well-known for her frequent... high spirits. I did not think it polite to pry further.”

"Then you did not form the impression that she suspected her life was in danger."

"In no way."

"And did she refer to any sort of assignation or clandestine meeting that might occur upon her return?"

"My dear Inspector, if Lady Alicia had arranged such an encounter, the last thing in the world she would have done was even hinted at such a thing to me." He looked at the Inspector pityingly. "Such a disclosure would have been extremely tasteless."

"And you did not accompany her into the house?"

"I handed her down to her footman, observed her enter the house, and then returned to this residence. My coachman can verify that I did not leave the carriage, as can the Fairhaven footman, as well as any other servants who happened to be awake."

The Inspector did not bother to point out that the word of a servant, or any number of servants, supporting the alibi of one of the wealthiest, most powerful men in England, could be very easily obtained.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It had been the war that provided the impetus for Simon Wise's admittedly odd career. In 1853, he had been a relatively carefree, bright eighteen-year-old, working in his father's watch-making and repair shop. He even contemplated enrolling the following year at University College in London, in part to fulfill the dreams of his father to have a

scholar in the family. In contrast to Oxford and Cambridge, which had only begun matriculating students who were not Church of England a few years ago, University College London was relatively inexpensive, and had been nicknamed the Godless College of Gower Street because of its nonsectarian orientation, its lively mix of heterogeneous students, and its radical and at times unconventional teachers. Simon thought he might thrive in this studious environment, but he also enjoyed the predictability of his life in Manchester, being circumspectly rowdy with his friends, and flirting with attractive neighbor girls, especially a girl with blue eyes and dark curly hair named Rachel Levin.

Then England went to war, why no one was quite certain. Still, there was a widespread conviction that whether it was to guarantee the independence of Turkey, teach the Russian brutes a lesson, or protect the holy places of the Ottoman Empire, it was the right thing to do. In those early days, the campaign in the Crimea was conducted in a festive atmosphere. Generals' wives accompanied their husbands to the scenes of battle, and people canceled holidays to take their vacations on the front. After a few months of agonizing, Simon joined up. He had difficulty explaining this decision to his friend Reuven Lipschitz, whose parents had emigrated from Russia when he was eight years old, in part to avoid the threat of lifetime military conscription in which Jewish boys were kidnapped to serve in the army as young as thirteen or fourteen. Often their families never saw them again.

"You are a lunatic for sure," Reuven would argue with the remnants of a Russian accent. "Our people have spent generations avoiding the soldiers of our host countries. Jews don't join the army. They run away from its pogroms."

This was part of the problem... the accusation of running away, of being separate, exclusive, a people apart. Simon had been stung by a *Punch* cartoon depicting a recruiting sergeant importuning a young Jew: "Enlist my fine fellow and serve the Queen." The Jew, portrayed with a stereotypic large nose and shifty demeanor, replied: "Much rayther remain as I am, and serve de Queen's Bench," an insulting reference to the number of Jews who worked as sheriff's officers, hunting down hapless debtors and consigning them to prison.

Simon's father had always been fiercely emancipationist, a political position adopted with frequency by wealthy London financiers like the Rothsteins who might legitimately aspire to playing leadership roles in the affairs of the country, but unusual in an only moderately prosperous artisan. However, Zadok Wise cared deeply about the rights of the common man. At the lower end of the social scale, it was more common for Jews and non-Jews to work together, live near each other, and frequent the same theaters and pubs, so Zadok felt he knew what true brotherhood was all about. The cry of the French Revolution, "Liberte, egalite, fraternite," as well as the French granting political equality to their Jewish citizens, never ceased to inspire him.

Zadok had fled the periodic blood libel pogroms of his native Romania, seeking a safer, more secure life. He hoped he and his family could thrive in the liberty and freedom that, in his mind, England represented. Like so many other immigrant Jews with few connections, he found opportunities for advancement narrower than he had expected and was forced to take up a peddling route between Manchester and Wales. He spent years attempting to pray in crowded railway trains, winding the phylacteries seven times around his left arm and attaching the leather box to his forehead, to the astonishment and

derision of fellow passengers. Trying to keep the laws of *kashrut*, he carried his own tin cup and plate and subsisted on dry bread and black tea. Often, he did not see his wife and children for months on end and not infrequently he was robbed of his merchandise of old watches and cheap jewelry by young rowdies. Eventually, following the old ways made less and less sense. Zadok fell under the spell of Voltaire and the *philosophes* and was increasingly prone to regard his own religion as full of superstitions and prejudices, whose rabbis perpetuated ridiculous, antiquated customs, and whose dietary laws estranged Jews from the fellowship of other men.

Over the years Zadok was able to save enough to establish himself and his family above a small watch-making shop and eventually became entrenched in a modest but comfortable life. In Manchester's old Jewish neighborhood, he raised his children as Jews as best he was able, but also taught his sons to think for themselves, so that they became as familiar with the words of Thomas Paine and Danton as with the Talmud. As a boy, Simon remembered his mother taking him and his brothers and sisters to Purim carnivals, buying "stuffed monkeys" and cups of chocolate at the confectioners' shops, everyone wearing cardboard noses. But in the year of his *bar mitzvah*, his entry into manhood, he also remembered wearing a red tie to school to show his Republican sympathies for the brief but passionate popular uprisings that were convulsing Europe.

Zadok admired Moses Montefiore, a highly successful London businessman from a long line of Sephardic Jews, who had left the Stock Exchange in 1824 to devote himself to social work and philanthropy. Perhaps his most famous action on behalf of world Jewry had occurred in 1840 when he led a delegation to Cairo to quash accusations that Jews had murdered a monk to use his blood for ritual purposes. Montefiore succeeded in

obtaining a public apology from the sultan. On speaking terms with the Queen, for his entire life he carefully juggled his Judaism with his devotion to England. During the Napoleonic Wars, Montefiore had been one of the first Jews to join the Surrey militia and eventually rose to the rank of captain. Yet he agonized over accepting the position of Sheriff of London because he feared his public duties might conflict with his religious obligations.

But Zadok saved his greatest veneration for those Jewish figures who did not allow religious scruples to stand between them and their pursuit of full equality as Englishmen. He idolized Sir Francis Goldsmid, who had been the first professing Jew called to the Bar, and Sir David Salomons, who, sometime after Montefiore's holding the prestigious, but largely ceremonial office, had been appointed Sheriff of London by a special Act of Parliament excusing him from swearing the required Christian oath.

Although only a humble watchmaker, like these great men, Zadok Wise thought of himself as an Englishman of the Jewish persuasion. He had been devastated when the Act of 1828 relieving both Dissenters and Catholics of their disabilities had not been extended to Jews. Since then, he had followed the gradual lessening of limitations on England's Jewish population with growing hope and pride, from the opening of the City of London to Jewish retailers to the extension of the franchise to propertied Jews.

## **CHAPTER FOURTEEN**

As his son, growing up surrounded by the seemingly limitless vistas of political and economic liberalism, Simon Wise determined that, although a Jew, nothing should

stand in the way of his fulfilling his ambitions. Although generally a thoughtful youth, Simon also earned the reputation of someone prepared to use his fists in defense of a righteous cause. Not only did he often champion those weaker and less well-favored than himself, but he was equally likely to assert his right to be whatever he wanted when his aspirations were mocked by less visionary boys. Simon was bright and good with his hands, but Zadok discouraged his dream of becoming a surgeon. A watchmaker could take something apart as easily as a butcher, Zadok pointed out, alluding to the inelegant beginnings of the surgical profession, but he could also put it back together, a skill the early “butchers” often lacked.

So, while Simon’s mother wept copiously and his friends thought him a fool, Zadok did not protest when his eldest son enlisted as a common soldier. Unlike many Manchester Jews, Zadok Wise had little difficulty in relaxing the religious scruples that discouraged working and eating with Christians. Therefore, although he enjoined his son to attempt to observe the laws of kashrut and say his daily prayers, something in his heart thrilled at Simon’s willingness to risk all for Mother England. "We must show that we are English in every detail," Zadok Wise said solemnly, not shrinking from the thought that spilled blood sometimes cemented relationships of convenience.

With this admonition, Simon Wise went off to war. Although he thought of it as his duty, a part of him longed to escape the comfortable monotony of life in Manchester. War was something men did, and he was now a man. In fact, he was one of 30,000 men initially given a rousing send-off to Turkey by cheering, singing crowds. After a month’s training as an infantry soldier, he was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division commanded by Sir George de Lacy Evans, a bad-tempered, moody, and remote man who, as it turned out,

would be among the most experienced and intelligent of the divisional commanders during the Crimean War. Simon was issued a rifle with a fixed bayonet and fifty rounds of blunt lead bullets, a blanket, greatcoat, an extra pair of boots, socks, shirt, a forage cap, a canteen, part of his unit's cooking gear, and three days' rations. He had become a soldier.

Simon expected warfare to be exciting, heroic, and of course successful. Like many Britons, he did not love warfare, but believed that, when it came, no one could do it better than the English. The Russian aggressors would be repulsed, and England, with a little help from the French and the Turks, would emerge triumphant.

Instead, the war fell apart. In place of victorious conquests, there was chaos, followed by inconceivable suffering and death. The well-intentioned but excessively courteous General Lord Raglan, in charge of the entire British effort, was more comfortable making polite and indefinite suggestions than issuing direct orders. From the start, supplies, left in civilian hands, were handled ineptly, pillaged, and after a while became almost nonexistent. Disease decimated the troops. Battle after battle was either mismanaged, indecisive, or deranged and routinely filled with appalling carnage. The French general Bosquet, who was reliably able to pinpoint the right turn of phrase if not always the right plan of attack, termed one particularly vicious site destined to change hands several times during the Battle of Inkerman, which never acquired the slightest strategic importance during any of these transfers, "l'abattoir," the slaughter-house.

Simon managed to live through one of the worst fiascoes, the Battle of Balaclava. As an infantry soldier, he was not part of the Earl of Cardigan's Light Brigade, which no doubt contributed to his survival. This mounted brigade, the victim of generals'

arrogance and poorly communicated orders, swept down into a heavily fortified valley, instead of assaulting the isolated Russian artillery position on the Voronstov heights that was supposed to be the target. After a massacre in which the Light Brigade lost forty percent of its men, they were forced to retreat with little to show for their pointless valor. Later Tennyson would immortalize the agonizing heroism of the cavalry, writing with considerable restraint that “Someone had blunder’d” when they were ordered “Into the jaws of Death, Into the mouth of hell.” To Simon, who many years later read these stirring lines, the poet had unforgivably romanticized an event which was simply a slaughter.

The charge of the Light Brigade was followed by the siege of Sevastopol, where Simon also had the misfortune to serve. Again, the unerring obtuseness of the allied commanders, who had made no provisions for a winter siege despite lacking the heavy artillery necessary to smash the defenses of the Russians, ensured only suffering, disease, hunger and casualties. Shelling and mortars, while resulting in immense loss of life within the city, were so militarily ineffective that the English soldiers joked the one sure way to make Sevastopol impregnable was simply to continue the bombardment.

Throughout the siege, despite Lord Raglan’s conciliatory diplomacy, the British and French were never able to efficiently coordinate their tactics.

Disaster after disaster produced several government crises, spurred on by the unflinching reportage of William Howard Russell to the *London Times*. But for Simon Wise, the massive stupidity and pointlessness of the war produced a crisis of a far more personal sort. After the decimation of the Light Brigade, Lord Cardigan retired to his yacht with a clear conscience, using the time-honored military defense that he had merely



“followed orders.” But Simon had nowhere to hide from his guilt at surviving the senseless havoc he encountered daily. Something in him was damaged. He endured the lightning strike of cholera and a bullet wound to the lung, but he lost his trust in the essential rightness of the world. He also lost his faith in his superiors and, most terrifying of all, in his God.

Not that this was something Simon admitted to himself. It lurked somewhere in the recesses of his mind, filling his soul with a despair more profound than that caused by the needless death and suffering of soldiers, the monumental imbecility of generals. Outwardly, he was reasonably brave and increasingly foolhardy. Some part of him still honored his father's dictum to "be British," to show that he was no less a man than the mangled, sick boys dying all around him. More importantly, however, he began to feel that since he could no longer depend upon his generals, his leaders, or his God to put things right, he would have to rely on himself.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Perhaps it was the absurd yet affecting image of a disillusioned young Jewish soldier attempting to mend a broken war by rescuing one comrade at a time that brought Simon Wise to the attention of Sergeant Major Matthew Turner. Simon belonged to a company of about seventy men. Although technically companies were commanded by a captain, assisted by a lieutenant, everyone knew that this particular company was held together by a "ranker," or noncommissioned officer, Sergeant Turner. The son of a Devonshire farmer, Turner was quick and ambitious and had left the countryside to join

the Metropolitan Police in 1844. He put in his time as a constable on the beat, and eventually was promoted to sergeant. He was about to be promoted again when the conflict in the Crimea intervened.

Turner took more than a passing interest in Simon. He sensed the cynicism of the young man, but also noticed his determination, his calmness under the most unspeakable conditions, his unflinching devotion to his fellow soldiers, and how even older men listened to his opinions. More than once, he had seen Simon restore peace between two soldiers desperate to be done with war, but able only to carry on a warfare of sorts between themselves. He had spotted Simon taking drunk and disorderly comrades firmly but respectfully in hand. Most importantly, he realized Simon was driven, possessed by a need to make things right.

The decisive moment for Sergeant Turner came when Simon confronted him with information that the death of a young lieutenant in Florence Nightingale's hospital in Scutari was not a result of infection, but murder. Together, they conducted an informal investigation and identified the killer. It was at this point that Turner decided Simon would make an excellent policeman. Looking toward his own future, he wanted a few men strategically placed on whose loyalty he could count.

"A policeman? It's not a common line of work for someone of my background," Simon had protested, not wanting to make explicit reference to his Jewishness, although of course it was well-known to the men.

"True. If I were a betting man, I'd say it's long odds. Luckily, I am not a betting man." Turner's elongated vowels and rolled r's had initially given Simon some trouble, but now he enjoyed the slower rhythms of his sergeant major's speech. He listened with

curiosity as Turner made his case. "When the Force was created, Commissioner Rowan underscored three points." A methodical man, Turner ticked them off on his fingers. "First, no gentlemen except at the highest levels, for he predicted that they would not wish to do work they thought beneath them. And in the few instances where men of gentle birth were appointed as Superintendents, they proved him right. Second, stick to lads from the countryside whenever possible, for they tend to have greater strength and less sharp tongues than city-bred fellows. Judging by myself, that was also sound thinking. Third, avoid too many ex-soldiers as recruits, for this was to be a civilian force, distinguishing them from the Continental police that are nearly as repressive as an army.

"Now let's think about you, Simon. You're no gentleman, and that's a blessing. When the Force was first created, most of the recruits were agricultural laborers, but there were shoemakers and tailors too, for all that the Commissioner, God bless him, thought they came from occupations too sedentary to prepare them to be policemen. And though you are a city fellow, coming from Manchester means you have no special ties to London, which is to be avoided, so our policemen can be impartial-like. It is true you are sharp-tongued on occasion, and that may be a problem. But you're a brawny lad, and I've seen you march further in one day than a bobby on the beat will cover in a week, though they do complain about the miles they log. You have pluck too, which is important, for a policeman cannot be a coward. And finally, though you have come out to do your duty, you are no soldier, Simon. And from what I've seen of them, mostly drunk and stinking, that's a blessing as well."

"I had some thought that I could become a surgeon," Simon protested.

"My guess'd be you've seen enough blood and suffering to last a lifetime. Come, am I right? What do you say, Simon?"

In the end Simon agreed, because he could think of no better alternative. Although Sergeant Major Matthew Turner had been wrong about one thing. Becoming a policeman had not saved Simon from the daily presence of suffering, death, and blood, not a bit of it. And sometimes he thought of himself as a kind of doctor, trying first to prevent the disease of crime, then trying to cure it, and where that proved futile, to alleviate the consequential suffering that inevitably resulted.

\* \* \* \*

From a strange beginning, it had continued a strange career. Despite his promises to Sergeant Turner, upon his discharge in '56 Simon wavered. He had no energy for anything, not the university, not courting. He made a pretense of working for Zadok, who silently grieved for his son and all the war had destroyed in him. Zadok had his own pains. A few months after Simon returned from war, an Act for the removal of the remaining Jewish political disabilities was again proposed in Parliament. Lord Derby, the Tory leader of the House of Lords, speaking in opposition, used the memorable phrase "...though among us they are not with us" in reference to the Jews. Looking at his tormented son made this unjust sentiment turn like a knife in his heart, and Zadok wondered for the first time whether he had sacrificed Simon on a foolish and unattainable pyre of his own making.

As for Simon, he would awake nights in a sweat, crying out, seeing the faces of comrades long cold, begging him to save them, blaming him for surviving when they had not. He smelled their suppurating wounds, saw the blackness of cholera in their faces.

"I tried," he pleaded, but their clammy fingers grasped at his nightclothes. The dirt of the grave lay under their nails.

Sometimes walking in the street, he would see a one-legged beggar and recognize him. Impossibly, it was someone he thought long dead, a successful amputation overtaken by virulent infection and disease. Running after the man, crying, jubilant, he would grasp him by the shoulders, shouting his name, only to have the known face dissolve, replaced by that of a stranger.

"Take yer bloody 'ands off'n me! Youse bloody lunatic! Leave me be!" And Simon, humiliated, bitter, would walk off quickly, ignoring the curious bystanders, and avoid that street for weeks.

At last Matthew Turner, returned to the Metropolitan Force and promoted to the rank of inspector, sought him out. Anyone could see he was uncomfortable in the Jewish section of Manchester, passing Orthodox Hebrews in black gabardines and fur hats, small boys with long ringlets bouncing at the sides of their faces. He registered with instinctual wariness the incredibly narrow streets, the black-wigged women with babies hung on their hips and older children pulling on their skirts, mud, refuse, posters in Yiddish and English, the perpetual noise of buying and selling. But he was greeted courteously by Zadok Wise, who kept his curiosity in check.

"You are a friend of my son, Simon? From the Crimea? You are welcome in our home." Zadok escorted him to the family living quarters above the shop. They took their seats in the tiny parlor.

Turner came right to the point.

“I want Simon to serve in my division of the Metropolitan Police, sir. He told me he would, but after we were discharged, we lost track of each other. I kept expecting he would come to me at Bow Street, in London, but he didn’t turn up. So I’ve come to him.”

"A policeman?" Zadok had heard nothing of this proposal, but then, since his son's return, he had heard very little from him at all. "Simon is a good watchmaker, maybe he will still even go to the university. And," here Zadok broke off for a breath, not wanting to offend, but the idea struck him as preposterous, "we do not usually follow that occupation," he finished delicately, unconsciously echoing his son’s protestations of a few months earlier.

Matthew Turner was well aware of this fact. Of course, he also knew that, in these enlightened times, the bonds of religion and culture were loosening so that increasing opportunities existed for Jewish youth to be apprenticed to a variety of artisan trades. Still, he had to confess that when he himself thought of the Jews all that came to mind were financiers and bankers at the top of the social pyramid and at the bottom descending to shabby moneylenders and pawnbrokers, peddlers, old-clothesmen, sharp and perhaps dishonest small-time entrepreneurs, selling rotten oranges and leadless pencils. Despite these prejudices, he had made up his mind that he wanted Simon.

"Mr. Wise," Turner said earnestly, "the political tide has turned in favor of your people. Parliament is about to lift the last of the Jewish disabilities. If a Jew can be sent to the House of Commons, according to the wishes of the voters, then surely he can become a policeman if this is what he wishes."

Zadok turned this over in his mind. It was true that since coming back from the Crimea, Simon had been worse than useless. He barely ate, he seldom spoke, he had

nightmares, he ignored Rachel, the girl who before the war had enchanted him so.

Zadok had to reassemble all the watches Simon repaired.

"I do not know whether Simon wishes for anything, except to be left alone."

"Nonsense," said Turner briskly. "Simon is an Englishman through and through," he added, noticing how Zadok's face brightened. "He's not one to brood and pine.

What's done is done, and to the extent that Simon had any part in the doing, he conducted himself honorably and bravely. It wasn't his fault our leaders were gentlemen asses, if you'll excuse a figure of speech. Simon will know his duty when he sees it."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

In this, the newly appointed Inspector Turner proved correct. Simon joined the Metropolitan Police at the age of twenty-two, a few years older than many of the new recruits. However, he suited well enough. He could read and write, a requirement the Commissioner had put in place thirty years ago and which had never been changed, although it had often been bent more than a little. He was a fine physical specimen, if somewhat on the thin side, according to the police surgeon after a cursory examination that included a small snicker at the sight of his circumcised organ. And, although matrimony was tolerated rather than obligatory for enlistees, like a good number of them, Simon was married, having broken through his silence long enough to ask Rachel to wed with a kind of fierce desperation that made it inevitable she would say yes.

A few days after the young couple first set up housekeeping in London, Martha had come to their door, begging employment. She was desperately poor and eager for any

sort of wage. Before her marriage, she had worked in several Jewish households, but had fallen on hard times due to a continuously inebriated husband and a growing number of unruly children. Though they barely had two-pence to rub together, Rachel insisted to Simon in such a way that he had no choice but to agree that it would be an act of *tzedakah*, charity, to assist the unfortunate woman. Rachel and Martha set about *kashering* the little house, affixing *mezzuzot* to the doors of each room and hanging a crudely colored *Mizrach* on the eastern wall, indicating in which direction a good Jew should pray. The Wise's first child, Rebecca, followed a short nine months later. A year after that, after the passing of his wife, Zadok took up residence with the little family.

Simon's training consisted of parading about for a fortnight at the Wellington Barracks drill ground for several hours each day six days a week with his fellow recruits. Mostly they engaged in close order drill and saber practice. Each recruit received a copy of Commissioner Rowan's "General Instruction Booklet," in which were laid out the principles of "man-management," a philosophy of governing the Force that emphasized discipline, pride, mutual respect, and the avoidance of brutality. Rowan had the insight to realize that the success and acceptance of this new policing body rode on the broad backs of each lowly constable, and he intended to make sure that the public had very little about which to complain. The booklet also contained, down to the most minute detail of dress and behavior, the duties and responsibilities of being a police officer. During their first six months of duty, the recruits were quizzed regularly by Inspector Turner as to its contents.

As an ex-soldier, Simon was struck by the unmilitary appearance of the police uniform, the blue single-breasted frock coat with white buttons, the standup collar worn



over a thick leather stock encircling the neck to prevent constables from being garrotted, the tall chimney hat that weighed over a pound, reinforced so it could be used as an aid to boost one over a wall in a situation of hot pursuit. (Wise had to confess to being disappointed when, eight years later, the hat was changed to a Roman style helmet, and he took no small degree of pleasure in the public outrage that accused the Force of adopting pseudo-military attire).

Simon attended police court regularly, learned how to give formal testimony. Turner encouraged him to be a good observer: "Learn what kind of people live in this or that neighborhood; what are the buildings you walk by on your daily beat, where are the nearest railway stations, the fire station. Learn the name of every street." Simon spent a couple of weeks patrolling with an experienced constable and then was sent out on his own, armed with only a hard wood truncheon, made of *lignum vitae*, a wooden rattle to raise an alarm, a notebook and pencil. The constables were under strict instruction to employ the baton only when they were in imminent danger of being overpowered by ruffians and in fear for their lives.

Wise joined the Force at a time when the police at last were winning the grudging respect of at least the middle and upper classes. Ten years past the last major Chartist uprisings, they were acknowledged to have established supremacy over mob rule and had somehow done so without completely trampling on the cherished British rights of free speech and freedom of assembly. They had made the streets of London safer from the criminal element. Armed only with their rarely used truncheons, a strong arm, common sense, and a great deal of personal courage, London's "Peelers," so called in honor of

their founder, Sir Robert Peel, had accomplished the improbable – they had succeeded in keeping the Queen’s Peace without destroying the liberties of her citizenry.

Simon's colleagues were a variegated lot. Amongst the thirty men in Simon’s class, there were mechanics, clerks, carpenters, butchers, bakers, some ex-soldiers, even a blacksmith, in addition to the omnipresent farmers’ sons. Most looked askance at his speech, educated in comparison to their rough language, and at his Jewish origins, which he neither hid nor advertised.

There was some awkwardness, especially early on. At the graduation of his recruit class, a superintendent enjoined them to "be punctual, neat, control your tempers, tell the truth, and attend church regularly." Indeed, Sunday church attendance was mandatory, and it required a special exemption to excuse Constable Wise. There were the not infrequent cruel and bigoted remarks, such as the comment that “Jews make crimes, not solve ‘em,” a reference to the fact that three-quarters of a century ago Jewish crime was regarded as an acute social problem both by critics of Jews and leaders in the Jewish community. On occasion, a fellow recruit would call Simon “Ikey,” presumably a reference to the great Isaac Solomons, known as the Prince of Fences, who after a highly successful career as a receiver of stolen goods, had fled England in 1827 after escaping from Newgate gaol. Wise marveled at people’s memories when it served their prejudices. And behind the back of the ever-vigilant Inspector Turner, some country bumpkin would form a cross with his fingers and spit over them when Wise walked passed.

But his fellow patrolmen discovered Simon to be loyal to his comrades, willing to cover for someone who was late for drill, or to help a clumsy rural yokel with basic

baton technique (more complicated than it looked), and volunteering Rachel to provide a wholesome, albeit kosher, meal to the unmarried dormitory constables on their night off. Since they normally subsisted on roast mutton, cabbage, potatoes, and dumplings, and had to supply their own bread, this was a decidedly attractive offer. Although Simon made a special effort for Rachel's sake to honor the major religious holidays at least symbolically, a policeman worked 7 days a week, and that included the Sabbath. Simon early on made the decision that God would understand his need to forego "shabbat shalom," the peace of the Sabbath, so that there could be peace for others. Besides, he doubted that God cared. Or sometimes even that God was.

Simon quickly realized that the core of a policeman's life was the beat. Constables often logged up to twenty miles a day and were on duty eight to ten hours in a row. Simon had no difficulty in keeping up the standard pace of two and one-half miles per hour, and discovered he enjoyed the relative anonymity of patrol. Because the beats overlapped, periodically he would cross paths with another constable, and they would tip their hats and exchange a few words. Not infrequently he would observe one of his fellows downing a small drink from publicans in exchange for ignoring minor violations, although he himself never accepted these "toothfuls." He also got to know the costers, flower sellers, dustmen and cabbies who frequented his neighborhood, and always gave a friendly salutation as he passed. Walking the beat, the constables were supposed to inspect property and keep an eye out for suspicious characters. Most often, Simon's main responsibilities were clearing lower class drunkards out of the street and assisting upper class drunkards in acquiring a hansom to get them discreetly home, breaking up brawls,

and apprehending the pickpockets and swells who loitered around the pubs and theaters at closing-time.

Mostly the beat gave Simon a chance to think. He appreciated the predictability of being able to put one foot after another, the sense of order and competence that emerged from the simple act of walking. Constables were counseled that "perfect command of one's own temper is indispensable at all times," and Simon treasured this dictum, because that was what he strove for, perfect control of at least one thing.

Over the course of five years Simon Wise began to put his world back together. He discovered he loved his wife very much. He also had become the father of four children, Rebecca, Miriam, and the twins David and Sarah, by the time he was promoted to sergeant, and questions about the justice of life became subsumed to more mundane worries such as how to keep his growing family in shoes and clothes. He picked up a few extra shillings a week by "knocking up" neighborhood workingmen who had no watches or clocks, and in so doing felt he was contributing his part to honor his family's tradition of keeping time in good repair.

In recognition of his ability to win the respect and trust of men, as well as his keen intelligence and devotion to the Force, he was promoted to Inspector the same year his seventh child, Naomi, was born. The English system of policing genuinely attempted to discount connection and privilege in favor of rewarding merit and loyalty, promoting men through the ranks whenever possible and recognizing "men of education and capable judgment." Wise often contrasted the relatively equal opportunities that existed in London with that city of excess across the sea, New York, where it was rumored almost every policeman from the patrolman on the beat to the police commissioner was owned

by Boss Tweed. True, many of his supporters said that Wise should have advanced to Superintendent by now, that it was his religion holding him back. But by the time the tongues had started to wag, Rachel was dead, Leah was dead, his last child was an imbecile, and he had been forced back into a new, yet familiar, hellhole of despair. Being appointed to a higher administrative post no longer held any meaning whatsoever for Simon Wise.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Murdoch knocked smartly at Wise's door, although it already stood open. Wise himself was standing at the window, gazing moodily out at gray skies.

"It's bloody November," the Inspector said mildly, without turning around.

"Couldn't we at least get some real weather, instead of this perpetual damp?"

"I've got some information on the Fairhaven case, sir," the Sergeant said, as he fidgeted with his helmet. When he and Wise were focused on their work, wrestling with the conundrum of robbery or criminality, he felt a companionship and a deep sense of belonging that he rarely felt even with Nancy, his wife. At casual moments like these, however, it sometimes came into his mind, like an unwelcome visitor, that Inspector Wise was a Jew.

"Go ahead then," said Wise, turning reluctantly from the window and seating himself wearily at the heavy oak desk. The wall behind him was lined with law books and manuals of municipal regulations. Murdoch wondered whether the Inspector had actually read them all. Wise absentmindedly fiddled with his pen as he listened to the

sergeant. The top of the desk was pitted and worn, the product of too many hastily scribbled memoranda where the nib had cut through the paper to the wood beneath.

"The coroner's jury has returned a findin' of Willful Murder, sir," Murdoch retorted.

"Not surprising. This was hardly an accident."

"To quote the medical examiner, sir: 'Because the body was not yet cold when found, the abdominal region was still warm, rigor mortis had set in only in the jaw, neck and upper extremities, and the muscles still contracted when beaten, I put the time of death between three and five a.m.'" Murdoch could not suppress a self-congratulatory feeling. Although not all that comfortable with the written word, he could still impress himself – and others - with his prodigious memory.

Inspector Wise did not respond, but he experienced a disturbing image of Mr. Farnsworth, the police surgeon and a man of impeccable dignity, indifferently carving up Lady Fairhaven's inert body. Murdoch, noticing only the Inspector's preoccupied air, was piqued by his superior's apparent lack of concentration.

"There are a few peculiar things, sir," the sergeant said significantly.

"Then I'd better hear them." Wise smiled resignedly, laid down his pen, settled back in his chair, and prepared to give Sergeant Murdoch his most complete attention. He regarded Thomas Murdoch as one of his best sergeants when it came to managing men, a quality he prized, perhaps because it mirrored his own ability as a leader. As well as the eager Constable Brown, Murdoch was in charge of five other ruddy-cheeked young patrolmen. Each day he conscientiously read them the daily police orders on morning parade and visited them on their beats at prearranged spots. He oversaw the upkeep of

their uniforms and supplies, and ensured they were neat, clean, and sober. He kept meticulous track of their faults and misconduct, but he could also be counted on to defend them from the consequences of an occasional indiscretion.

However, although Thomas faithfully piled detail upon evidentiary detail, to Inspector Wise's way of thinking he was less skilled at following a chain of evidence and logically formulating a hypothesis based on inductive reasoning. This weakness led to Murdoch's making occasional intuitive leaps about suspects that left the Inspector shaking his head, and although the sergeant would never admit it, probably played a role in his being passed over for promotion. Wise had learned to assume that the sergeant's incessant affidavits, depositions, and documentation required elaborate culling to separate the chaff from the wheat, but he also knew that Murdoch was especially sensitive to any imputation that his efforts were tangential or inconsequential. To Murdoch, each sliver of information uncovered was a remarkable discovery that should be valued and admired in and of itself. Inspector Wise realized that Murdoch was already commending himself on the gems he was about to reveal, and that the only way to satisfy the man so that he would go away and let him get some work done would be to listen to each and every word.

"First off, when we were called to the residence, I remarked that her ladyship was wearin' a fancy ball dress, not at all appropriate for that early mornin' hour." That piece of information was pretty hard to miss, thought Wise, remembering the misplaced elegance of the corpse, but he simply nodded encouragingly.

“When Constable Brown and I went back to have a bit of a chat with Lady Fairhaven’s personal maid, Mathilde, she admitted that Lady Fairhaven was wearin’ the same ball-gown she’d had on the night before.”

In an aside apparently calculated to offset his own sober response to information he too secretly felt was thrilling, Sergeant Murdoch added, “When he heard this about the dress, Constable Brown was as excited as if he’d discovered the bloody murder weapon... No pun intended, sir.” Murdoch grinned, punning with as much intentionality as possible.

“Now that you mention it, have we located the weapon yet?” No knife such as might have been compatible with Lady Fairhaven’s wound had been found at the scene, or in a thorough search of the premises, and the Inspector wished to turn the conversation to what he considered a more promising line of inquiry.

“Not yet, sir,” said Murdoch, unhappy that the focus had shifted to an area of failure. “But Brown was right to be excited, sir, because her clothes make it purely obvious that Lady Fairhaven did not retire that night. Indeed, it is pretty much impossible for a lady to...” and here even the bold Murdoch looked slightly embarrassed, “well, sir, to disrobe entirely unassisted. And Mathilde told us Lady Fairhaven refused to be attended when she returned home that evening.”

“I see, Sergeant,” Inspector Wise said noncommittally.

Sergeant Murdoch was upset that this disclosure had not provoked a stronger reaction in the Inspector. “Now this is where it becomes interestin’, sir. Mathilde also informed us that her ladyship suffered from insomnia. She often spent all night in her withdrawin’-room, writin’ personal letters and correspondence related to her charitable activities, although if she’d been out, she usually had Mathilde help her into something



more easeful. In any case, sir, I think we can safely conclude that either Lady Fairhaven was workin' in the morning room and was surprised by her assailant, which does not seem likely given that the lock on the door to the garden was unbroken. Or, that she was attacked by a member of the household, who entered through the inside door."

"Let's consider for a moment, Sergeant. There are a few items that should not be overlooked. For instance, although I tend to agree with you that whoever committed this crime was no ordinary prowler, we cannot dismiss the idea of a stranger's entrance so readily. If you recall, Sir Gregory mentioned that his wife often liked to stroll in the garden. Therefore, despite the chill weather, possibly she herself unlatched the door, took a breath of fresh air, and then forgot to refasten the lock, in this manner exposing herself to an intruder.

"There is another hypothesis as well. It is conceivable that Lady Fairhaven intentionally remained awake to rendezvous with someone at a prearranged tryst, and herself admitted this person through the garden entrance." The idea of a clandestine encounter had occurred to the Inspector soon after his visit to Berkeley Square, and he had been mulling it over ever since. Perhaps Abraham Rothstein, though he denied it, perhaps the libidinous footman, perhaps even Sir Gregory, although he claimed to have been at his club, perhaps a person at this point entirely unknown to them. "I am meeting again later today with Sir Gregory and perhaps tomorrow with Lady Abbott, the family friend whom you so painstakingly located, to ascertain more about Lady Fairhaven's customary nocturnal activities." He knew Thomas would blame himself severely for not thinking of this possibility. "You've done good work, Thomas. Now I've got to get on with these papers."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Three years ago, there had been a strike in the Metropolitan Force for higher wages, a guaranteed pension, a weekly rest day, and the right to form a trade union. One hundred and eighty men had refused duty, of whom one hundred were dismissed, many of them colleagues and friends of Inspector Wise, although most were later reinstated quietly at reduced pay. Three ringleaders were sent to prison, with little to show for their efforts. There was still no day of rest, no guaranteed pension, and only a token salary increase. The lack of a secure pension in particular continued to rankle, and recently a select committee of the House of Commons had been established to hear evidence on this issue. Inspector Wise had been invited to testify and was in the throes of preparing his statement. Of course, the Fairhaven case was a high priority, because of the prominence of the baronet, but detection must progress as a matter of logical development, and Murdoch's enthusiasm, he felt, was premature.

"Thank you, sir. But that's not all." Once more Sergeant Murdoch interrupted his thoughts, unwilling, as the Inspector had feared, to end their discussion until he had redeemed himself. "Mr. Creavey admitted that her ladyship had seemed unlike her usual self this past week. Agitated, he said."

"Agitated, Murdoch?"

"Aye, sir, that was the word he used," Murdoch replied testily. "I don't know what he meant by it. You know how butlers are, so bloody high and mighty. Think they're nobility themselves. Think policemen are made to wipe their feet on. All the

good Mr. Creavey could think of was protecting the family's name. As soon as the words were out of his mouth, he looked as though he would have traded places with the scullery maid for a day if he could've taken them back."

"I see," said Inspector Wise, thinking that this information provided reassuring confirmation of Sir Rothstein's observations about Lady Fairhaven's emotional state. He suspected that whatever had contributed to her disquiet would also be relevant to her death. But for the moment he only said, "You mustn't be too hard on Mr. Creavey, Thomas. Indiscretion is a fatal flaw in a butler. Was there anything else?"

"Nothing that caught my attention, sir. The servants seemed to like Lady Fairhaven well enough. They thought she took a sincere interest in their lives, and she had actually gone out of her way to help one or two with family problems."

"What did the servants have to say about the baronet?"

"I didn't hear any serious complaints on that score either. He's the typical country gentleman, spends a few hours every day on the family's affairs when he's in town, a bit of an up-and-comer in the House, but his real passions are horses, cricket, and the hunt. He seems to have a taste for the high life, the theater, quite a bit of gamblin', but he generally pays his debts."

"And no one in the household heard anything the morning Lady Fairhaven was killed?"

"Not according to the servants, sir. Lady Fairhaven's withdrawin'-room, the mornin'-room that is, is a trifle isolated from the rest of the house, as you no doubt noticed. The kitchen naturally is in the basement, along with the butler's pantry and the housekeeper's quarters. On the ground floor, in addition to the entry-hall, is the drawin'

room, the dinin' room, the library, and at the end of a small passage, the mornin'-room which opens onto that small garden with its own private entrance. On the first floor are the master bedrooms, one for Lady Fairhaven, one for Sir Gregory. The second floor houses the children's bedrooms, the governess' room, and the schoolroom, while the remainder of the servants are quartered on the third floor. Someone could have been in the room with Lady Fairhaven, no matter how they got there, and no one be the wiser."

Wise contemplated the arrangement of the dwelling for a moment, then said, "Did you and Brown between you cover all the servants?"

"I don't know as I could say all. Frankly, sir, I've rarely seen so many servants under one roof. Butler, two footmen, the housekeeper, scullery maid, upstairs maids, downstairs maids, the 'tween maid, laundress, cook, nursemaid, and governess. And that doesn't include the outdoors servants brought up from the country. Still keep their own horses, they do, don't rent them like so many do nowadays. Anyway, Brown and me counted eighteen, and we might have missed a few. A garden boy left service a couple of days before, and a few months ago, a downstairs maid was discovered with child and dismissed by Mr. Creavey. That girl might have been angry enough to retaliate," Murdoch speculated, with more exuberance than logic, in the Inspector's opinion.

"By stabbing her mistress through the heart? I doubt it, Thomas. After all, it was the butler who sent her away. Her ladyship probably didn't even know the girl was in trouble – and from what you mentioned before, if she had, she was more likely to help her than dismiss her." Seeing his Sergeant's chagrin, Inspector Wise said kindly, "Look into it all the same. And put some men on the street to drum up more information on our jolly baronet," he added, thinking of the intelligence Lady Rothstein had provided

regarding the baronet's rumored dalliance. "Perhaps he was not satisfied with the theater. Find out where he spent his leisure time."

"Right, sir." Sergeant Murdoch made no move to leave, although he knew he had overstayed his welcome.

I know what he's waiting for, Inspector Wise thought, a few titbits no one else would be privy to, perhaps something juicy about Rothstein. Damn it all, the man could be impudent. Then remembering their history, he unbent, and said nonchalantly, "Sir Rothstein does not appear to be a likely suspect at this time, although we should not completely rule out his involvement." Murdoch's face glowed with interest. It was exciting to be assigned to a case that touched even peripherally the highest reaches of London society. "He has an alibi, in that several witnesses, all servants, swear he did not leave the carriage when he returned Lady Fairhaven to her home. Nevertheless, I believe we need to probe a bit more deeply this connection between Lady Fairhaven and the Rothstein brothers. Perhaps there's something more there than meets the eye. When I talk with Lady Abbot tomorrow I will see if she can shed light on these various relationships." Instinctively, Wise distrusted surfaces that were too smooth. In his experience, digging deeper usually revealed a distorted interior. This was where evil lay hidden, and where he would find his solutions.

Murdoch nodded, finally satisfied. He too had learned to be suspicious of appearances, especially where the aristocracy was concerned. There was always something more.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

No one was pleased when later that afternoon Inspector Wise put in a second appearance at the Fairhaven residence - not James the footman, who found opening the front door to a mere policeman beneath his dignity; not Mr. Creavey the butler, who worried that the seemingly incessant police comings and goings at the house in Berkeley Square might have an unsalutary effect on his standing with his peers; not Mrs. Shaw the housekeeper, who looked suspiciously at Inspector Wise's muddy boots and dripping coat as though he had purposely brought in the weather to contaminate her cleaning; and certainly not the baronet himself, who, upon being informed of the Inspector's presence in the library, was only saved from a distinctly irritated expression crossing his face by generations of breeding that did not permit a Fairhaven to demonstrate emotion in front of servants, or their equivalent.

Anticipating the baronet's displeasure, Inspector Wise was not too happy himself to have returned for another conversation, although he reminded himself that, in crimes of passion, the most likely suspect was the one closest to home. But Sir Gregory did not strike the Inspector as so impulsive a man that he was likely to have struck down his wife in an angry outburst. Besides, the deliberate rearranging of Lady Fairhaven's body had a touch of compulsion in it that he had not detected in the baronet. At least, not yet.

"I am sorry to trouble you again, Sir Gregory, but our last interview was interrupted." There was a brief silence. Possibly both men remembered the forlorn cries of the children. "I need to develop a better understanding of the events that transpired on the night that Lady Fairhaven..."

"Yes, yes, man," Sir Gregory interrupted hurriedly. "No need to go into all that. Very well, ask away, although I still can't think how it will be of help. Time is passing, and the murderer is becoming more secure each day that goes by without being apprehended. I warn you, I will not accept anything less than success in this matter."

Wise wondered whether this was the peremptory tone in which Sir Gregory conducted his Parliamentary business. "Nor will I," he replied simply. "Now, if you could provide me with a brief summary of your activities that night..."

"It being a Friday night, and since Parliament is not yet opened, it was particularly convenient for us to give a small dinner party. Of course, the season has not begun, scarcely anyone is in town yet, so it was a rather low-key affair. We had about ten people present, and very decent conversation."

"We'll want a list of names, your Lordship," broke in Inspector Wise.

Sir Gregory looked perplexed, then offended. "Whatever for?"

"Routine, sir," the Inspector replied smoothly. "Perhaps Lady Fairhaven said something to one of them that might shed some light on... subsequent developments."

"Highly unlikely, I should think," protested the baronet.

"Of course, Sir Gregory, but we must leave no stone unturned. Do you yourself recall anything of note occurring during the evening?"

"Nothing. It was a normal affair. Our guests arrived somewhat after seven, within the hour we had proceeded down to the dining room, we consumed a jolly good meal, as always. Lady Alicia loved putting together banquets, balls, that sort of thing." Sir Gregory looked mournfully at the Inspector. Inspector Wise could not decide if he were regretting the loss of his wife or the loss of his dinners. "I recall we had a clear soup, a

poached turbot, turkey and an excellent roast saddle of mutton, along with cutlets, or was it a sautéed fillet of fowl, quail from the Continent, and to close excellent truffles with champagne."

"Impressive, sir," Wise said politely.

"Afterwards, the gentlemen smoked for a half hour or so, then joined the ladies in the drawing room, where we had tea and coffee. Around eleven carriages were called for, and we proceeded to the ball."

"This was the ball given by Lord and Lady Mallory?"

"Yes. A Guy Fawkes ball. Rather a quaint idea, but what can one do at this time of year?"

Inspector Wise quashed the impulse to reply, "Apparently you managed," Instead said, "I have heard that Lady Fairhaven spent a good deal of time with both Sir Abraham and Mr. Alfred Rothstein that evening."

Sir Gregory looked uncomfortable. "Lady Alicia danced a quadrille and three waltzes with Alfred. Perhaps it was excessive. And she had an inordinately lengthy conversation with Abraham. Certainly, people were talking. But it was an inadvertent indiscretion on her part. Through some of her charitable pursuits, Lady Alicia had become interested in the improvement of working-class conditions. She was fascinated by Abraham and Gertrude Rothstein's project to build modern cottages equipped with sewer systems and running water for their laborers at Tring. Out of proportion, if you ask me. Of course, at home we keep up our laborers' cottages, we've built a local school, contributed to the building fund for a new parsonage. But this extravagance of erecting whole model villages, too damned expensive!



“Still, Lady Alicia was intrigued, no doubt about it. Thought we might raise a Saltaire, one of those prototypical worker communities, out at our country place, like that old industrialist Salt did. Forgot we didn’t have a factory to support it!”

Privately, Inspector Wise speculated whether other aspects of the fabulously wealthy Rothstein family, in addition to their construction projects, fascinated Lady Fairhaven, and resolved to find out.

"And you also thought her conduct that evening unseemly?"

"We did not part on the best of terms, which I will forever regret. But I was not sufficiently upset to murder her, if that's what you mean."

"There was no implication, Sir Gregory. I am simply seeking information. So that is how it happened that Mr. Abraham Rothstein took Lady Fairhaven back to Berkeley Square in his carriage?"

Again, the baronet looked uncomfortable. "It was unavoidable, something she and I had agreed upon beforehand. It had nothing to do with Rothstein. I had some business to conduct early in the morning about the entailment of our country estate, and I decided it would be more convenient for me to remain overnight at my club."

"You spent the night, the entire night, at your club." It was phrased as a statement, but the Inspector’s inquiring gaze gave the baronet an opportunity for denial or clarification.

"As I said." There had been only the most imperceptible hesitation, but Inspector Wise knew with the certainty borne of experience that the baronet was lying to him.

Although outwardly the Inspector appeared perfectly collected, he felt his heart beating

more rapidly and the blood coursing strongly through his veins. It was, he supposed, the poor man's equivalent of the hunt.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

"Inspector Simon Wise, calling on Lady Penelope Abbott," said the Inspector the following afternoon, proffering his card to the plainly dressed servant girl with curly red hair that reminded him of Naomi. Sergeant Murdoch had described Lady Penelope Abbott as a good friend of Lady Fairhaven's, someone who was involved in many of the same charitable causes and who also had a personal relationship with the murdered woman. Inspector Wise noticed with interest that the house itself was quite modest, not at all in the same class as the Fairhaven's lavish residence.

With a quick curtsy and a slight shadow of alarm in her eyes which he assumed was triggered by the title of inspector, the maid said, "Come in, sir. I will tell my mistress you are waiting," then blushed furiously as she realized the blunder she had committed in disclosing to the caller that Lady Abbott was at home. It could not be undone, however, so she ushered him into a foyer, then scurried away. A few moments later, he was led into an unpretentious but bright parlor, where a small woman half-rose to greet him.

"As you can see, Inspector, I am truly at home, both literally and figuratively," Penelope Abbott said in an ironic tone.

"Your maid left you little choice, " he replied, acknowledging the social gaffe since Lady Abbott had, quite surprisingly, opened that particular door.

"She is new, and alas poorly trained as I am discovering. I have heard it said in fashionable circles that when one is committed to the social necessity of having a butler open one's front door but lacks the financial wherewithal to remunerate such an important and expensive personage, a parlor maid will have to do. Since my husband's death twelve years ago, I find myself in somewhat straitened circumstances, and so I must pay the price." Her eyes gleamed with amused self-mockery. "To tell you the truth, even when my husband was alive and we had a more imposing household, I never could quite manage to keep control over my butler. So you see, Amanda suits me quite well, although I must put up with the occasional misstep."

"To be sure, Lady Abbott." The Inspector was taken aback. He did not know what to make of this sort of candor, especially from a member of the upper classes, no matter how constrained her circumstances might be. It occurred to him that she spoke to him as an equal, a ridiculous but intriguing thought. He also observed with interest that, despite the Queen having made permanent mourning attire something of a fashion statement for widows, Lady Abbott was not dressed in smothering folds of black crepe. Instead, her well-tailored dress was a deep mauve, with a contrasting green half-jacket. He found the effect quite striking.

"I assume your visit is in regard to the tragic death of Alicia Fairhaven." Lady Abbott watched him carefully with unusual violet eyes, and he caught an expression of intelligent curiosity flitting across her face.

"Yes," the Inspector agreed. "Your name has been mentioned often in connection with hers, in that you appear to have been involved in many of the same charities."

"Indeed," said Penelope Abbott. "Please, Inspector, have a seat. Amanda will be serving tea directly." She added laconically, "Amanda handles tea much more competently."

The Inspector sank into an overstuffed sofa, taking the opportunity to look about him. The parlor was cluttered, but comfortable and homey. Several small spindle-legged tables were crowded with photographs. His eyes glanced over a younger, possibly happier Lady Abbott in several poses, always in the presence of a stern figure in uniform, and a varying number of boys, first chubby, later slim. Interspersed among the pictures were porcelain figurines, cut-glass bowls, and other bric-a-brac. A miniature model of a Swiss chalet rested on the mantelpiece next to a gilt French clock.

"We stayed at Montreux one winter with the boys," she commented, noticing his gaze. "At the time it seemed charming to bring home a copy of the establishment where we had holidayed so enjoyably. Now it strikes me as overdone." The Inspector was unsure whether she was referring to the long-ago holiday or to the curlicued, quaint little dwelling. He expected a manikin in lederhosen to pop out one of the doors and yodel the time.

The windows of the parlor were hung with heavy stuff draperies and lined with lace curtains. The ceiling, a gray-blue color, made him think of the sky. On the floor was a striking indigo Indian carpet, covered with repeating geometrical patterns of small masses of bright color. Looking more closely, Simon realized that although it did not consist of actual flowers, it somehow gave a "bloomy" effect, as though he were sitting in a field full of blossoms.

A scattering of cushions, delicately embroidered with flowers, fruit, butterflies and birds, graced various pieces of furniture. From the occasional lapsed stitch, he deduced they were made by hand. A fitting past-time, he thought, for the namesake of the wife of Odysseus.

Penelope Abbott regarded him shrewdly, inspecting him as carefully as he inspected her living quarters. "Inspector Wise," she remarked, giving his name due consideration. "We must live in a truly enlightened age when a public servant of the Hebrew persuasion leads the murder investigation of a socially prominent individual. Perhaps another exceptional Jew, like the great Disraeli?" Her tone was simultaneously curious and slightly mocking.

Simon Wise felt his cheeks coloring, although he had heard such comments before. "While I have only the greatest admiration for our Prime Minister, Lady Abbott, I am certainly no more exceptional than any other police inspector on the London force."

Penelope Abbott opened her mouth, then closed it quickly again, and blushed in return. "Please forgive me, Inspector. I have spoken both tactlessly and insensitively. I might excuse myself by saying such a remark is the product of a society that values cleverness over kindness. But in fact, it is the result of a woman with too little to do and insufficiently serious matters to occupy her attention. I apologize."

Lady Abbott paused, then as a peace offering added, "You know, I was invited to a Sabbath worship service once by a Jewish acquaintance of mine. Although I did not like being crowded into the upstairs gallery with the other women, and although I could not understand one word, except the blessing of the Queen, nevertheless I found the whole experience rather moving. It struck me as the service of a vigorous and brave

people, filled with joy, abundant in hope and confidence." She smiled wryly. "Of course, it was rather long, a bit more than we poor weak-kneed Anglicans are used to enduring." Then, as Amanda chose this moment to enter with a tea tray, she continued smoothly, "Please, have a cucumber sandwich."

The Inspector gratefully accepted the delicate slices of bread, butter, and cucumber from a small platter of sandwiches and short-breads in lieu of further comment. Remarks about his Jewish heritage, usually crude or facetious, were not uncommon. What was completely baffling was the straightforward manner in which a member of polite society had acknowledged her own social clumsiness and, what was more, tried to make amends. Simon Wise looked at Lady Penelope Abbott more closely. This was clearly not a usual woman. He felt far from being in command of this peculiar situation and decided he had better carry on before he lost complete control of his interrogation.

Their conversation confirmed much of what Baron Rothstein's wife had disclosed both about Lady Fairhaven's charitable activities and her occasional coquetries. Lady Abbott offered a few more details on this latter score.

"For a few weeks, Lady Alicia was on friendly terms with Frederick Bryant May, a nouveau-riche captain of industry who has built his fortune, literally, on matchsticks. I believe initially Alicia wished to encourage him to reform some of the more egregious working conditions at his factory, but it is also indisputable that Mr. May has a certain animal magnetism." Lady Abbott laid stress on the word "animal," as if she too had found this quality briefly intriguing. "Recently she had taken up with the Rothstein brothers, in part because of Abraham's far-reaching charitable projects, in part because it is always invigorating to be around people of unimaginable wealth. For a time, she was

also fascinated by the provocative, albeit peculiar, Professor Theodore Maximus, who teaches at London University College and who, with JS Mill, argues that women may actually be fully as capable as men, perish the thought."

Wise was startled by the disclosure that his good colleague and crime photographer had intersected with a woman of such social prominence, as well as learning of his unexpected radical views about the equality of women. He said nothing, although he thought to himself that this revelation shed light on Maximus' shocked reaction at seeing Lady Fairhaven's body.

Lady Abbott shot the Inspector a droll, half-mocking glance and seemed to be mulling something over. "It is true that, of late, Sir Gregory seemed more than usually exasperated with his wife's improprieties. But he himself took his sensual pleasures elsewhere, so he really had nothing to complain about."

"Perhaps he had compromised himself in a way that would bring disgrace to the family, and his wife was threatening to expose him," the Inspector suggested. "In cases like these, the most likely suspect is usually the spouse."

"I understand that, Inspector. But propriety was what concerned Gregory. He was careful not to embarrass his wife, and that was what he demanded in return: prudence."

By the time the Inspector left, he admitted he had learned nothing further about Lady Alicia Fairhaven that could be useful to the investigation. Was it because he had wasted over an hour that he felt so strangely unsettled?

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The following day Inspector Wise and Sergeant Murdoch had been able to secure an appointment with Dr. Michael Talbot. They were shown into the waiting room by a plump, amicable woman who introduced herself as his nurse. The Inspector examined his surroundings with interest and some apprehension. He doubted whether there would be much of value to be learned here about Lady Fairhaven. If he were honest with himself, he had to admit that a large part of his motivation in seeking out Dr. Talbot was Emily. Perhaps Dr. Baumgarten had been right. Perhaps after all there was something that could be done for her.

"Where are the patients, then?" asked the Sergeant, surveying the empty room.

"Oh, the doctor doesn't see private patients on Fridays. He's in his office, preparing for the charity clinic he conducts over at the hospital. I'm just off to fetch him." And with an obliging smile, Nurse Cunningham left the room.

"Got a good number of books here," Sergeant Murdoch remarked. It was true that two walls of the room were lined with impressive leather-bound volumes. The Inspector craned his neck to read the bindings on a stack of journals: *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Physicians, Psychological Medicine, Reports of the Society for the Study of the Mental and Physical Conditions of Children*. Diplomas from Cambridge, London Hospital, and the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science, apparently a prestigious professional society concerned with contemporary social problems, covered one wall. But what struck the Inspector was the strange way in which the room resembled a nursery, and a rather permissive nursery at that. Mechanical toys, looking rather the worse for wear, filled several of the lower shelves. A wooden bin overflowed with dogs, balls, and puzzles. A large copy of *Alice's Adventures Underground* lay on a



table. Wise recognized the Tenniel illustration on the cover from the copy his own children had at home. The remaining walls were hung with pictures of fairy-like children and cherubic sea-sprites from Kingsley's *Water Babies*. The Inspector felt surprisingly at home. Perhaps it was that Dr. Talbot spent much of his time surrounded by children, as did he.

"Inspector, Sergeant. Please come in." A connecting door had opened, and a slight, pale man was motioning toward them. Despite his beard, Inspector Wise thought he was quite young, in his late twenties at most. When they had settled in the doctor's office, Wise looked at him curiously. He was indeed young to have developed such an impressive reputation. But beneath the courtesy, the Inspector thought he could detect a certain zealotry. Perhaps it was the intensity of Talbot's dark eyes, the wide, mobile mouth, and the restless way his fingers occasionally thrummed on a mahogany writing table, as though they had more scientific things to be doing than listening to the police.

"So ye're aware of Lady Fairhaven's death, sir?" Murdoch was saying. Wise often allowed him the opening gambit, so that he could freely observe the interaction.

"Of course. It's been in all the papers." Doctor Talbot's expressive features betrayed a shadow of impatience, but his tone remained polite. "We were acquainted, as I'm sure you know, through her generous work for the Association to Improve the Condition of Mentally Enfeebled Children, as well as the interest she took in my own Institute." His voice dropped. "I admired Lady Fairhaven a great deal. She was a devoted wife and mother, as well as an intelligent woman committed to various social reforms. She did a great deal of good. Her death is a tragedy." The doctor looked even paler, and the Inspector thought he saw true grief on his face.

"What else can ye tell us about Lady Fairhaven?" Sergeant Murdoch continued, seeming not to acknowledge the doctor's statement, although Wise knew his sergeant well enough to detect a seedling of interest at the depth of Dr. Talbot's feelings. "Did she have any enemies?"

"Enemies?" The doctor sounded dazed. "The papers inferred it was a botched burglary, perhaps a thief whom she discovered in the act of..." Dr. Talbot's voice trailed off.

"We'd appreciate it if you treated this information confidentially for the time being," Inspector Wise intervened, "but it's not likely it was a robber. There was no sign of a forced entry. We think she knew whoever murdered her." He waited to see what effect this information might have on Dr. Talbot.

The doctor looked disconcerted. "She knew...? But who could have wanted to murder Lady Alicia? That is absurd. Occasionally she could be a bit unconventional, as I mentioned she was an intelligent woman, perhaps overbold in some of her opinions, but still charming. I believe she was regarded as an asset to her husband, who as a rising MP required a wife who could avoid scandal."

"And just what scandals did she avoid?"

"You mistake my meaning," the doctor said coldly. "I know of no scandal, inferred or otherwise, that touched Lady Alicia. I simply meant that while interested in a larger sphere than house and hearth, she was discreet and well-bred."

"What sort of work did she do for the Institute, Dr. Talbot?" the Inspector asked. For a moment their eyes locked, then Talbot looked away.

"She had only recently become involved in the Institute, perhaps in the last year. But I found her wonderfully quick and... sympathetic. She was an easy woman with whom to converse. She had a remarkable gift for understanding and appreciating one's work." The doctor was eager to explain. "In addition to this consultation, I have taken space on Goshen Street, near the University, where I have established an Institute for Research into the Deformities of Children. I have my laboratory there, and it is where I conduct my investigational studies. But I had hoped for it to become much more. You see, I have wanted for some years to establish a Home for mentally deficient children, a sort of school where I could try out some of my educational ideas, introduce new treatments, and create an environment that would nourish them physically and emotionally. It's difficult to explain, but it is a vision that means a great deal to me."

Wise said, "I think I understand you quite well. Please go on."

The doctor looked at him inquiringly, but said, "Because of her connections, Lady Alicia has been able to help start a fund for the establishment of such a Home. She succeeded in interesting several of her wealthier friends in the project. Now I don't know what will happen." Dr. Talbot squeezed the bridge of his nose in a fatigued gesture, then rallied. "She also helped with pamphlets, educational materials, that sort of thing, for the Institute. She was quite a talented writer, with a clear way of expressing herself. Part of our work is to attempt to educate the lower classes about the true nature of mental deficiency, teach them there are ways their children can be helped." He took a breath. "It can be a daunting process. Lady Alicia was a constant source of solace and encouragement to me. I will miss her greatly."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Unaccountably, Dr. Talbot chuckled wryly.

“Does something about this situation strike ye as humorous, sir?” Sergeant Murdoch asked.

“No, no of course not. It’s just that Lady Alicia and I did not always see eye to eye. As a member of the Infant Protection Society, I have worked hard to ensure that adequate legal protection is provided helpless infants who are at the mercy of distraught and desperate single mothers. Lady Alicia, as befitted her feminist inclinations, was more interested in redeeming young girls who had stumbled for the first time. She felt the legislation sponsored by the Society would harm poor baby minders by depriving them of an indispensable source of income while eliminating a vital service for unsupported mothers.”

Despite his best intentions, through Hannah’s nightly carping on the woman question, as she liked to refer to it, Inspector Wise had acquired some knowledge on this subject. He had a feeling of satisfaction that at last the incessant harangues he had endured might be of some use. “I believe Lydia Becker and other women’s suffrage supporters have accused the Infant Protection Society bills of singling out women for regulation and ignoring the problem of the male sexual exploiters who, in their view, created the problem in the first place.” He enjoyed Dr. Talbot’s sudden look of attentiveness.

“Quite correct. That is an excellent summary of their position. In the event, almost none of the legislation proposed thus far has passed anyway. And, although things

have become somewhat heated in Parliament, between Lady Alicia and me, at any rate, our differences were always friendly. We approached the problem from divergent angles, but our basic analysis of the overarching social problem was virtually identical. Infants must be guarded against exploitation and death, while mothers need to be rescued from social condemnation and crushing economic encumbrance.”

There was a knock at the door. "Yes?" said Dr. Talbot. A strange-looking individual entered and made his way with a sort of spastic stride toward where the doctor was seated. Only a few inches over five feet, he appeared thin and frail.

"This is my assistant, Oliver Brantley," the doctor explained. "He does errands for me, obtains supplies, chemicals for the laboratory, runs messages, distributes our educational literature." The doctor gestured toward Wise and the sergeant. "Oliver, these are the police. They are here about Lady Fairhaven.”

The figure made no direct avowal of their presence, but instead mumbled something to Dr. Talbot in a garbled, painfully twisted speech. Talbot listened with perfect equanimity, patiently waiting until the sentence was seemingly torn out of Brantley's mouth.

"You must forgive Oliver. He has a slight speech impediment. It is easy to understand him after a few encounters, but initially it helps if I interpret. He knew Lady Alicia too, you know. He sometimes delivered messages between us about pamphlets and such." Brantley made another verbalization and Dr. Talbot continued, "Lady Alicia was very kind to Oliver. She sometimes gave him little treats, almonds, oranges. She asked him about his childhood. He says he is very sorry she is dead.”

Although Sergeant Murdoch had had considerable difficulty deciphering Brantley's language, he was not at all certain that Brantley had said anything of the kind. A handsome man himself in a pugnacious way, he looked at Brantley with distaste. Like many people, Sergeant Murdoch believed physical deformity was often a sign of depravity. "When was the last time he saw Lady Fairhaven?"

Dr. Talbot looked inquiringly at Brantley. The man's mouth worked laboriously, his entire visage participating in the act of articulation. Again, seemingly incomprehensible sounds emerged.

"He says it was about two weeks ago. That sounds right. I had sent him with proofs of a booklet about which I wanted Lady Alicia's opinion." Dr. Talbot looked at Sergeant Murdoch with a sardonic smile. "I was attempting to explore whether certain physical imperfections may be considered stigmata of moral degeneracy. Although it is a controversial issue, in this pamphlet I argued the case in the negative."

There was an awkward silence. Sergeant Murdoch had the unsettling feeling that the doctor had been reading his mind.

"And did he notice anything out of the ordinary about her at that time?" the sergeant persisted. "Did she seem upset, or did she say anything that struck him as strange?"

The doctor conferred briefly with his assistant. "She seemed as usual," he said abruptly. "Now, gentlemen, if you will excuse me. My time is valuable and my charity patients await."

"Murdoch, please wait for me outside," Inspector Wise said. "Doctor, if I may..."

"I told you, Inspector, I have no information that could help you with Lady Alicia's murder. I still find it difficult to accept that it was not some terrible random event. I know of no one who would wish her dead."

"No, you misunderstand," said Wise with some difficulty. "I have a daughter... she is three... she is Mongoloid. Perhaps, if you would be willing... Perhaps you could join us for a Sabbath meal," he concluded with sudden inspiration, then felt unaccountably vulnerable, as though he had crossed some border and landed himself in uncharted territory. Why had he said that? He was not an impulsive person. He did not blurt things out spontaneously, much less invitations to dinner. And the Sabbath was sacred to their family, an island of tranquility floating in the busyness of the everyday week. Why had he invited a Gentile to intrude? Especially as he had resisted Emily becoming Talbot's patient.

After all this time, Simon Wise did not want to allow the dreadful seed of hope to be planted. He did not want more consultations, more opinions. Yet strangely, Wise felt he needed Dr. Talbot. Certainly, if the warm surroundings and passionately expressed sentiments were any indication, Dr. Talbot's regard for his pathetic little patients was sincere and honorable. So perhaps a shared meal could do no harm? And he could simultaneously join his family for a rare Sabbath on the excuse to the Superintendent that it was work-related obligation.

Talbot's expression changed immediately, although in a subtle way that avoided any overt suggestion of pity. "It would be my pleasure, Inspector. At your convenience."

As he walked once again through the doctor's waiting room, Inspector Wise felt an irresistible urge to pick up a brightly colored top and spin it. He could not understand

this impulse, any more than he could unravel what had impelled him to invite Dr. Talbot to his home. Dr. Baumgarten had warned him of the danger of a breakdown after Rachel's and Leah's deaths, the potential consequence of his intense grief. He prided himself on his courage, his toughness. On the whole, he considered himself resolute and steadfast. In this line of work, one had to depend implicitly on one's nerves. Now he wondered if, three years after losing his wife and daughter, he were not also in danger of losing his mind.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The lamplighter paused outside the Wise residence and commenced his nightly task. The globe of light flickered for a moment, then glowed reassuringly. For as long as they could remember, the Wise children had gathered religiously at the large window at the front of the house to watch this ritual, bending back the thick drapes to get a better view. They felt it was a mark of distinction that their house had, so to speak, a streetlight of its very own. Each time it was kindled, Rebecca thought of the Biblical text, "and God divided the light from the darkness." Although it seemed fanciful, at times she imagined the lamplighters as some strange variety of high priests practicing a sacred calling.

"Can you see Abba yet?" Deborah wanted to know. She was an introspective child, musically inclined, with a sweet, sure voice. Of course, all the girls could play their upright pianoforte a bit and, by employing the tonic sol-fa system of sight reading, could sing the somewhat saccharine songs of Tosti or the music of Charles Villiers Stanford in



reasonably pleasing two-part descants if necessary. But it was Deborah's virtuosity with Bach's intricate counterpoint harmonies that amazed their visitors.

It seemed disloyal to her father to say so out loud, but Deborah knew that the sun had already set and the Sabbath had begun. Rebecca and Miss Hannah had said the blessings and lit the candles a few minutes earlier. Zadok sat at the head of the table, an implicit admission that Simon Wise would not be presiding over the meal. Each child was scrubbed and in his or her best clothes, including Emily, who was eyeing the Sabbath loaf hungrily. Now, hoping against hope, they still awaited their father's arrival.

As a police inspector, Simon Wise rarely had the opportunity to honor the Sabbath as his forefathers had intended. Typically, Saturday afternoon was the end-of-week payday and therefore also a busy crime day, so he often worked late into the night. For Rachel's sake, whenever he could, he had tried to be home by sunset on Friday evening, for the ushering in of the Sabbath. He remembered her beseeching him, "Come home tonight, Simon, you can say a blessing, have a kosher supper, and show your children you haven't been attacked by some street ruffian." He knew she worried constantly, partly about his safety, but also because it was impossible to be a policeman and an observant Jew. Since her death he frequently found excuses to stay away.

"That's him, that's him, there he is!" cried six-year-old Naomi excitedly, her reddish curls flying as she jumped up and down in anticipation.

"No, you silly goose, that isn't Abba, it doesn't even look anything like him," fourteen-year-old Sarah said with a superior expression.

The children turned away from the window disconsolately. In the kitchen, Martha was putting the finishing touches on a succulent haddock, fried with eggs in salad oil and

surrounded by slices of lemon and sprigs of parsley. Because she had worked for Jewish families all her life, she automatically lit the fires, wound the family watches and tore the toilet paper in preparation for the Sabbath. She would have been horrified to do otherwise. She knew as well as Miss Gelbstein, perhaps better, how long to keep meat in salt, never to fry steaks in butter, and that the gentlemen of the house could not smoke on the Sabbath until three stars appeared in the sky (although the Inspector did not smoke at all). It was Martha who blithely referred to beggars as *schnorrers*, indiscriminately intoned *olov hashalom* when she mentioned the name of a deceased person, whether Jewish or not, and exclaimed *mazzal tov* to the children when they boasted to her of their accomplishments. Miss Gelbstein herself cringed at such Yiddishisms. Indeed, after Rachel's death, it was as much Martha's consternation at violating her employer's faith as it was Miss Gelbstein's punctilious desire to honor Rachel's orthodoxy that kept the spark of religious observance alive at all in the spiritually fractured Wise household.

Rebecca, who carried Emily on her hip as a semi-permanent fixture, started to tidy the already flawless flower arrangement on the table, which was covered with gleaming china, polished silver, and a snowy damask linen cloth with a small dot pattern that Miriam, their fashion arbiter, assured them was in the best of taste. Two wax candles stood at attention in the heavy silver candlesticks. The *kiddish* goblet was filled with wine, and the braided *challah* sprinkled with sesame seeds waited under its embroidered cover. Later, there would be the fish, as well as smoked salmon, plates of olives, pickled herring and cucumbers. And for dessert, Hannah Gelbstein's famous almond pudding, which had made many a Jewish housewife forgive her radical feminist ways in exchange for the recipe.

Since her mother's death, Rebecca felt a special responsibility to make each Sabbath perfect, yet each Friday the setting sun seemed to cast a chill, a hollowness into their home. She clutched Emily tighter, as Miss Gelbstein bustled in.

"Come, children," Hannah said with determined cheerfulness, "we must begin our Sabbath. God waits on no man."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Over the next few days, Simon found himself thinking of the information, such as it was, that Lady Abbott had provided him. He also found himself thinking about Lady Abbott herself, her quick wit, forthright manner, and eyes that seemed to communicate more than she said. And because he was contemplating a true lady, an aristocratic lady, his thoughts turned to Miriam, his second daughter, who so longed to be a lady and was so far from ever becoming one.

Miriam was a great trial to Miss Gelbstein because she was preoccupied with becoming the consummate English miss, although it was this uncompromisingly feminine quality that made her father regard her with pride and relief. Sarah and Rebecca alternately ridiculed and envied her, while David and the little girls regarded her with unconcealed admiration. The prettiest of the Wise sisters, her copper hair and fair skin often led her to be mistaken for Irish. At sixteen, Miriam considered herself "une demoiselle faite," a fully-fledged young lady. She had recently lengthened her skirts and started putting up her hair in a becoming chignon. Miriam was fond of dreaming about the finer things in life, which at the moment in her imagination consisted of sable coats

and diamond earrings. When she was foolish enough to vocalize these yearnings, she usually earned withering glances from Rebecca, who chided her for being selfish, and from Sarah, who called her shallow. Miriam's continual attempts at self-improvement were also generally met with unconcealed contempt from these two, although Simon regarded them as laudable, and could not understand the reactions of the other girls. Hannah's influence, he suspected with misgiving.

"Listen to this," Miriam would say, turning the pages of what the other girls called her bible, *The Habits of Good Society*. "A lady should always wear a smile, exhibit graceful bearing and a light step. She should never look breathless, or flushed, or shivery."

"Suppose she is cold?" would be Sarah's implacable rejoinder; and "Suppose her corset is too tight?" Rebecca would chime in.

"It makes no difference," Miriam would reply coolly. "A true lady will never give indication of the slightest discomfort." Quoting, "Anything that detracts from the pleasures of society is in bad taste."

Secretly, she liked to read the penny dreadfuls, although Miss Gelbstein forbade them, and she had to smuggle them in with Martha's connivance, swearing her to silence and bribing her with chocolates. Simon had once stumbled on a small pile of the magazines, hidden under a pile of Miriam's sewing but, regarding it a harmless enough vice, never let on he knew her secret.

He recalled with amusement when Hannah had stooped so far as to enlist Miriam's own self-improvement magazines in a campaign to elevate her reading matter.

“Consider this, Miriam,” Miss Gelbstein entreated her willful charge. “In *How to Shine in Society*, the author specifically recommends the reading of history as an excellent subject of study.”

“Ugh,” Miriam complained, “history is so boring. It’s all about things that are already over and done with. I prefer novels.”

“If you are serious about self-improvement, Miriam, novels simply are not adequate. Listen to this: ‘Contemporary novels are generally of poor quality, and therefore of little use in improving one’s conversation.’”

Miriam nodded but did not desist from bringing Martha chocolates on a weekly basis.

Simon’s second daughter was an accomplished seamstress and, whenever she could get away with it, devoted as many as three hours a day to making and remaking dresses and bonnets, trimming hats, sewing and embellishing her underclothes, altering mantles and wraps, shopping for fabrics, trimmings, gloves, boots, and shoes. She had also gone through a short-lived but intense embroidery phase, with the lasting result that every towel, duster, stair runner, and antimacassar in the Wise household was covered with intricate geometric mosaics. Miss Gelbstein commented periodically that they were appalling, but Miriam insisted they were aesthetic, and since Simon refused to intervene, although he thought privately that it could only be to the good that his daughter was skilled with a needle, the linens remained patterned.

Of his three oldest daughters, it seemed to Simon Wise, Miriam was the most charming, the most beguiling, the most... normal. He sympathized with her desire for refinement and culture, to make something better of herself, and wished some elegant

lady, such as Lady Abbott, might take his lovely daughter under her wing. But even as he had passing vision of Lady Abbott mothering Miriam, he felt doubtful. Although her ladyship's manners were of course impeccable, some of her ideas sounded uncomfortably similar to Hannah's and Lady Rothstein's.

He passed a hand through his hair wearily. Everywhere he turned these days women agitating against their traditional place in the world besieged him. Was there no refuge from these bewildering claims to equality? It was one thing to entertain abstract discussions about female suffrage in the company of intelligent, liberal-minded men, but quite another to be surrounded night and day by women who seemed to be trying hard to misplace their femininity. Rachel had been a perceptive, capable woman, but she had never questioned her role as helpmate and companion, happy to further Simon's goals rather than absorbed in her own abilities. He had always thought Miriam would make some young man a perfect wife, as Rachel had been, but nowadays he was no longer sure what this meant. Did women even still want to be wives? What upper class ladies did in their leisure hours to amuse themselves was none of his concern, but for the proliferation of confusion in his mind and in his household, Inspector Wise held Hannah Gelbstein directly responsible.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Despite his misgivings, Simon managed to arrive home that evening shortly after Martha had begun skillfully navigating among the children clustered around the table-

board to serve the stew. Zadok sat at the head, but rose as Simon approached and formally shook his son's hand.

“Abba!” shrieked Naomi, half-jumping up from her seat before Miss Gelbstein's steely glare quelched this impulse. Winking surreptitiously at the little girl, Simon kissed the variously brown and reddish curls of each of his children in turn, following Martha in a ludicrous domestic pas-de-deux around the room. When he came to Emily, seated in her special highchair, he hesitated fractionally. Rebecca, attentively spooning stew into Emily's mouth, was quick to notice the pause and glowered at him. Simon brushed his lips against the child's thin hair and patted Rebecca's arm in a conciliatory gesture. Emily giggled delightedly, but Rebecca did not seem appeased.

Nice of you to join us, Simon,” Miss Gelbstein said acerbically, almost instantly regretting the words. She desperately wanted him to spend more time with his family, to help him reconnect with his children. She reminded herself to try to be nicer. “We've already said the blessings. I was just explaining the marriage question to these young ladies – and gentleman,” she gave a halfhearted wave in David's direction, “all of whom no doubt expect to be married someday.”

Inwardly, Simon groaned. Were his worst fears to be realized yet again?  
“Marriage question? What question can there be, Hannah?”

Whatever her reservations, Hannah ploughed on determinedly. “As I was saying, children, marriage exploits the weakness of women to the advantage of the more powerful sex. David, don't slurp your soup. Miriam, please pass the salt. Do you realize that, once a woman marries, she loses control of her property and any future earnings? Children that issue from the marriage are the property of her husband. She too is

considered her husband's property. Deborah and Naomi, do not engage in side conversations while the family is discussing a topic of importance. You may think the subject of marriage irrelevant to you now, but I guarantee it will not be ten years hence."

Miss Gelbstein took a breath, but in such a way that did not encourage interruption. "Did you know that, before 1857, less than twenty years ago, divorce could only be accomplished by an Act of Parliament? Forty or fifty years ago, in the countryside, it was not unheard of for farmers or laborers who had fallen on hard times to sell – yes, I said sell – their own wives, as if they were so much chattel. Now, am I describing an enlightened, a fair institution?"

"Hannah, for heaven's sake," remonstrated Simon, wishing his family could simply have a quiet meal for once, and talk about polite, inconsequential subjects, as he imagined most proper families did. He could see that Zadok, paying great attention to his soup, would be of no help. "You make it sound as though marriage is a cruel exploitation."

Miss Gelbstein pursed her lips. "Precisely, Simon," she said with equanimity. "What did that overrated preacher Spurgeon say? 'He (the husband) has many objects in life which she (the wife, of course) does not quite understand; but she believes in them all, and anything which she can do to promote them, she delights to perform.'"

"And where do you find error in that?" asked Simon, now truly bewildered. The Baptist's words reminded him very much of Rachel.

"It is unbelievably condescending, as though women had no possibility of a life unsubordinated to that of their mate."

"I shall never marry," Sarah declared stoutly.



“I won’t marry too,” said Naomi.

Miss Gelbstein looked at the girls implacably. “Ha. You are probably thinking that by not marrying, you will be able to make something useful of your life. Far from it. Although it is never questioned that female servants and the wives of farm laborers must engage daily in demanding, heavy, and dirty work, requiring unremitting hours and often considerable strength, middle and upper-class women are considered too fragile to endure the burden of honest labor. The only employment we are considered suited for is as underpaid, overworked governesses, of whom, as Marx would say, the available supply far exceeds the demand. Tell me, Simon, are we privileged creatures then a separate species of human being? I confess, the logic of this escapes me.” Miss Gelbstein cast her eyes downward in a wholly unconvincing imitation of demureness. “But then, I am only a woman.”

Simon shot her a pleading look. “Hannah, please!” But Miss Gelbstein was not to be deterred.

“And supposing we are able to become self-supporting, useful members of society? Even then, we shall never be permitted the same wage as a man for the same work. In fact, women are usually paid half as much as a man for identical labor.”

“But consider, Hannah,” Simon protested, thinking that here at least he was on solid ground, “men must earn a family wage. A woman employed often is taking the bread from the family of the man she has replaced.”

“Nonsense, Simon. More than a few women must support themselves and their families – because they are widowed, or their husbands have deserted them, or are chronically drunk, or were crippled in an industrial accident and are unable to earn a

living wage, or even, though it is ill-mannered to mention it, because they never had husbands in the first place. You cannot convince me that women deserve less than men for the same work. It is absurd!”

She looked about, daring anyone to disagree with her. Her female audience nodded enthusiastically, although Miriam knew that such talk, however intriguing, was pointless. She was certain she would someday marry a kind, indulgent gentleman with whom she would have an elegant life. David looked to his grandfather for support, but the old man had nodded off as he increasingly did these days, lolling back in his chair. The boy consoled himself by wondering if he could get up a game of King Caesar at school the next day.

Emily chose that moment to launch a piece of bread in her father’s direction that landed squarely in the stew, splattering his jacket.

“Rebecca, for goodness sakes, you must keep that child contained, otherwise I will not allow her to eat with us.”

“She’s little more than a baby, Abba. She has as much right to be here as any of us.” Simon could hear the hurt in his oldest daughter’s voice, but he refused to soften. Instead he fished the lump of bread from the bowl and placed it conspicuously on the table, a reprehensible symbol of his defective child’s inadequacies. Rebecca stared at the soggy lump as if she could will it into oblivion, as well as what, to her, seemed perfectly normal three-year-old behavior.

There was a moment of uncomfortable silence, then Hannah continued her pronouncements. “In any event, children, because female infants are actually stronger than male infants and more likely to survive, and because this country persists in

sacrificing its young men in cruel and pointless wars, while other men selfishly choose to remain bachelors all of their unnatural lives, there are simply not enough men to go around, even if every woman in England wanted nothing more than to get married. It is a well-recognized fact that there is a scarcity of eligible husbands for decent middle-class girls. The Census of 1851 concluded that forty-one percent of all women between the ages of 20 and 40 were spinsters. But instead of allowing us single women to make something useful of our lives, to contribute to the greater social good, we are declared “excess” and “redundant,” and societies are formed, the sole purpose of which is to ship us off to the colonies, so we can find husbands and fulfill our destiny as women.”

Miss Gelbstein looked disgusted. Sarah and Deborah exchanged crestfallen glances, while David had a derisive grin on his face. Even Miriam panicked for a moment, contemplating the horrible fate of becoming a spinster like her shrewish cousin. She consoled herself with the thought that her loveliness and good manners would attract the few eligible young men still in existence.

“One can always engage in good works,” Rebecca offered placatingly.

“Good works!” sniffed Miss Gelbstein. “Good works are all very well, but we women are capable of so much more – becoming artists, scientists, leaders in industry and government.”

Contemplating these wondrous possibilities, the table fell silent. For a fleeting moment, Simon wondered how such emigration societies as Hannah referred to might be contacted.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Rachel's family had emigrated from Germany when she was a small child. Left behind were vast numbers of assorted relatives scattered throughout the German states. Hannah Gelbstein was a distant cousin, although Simon could never quite discern the exact relationship. Five years ago, at the age of thirty, when her family in Frankfurt despaired of finding her a husband, they shipped her off to live with Rachel and her family in the hopes that she could become self-supporting. The plan had been for her to hire out as a governess to some wealthy household, which seemed logical enough because Miss Gelbstein looked like a governess. Regardless of changing fashions, she wore her hair parted in the middle and tied severely behind her head in a bun or plaited about her head. Regardless of the season or the occasion, she always dressed in a black, gray, or fawn-colored plain stuff dress with a white collar. And, regardless of the conversation, her expression remained self-righteous.

Even more useful, Hannah was extremely well-educated, much better so than the average Englishwoman. She had a good grasp of mathematics, physics, botany, zoology, and chemistry, and was fluent in French, Italian, and English, as well as, of course, German and Yiddish. However, perhaps her greatest asset in pursuing the profession of governess was that Hannah was also something of a moralist. On the wall of her small room hung a print by Herr Schacher which she had carefully transported from her homeland. Entitled *The Broad and Narrow Way*, it depicted a broad highway labeled "Welcome" leading to a demon-infested fiery pit, the path invitingly lined with worldly temptations such as taverns, dance halls, gambling houses and theaters. The narrow way of hard work, effort and self-reliance wound upwards toward appropriately elevated

celestial rewards. Miss Gelbstein, whose family had a Christmas tree back in Germany, saw no contradiction between the essentially Christian message of this popular print and her own Jewish roots. Whenever one of the children strayed in her eyes, she simply pinched her fingers together and intoned in her accented English, "Narrow, narrow."

Armed with these accomplishments, she set forth from Islington full of hope, ready to impart a bit of culture to the young Anglo-Saxon savages in her charge. But her strong Teutonic accent and imperious ways repeatedly brought her to grief. At last, without anything ever having been said directly, Miss Gelbstein simply stopped leaving the Wise household. She earned occasional pin money by doing odds and ends of research for gentlemen with too much money and leisure time who fancied themselves qualified to write a monograph on some arcane subject, like the decline of the worsted trade in Bradford or the linguistic derivations of Hindustani. Mostly, however, she undertook the education of the Wise children, who, except for David, a day student at University College school, attended a local proprietary school that did little to illuminate their intellects, although it succeeded admirably in boring them to distraction. While it was Sarah's dream eventually to attend the progressive, nonsectarian Ladies' College, she had not yet mustered the courage to discuss this plan with her father, and in the meantime was glad enough to submit to the tutelage of Miss Gelbstein.

At first, Simon had simply tolerated Miss Gelbstein's presence. She did not have any humor that he could detect, and she had a very sharp tongue. Furthermore, she was a seething hotbed of radical ideas, and never seemed to realize how inappropriate it was for a woman to hold forth on the politics of the day, or the economic underpinnings of civilizing the Africans. Simon thought disapprovingly of her as 'strong-minded,' and

worried that she would have a bad influence on his daughters. But Rachel was fond of her, and he had to admit that she was an excellent tutor. Her education at the University of Zurich had given her a knowledge of history, geography, and moral philosophy that quite surpassed his own, if he were honest. And Simon was impressed by Miss Gelbstein's familiarity with the sciences and mathematics. He had often heard that women were not supposed to be able to understand the complexities of mathematics or philosophy because of their smaller brains, a scientific fact established by the investigations of anthropologists. When he had tentatively mentioned this to Miss Gelbstein, she fairly sputtered with indignation.

"It may be scientific fact, as you say, that our brains are smaller. But if that is so, then I am certain that we use more of what we have than most men!" She had continued teaching geometry and logic to his daughters as well as his son and, whatever limitations of brain mass the girls may have suffered, all the children seemed to flourish under her instruction. With Miss Gelbstein's strict guidance, David suddenly mastered previously recalcitrant Latin declensions. She even managed to make algebra intriguing to Miriam, who found that she could put this mathematical science to good use in calculating how much yardage to buy when planning a new dress.

After Rachel's death, her presence became indispensable. Without a wasted word, Miss Gelbstein seized the reins of the devastated family, and with innate efficiency guided them through the worst of their sufferings. She became nurse and nurturer, as far as her unbending personality would allow, took charge of the moral as well as the academic progress of the children, and proved herself to be a highly capable manager,

handling the household finances and supervising Martha with an efficiency that left Simon, used to Rachel's more permissive ways, dazed but grateful.

True, Miss Gelbstein was not without her peculiarities, which she inflicted mercilessly on the Wise children. With the passion of the immigrant, she espoused the quintessentially English belief that people had a duty, one could go so far as to say a social obligation, to be healthy, and she helped the young lives for which she had become responsible to execute this duty to the best of their abilities. In furtherance of this pursuit, she was an unrepentant believer in castor oil, and mixed in a time-honored family recipe of peppermint and water to wash down the vile potion. The children protested that this mixture was entirely unsuccessful in improving either the tonic or their health, but Hannah paid them no heed. She was also much preoccupied with constipation, and faithfully dosed the children with syrup of figs on a weekly basis. This concoction too had a loathsome taste, and the children all agreed it took them a full week to recover from its aftereffects.

In matters of dress for the children, Miss Gelbstein tended toward the functional, rather than the fashionable and adorable. She despised the Dolly Varden polonaise, whose pronounced bustle she dismissed as frivolous and provocative. She judged the common practice of sisters close in age wearing identical clothing cloying, and absolutely forbade it in the Wise household.

The polite dinner conversations to which Simon Wise aspired rarely went as planned. One of Miss Gelbstein's special targets of disdain was the corset. Simon ruefully recalled one such discussion several months ago. Hannah had found support for her anti-corset stance in a pamphlet entitled "Wasps Have Stings or Beware of Tight

Lacing," by John Marshall, an eminent London physician. Based on this scientific testimony, she scrupulously made the older girls remove the bones from their corsets, although Miriam persisted in reinserting them whenever possible.

"Hannah," Miriam protested, "how am I to have an eighteen-inch waist unless I keep the bones in?"

Before Miss Gelbstein could reply, David said eagerly, "If you let me go as a cabin boy on an American whaler, instead of forcing me to go to school to learn things no one cares about, I could harpoon a whale and get Miriam as many of those bones she wants." He particularly resented the time he had to spend in Saturday *shul*, while other boys his age were playing blind man's bluff or football in the streets.

Naomi was captivated by this idea. "I want to catch a whale!"

Zadok, who had been repairing a Big Ben replica, leaned forward to rap David's knuckles. As a rule, the old man did not concern himself with the affairs of the gaggle of young women in this household. But David was his only grandson, and he was determined that he not fall away from his religion as Simon and indeed, he himself, had trying to survive in a Gentile society. "Faith, good works, and charity, but the study of Torah is equal to them all," he quoted, his white eyebrows frowning. Only Rebecca could see an affectionate twinkle in the blue eyes beneath the busy brows.

Personally, Miss Gelbstein did not believe it possible for any woman, let alone a healthy girl, to have an eighteen-inch waist.

"You'll faint," she warned.

"Fainting is romantic," was Miriam's unrepentant rejoinder.

"I want to faint," Naomi chimed in.



Miss Gelbstein shut her book with a bang. "Miriam, fainting is absurd. Try not to be sillier than you have to be."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

When the next morning over breakfast Simon mentioned his encounter with Dr. Talbot, describing the Institute, his charity work, and the surprising, to him at least, invitation to dinner, Rebecca felt her spirits rise for the first time in a long time. Here was a man doing great and noble things, determined to improve the lot of those less fortunate than himself. Even better, he was someone who would be able to see Emily as more than an object of pity and help her toward the life she deserved. Most importantly, perhaps the invitation was a sign that her father was relenting in his remoteness from his youngest daughter, that he might at last be willing to accept her as part of the family.

Later that day, glancing through a recently published edition of Dore's sketches of London, Rebecca's mind drifted again to the young and dedicated Dr. Talbot, and the loftiness of his mission. She too longed to do something meaningful with her life. Although she had not dared to raise the subject with her father, who became withdrawn and stern whenever Emily's disability was mentioned, she fantasized about being more than an underpaid governess, about actually starting a school of her own for youngsters like Emily, where they could learn and grow and develop like other children.

"Look, Hannah!" She thrust the illustrated book at Miss Gelbstein. "The condition of such ragged, pitiable children is appalling. We must be able to help these

poor innocents in some way! They should not be blamed for the sins of their ignorant, pauper mothers and fathers.”

Hannah glanced at her charge sharply. “It is admirable, Rebecca, to wish to help the children, yes. However, I wonder that you know so much about the lives of ‘paupers,’ as you term them. You have never actually spent much time in Whitechapel or St. Giles, have you?”

Rebecca confessed a bit shamefacedly that she had not.

“You know, Rebecca, the Poor Laws were reformed forty-odd years ago because it was believed that what they deemed misguided and indiscriminate charity had created whole towns of lazy, indolent people who had lost the habit of work, and expected to be taken care of forever, living off the largesse of the parish.

“In point of fact, this whole notion of beggars luxuriating in the generosity of the parish was greatly exaggerated. And are the workhouses that resulted from the stricter laws really an improvement? They separate families, segregate children from parents and humiliate their inmates so that most would rather starve to death than cross their doors.”

“I am not talking about the working poor,” Rebecca said hastily. “They are honest people who deserve to better their lot. But I have always been taught that there is a distinction between poverty and pauperism.”

Hannah huffed, “The theories of the unjustifiably eminent economist Henry Fawcett have found a wider audience than they deserve. He claims that poverty is inevitable, natural, and a stimulus to hard work. But he compares pauperism to a disease, arguing that it is contagious and deadly. When it infiltrates the working-classes, according to Fawcett, the will to work is lost, the urge to self-help is broken, the results

are dependency and degradation, and there is always the danger that, as it spreads, a complete breakdown of social order will ensue.” Hannah paused for a moment, then spat out, “Poppycock! Such claims are mere excuses to maintain the dominance of the aristocracy. I must conclude that Mr. Fawcett is blind morally as well as literally.”

Rebecca closed the book abruptly, as if to distance herself from the pathetic creatures portrayed inside. It was all so complicated! She was sure Dr. Talbot did not concern himself with the economic distinctions between poverty and pauperism, or whether his little patients would have sufficient will and sense of responsibility when they grew up to improve their lot in life, as all good Englishmen should. She could sense that, like her, Dr. Talbot cared only about doing good, and he did not have the dragon-like Miss Gelbstein forever breathing down his neck, exhorting him to ever-more-radical notions. She could not wait to meet a man who shared her ideals and might even show her how to go about fulfilling them. Dr. Talbot coming to dinner seemed to Rebecca destiny, *yiuhd*.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

It was nine days after Lady Fairhaven's murder that a little body, wrapped only in a grimy shawl, was found outside St. Botolph's. Although it should have been obvious that the child was dead, an early morning parishioner preparing to worship immediately raised a hue and cry until a constable arrived to inspect the situation. Being new at his job, and not sure about proper protocol when it came to dead babies, but being determined to make no mistake, Constable William Benjamin Brown simply wrapped the

diminutive corpse more tightly in its shawl and carried the bundle, accompanied by the protesting parishioner, to the Whitechapel division.

Brown burst rather breathlessly into the ground floor of the station house, trailed by the wailing, hysterical woman who had found the baby. He placed the small body unceremoniously on Sergeant Murdoch's desk, hoping that his superior officer would guide him as to the proper course of action. Inspector Wise, on his way back from court, where he had spent most of the morning testifying in the matter of a race-track scam that had its roots in one of the St. Giles rookeries, strolled over as well.

"What is this, Constable Brown?" he asked, intrigued by the commotion, the officer's flustered state, the woman's histrionic wailing, and the mysterious object. Although he sometimes felt a small pang of guilt at his reaction, characteristically situations like these gave Inspector Wise a strangely heightened feeling of alertness, of aliveness. He felt his thought processes mobilizing, his body flexing to a state of readiness. In his mind, it became a competition. In some manner he could not describe, a gauntlet had been thrown down. Once again, malignant forces had conspired to create chaos, disorder, confusion, upheaval, and suffering. Yet underneath there was a single thread binding it all together, a logic, a solution to the disordered pieces of the puzzle. It was up to him to find it and his pulse quickened with the challenge.

"A baby, sir," William Benjamin Brown replied, his voice shaking more than he would have liked. The young constable was nervous about reporting directly to Inspector Wise and felt this was not an auspicious opening. He hoped he could remember to use proper police language. The woman took up the word, incorporating it neatly into her ongoing cries.

"A baiby, a baiby, an innocent abandoned!" she crooned.

"A dead baby, sir. Abandoned outside St. Botolph's," Constable Brown clarified, attempting to apply a veneer of authority to a scene that was rapidly becoming absurd. "I was proceeding on my beat when I was accosted by this woman. She showed me the baby, and as I had reason to believe it was deceased, I decided to transport it directly to the station house." Brown stopped, feeling he had acquitted himself reasonably well.

"Did ye forget, laddie, that the corpse is to be taken to the municipal mortuary, in accordance with the Sanitary Act, not dumped on my desk like a ruddy parcel?" asked Sergeant Murdoch.

Constable Brown looked alarmed. "I confess, I did forget, sir. I didn't want to make a mistake, so I brought it here."

Murdoch gave the Constable an unexpectedly forgiving glance. "Well, well. No harm done. I don't suppose it minds where it lies, poor thing." He turned his attention to the woman, who continued to howl. "And who might ye be, ma'am?"

The woman stopped wailing abruptly and looked at the Sergeant with suspicion.

"Who's askin'?"

"I am Sergeant Thomas Murdoch," replied the Sergeant, uneasily aware that the wailing woman had just turned the tables on him.

With an air that conceded fair was fair, the woman said, "Me name is Margaret Shelley, and I 'ave been a parishioner at St. Botolph's for most of ten years."

"And are you a relation to this... child?" asked Inspector Wise.

"Relation? Relation?" shrieked Margaret Shelley, the decibels rising, as though a grievous accusation had been lodged against her. "And isn't it God's truth that I'm seein'

this poor innocent, this abandoned precious jewel, fer th' first time in me life as I was preparin' to enter th' church. At first, I could not believe me eyes, I thought it must be some cast-away clothes an' I went to look, not that I would want sich things you understand, but perhaps fer some poor unfortunate..." Her voice trailed off, her expression suggesting that she was giving more detail than anyone, including herself, wanted.

"In any case," Margaret Shelley commenced with renewed vigor, "when I bent low I could see right off that it were a precious infant, and I began yellin' fer 'elp at the instant."

Inspector Wise was looking closely at the little corpse. "Constable Brown," he remarked absently, "if you could take Mrs. Shelley into the next room and note her statement..." Margaret Shelley left on Constable Brown's arm, his head respectfully inclined toward her now constantly bobbing, babbling one, a seemingly endless stream of words let loose by her sudden prominence in an unexpected and, with each recounting, increasingly thrilling drama.

The Inspector continued to gaze at the tiny body, white to the point of pallor, a thin cap of pale blond hair covering its head, the eyes mercifully closed. It was surprising to him that he felt nothing, only a little curiosity. He guessed the baby was very young, less than a month old. As he gazed at the solemn little face, for a moment he thought he saw traces of Emily in her features.

"Thomas," he said, "does the child appear entirely natural to you?"

Sergeant Murdoch peered into the tightly wrapped shawl and gently touched the infant's cold cheek.

“Poor bairn. Ye well know many wee ones slip away young. It’s a sorrow, but it is the way of things.”

The Inspector shook himself. He remembered his vivid visions of Rachel in Lady Fairhaven’s morning room. If he wasn’t careful, he’d begin seeing phantasmagorical traces of his family in all his cases. Leah would be next, his sweet angel superimposed on some disgusting corpse. "What do you suppose happened to the little one?" he wondered, trying to collect himself.

"Likely died of the cold, poor thing. The mother could have hoped that, by leavin’ the baiby at a church, someone might take it to the workhouse. A desperate family, another mouth to feed... it happens all the time, sir. On the other hand, it might be simply a dropped baby, a bastard, dead before it was forsook, to save the mother the burial fees.”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Simon Wise knew well that a few years ago had seen the height of a panic, mostly among physicians and certain MPs in the House of Commons rather than ordinary citizens, about the increasing infanticide of illegitimate children, especially in London. When he had mentioned this latest tear in the social fabric to Dr. Baumgarten, his friend nodded knowingly.

“Compared to the end of the last century, Simon, mortality among infants under a year has fallen, but since the 1830s it has hovered stubbornly around fifteen percent. However, this figure hides large discrepancies in the death rate. Among educated, well-to-do families, infant mortality is no more than eleven percent; among the urban working

class, between thirty-five to fifty-five percent; but for illegitimate births it rises to an astounding sixty to ninety percent. Many, especially among the upper classes, assume that a good number of the deaths of bastards are due to gross incompetence and neglect, and that not a few are intentional murder.”

Simon was not shocked by this barrage of statistics, but he was nevertheless appalled. “I am well aware this happens, but I’ve never been able to grasp how any mother could intentionally kill her own child.”

Dr. Baumgarten shrugged. “You must consider, Simon, that aside from the social stigma, infants born to unwed mothers are a huge economic liability. A woman who somehow frees herself of the responsibility of caring for the child, whether by boarding it for a small weekly sum with a dry-nurse, paying a lump fee to have it “adopted” – an arrangement that, as you well know, while perfectly acceptable, has no legal bearing - or by having the child succumb to malnourishment or illness, can return to her employment, usually as a domestic, and in time recover her social standing. Burdened with an infant, she is unemployable, and will likely sink into irrevocable poverty and degradation.”

“Of course, you are right, Elias. I have seen these things unfolding in the streets daily. But the idea of infanticide...” Simon’s voice trailed off. He was thinking of Rachel’s determination to emulate her Biblical namesake.

Despite Simon’s personal skepticism, physicians and their political allies sounded the alarm regarding a growing number of “accidental deaths,” asphyxiations, “overlyings”, where parents, usually drunk, inadvertently rolled across their children and smothered them, drownings, falls, and opiate overdoses that seemed rampant among illegitimate infants. There had also been an upsurge of “dropped” babies, babies left



exposed to die, or who had been allowed to die, or even been put to death, their bodies abandoned in parks, on doorsteps, in churchyards, floating in rivers and canals. Around three hundred infants in this state were found in London alone every year, almost one a day, Simon reminded himself. Further, as Dr. Baumgarten pointed out, so-called “natural” deaths from conditions such as debility, marasmus, prematurity, lack of breast milk and from diarrhoeal diseases such as gastritis and enteritis often were the end result of gross maternal neglect. Most such deaths occurred in children under one year of age, a third within the first month of life.

Recent legislation made it more likely that such cases would find their way to a coroner’s inquest, but they were a procedural nightmare from the police point of view. The current laws still favored a presumption of innocence on the part of the mother. It was exceedingly difficult to prove the level of malicious intent required for a murder, or even a manslaughter, conviction. Simon recalled a case just last year, *Regina vs. Nicholls*, in which a magistrate dismissed a charge of manslaughter against a woman whose baby had died of malnutrition because, in the words of the magistrate, “Mere negligence is not enough. There must be negligence so great as to satisfy a jury that the offender has a wicked mind in the sense of being reckless and careless whether death occurred or not.”

Definitive medical evidence was also hard to come by, and the advanced state of decomposition of many of the little bodies made it impossible to establish “live birth,” a prerequisite for any criminal prosecution. There were no conclusive scientific tests as to whether the infant had breathed on its own. Hydrostasy, or the theory that if the child had breathed, its lungs would float in water, had been largely discredited. Even if

evidence of independent breath was proved, for example by a witness testifying she heard the child cry out, this did not guarantee the child's "separate existence," another requirement for a murder prosecution. If the baby somehow died while even one foot remained in the birth canal, it would be classified as a stillbirth, and as such, need not be registered, in fact, could be legally buried in the mother's back alley if she wished. How the child died was then of no concern to the courts.

Finally, middle-class, all-male juries were notoriously sympathetic to mothers because, like Simon, they had difficulty fathoming that a woman might ever be tempted to kill their own child. There was much sympathy for "seduced and abandoned" girls, who were generally perceived to have been unfairly treated by the severity of the reformed Poor Laws, which shifted much of the responsibility for bastardy away from the putative father toward the mother and provided less financial support for unmarried women than previously. Juries would rather return absurd verdicts of "accidentally poisoned," "accidentally choked," "accidentally drowned in privy," in the face of compelling evidence of foul play, than condemn a woman to be hanged, although in point of fact the Home Secretary almost invariably commuted the few death sentences that were passed down. Juries even disliked a verdict of manslaughter, a noncapital offense. The murder of infants was seen as somehow lesser than other murders, in part because it was widely believed that the infant had no consciousness of the act and therefore could not feel anticipatory terror or pain, and in part because the perpetrator was not seen as a threat to society in general.

Inspector Wise shook his head to bring him back to the present moment and the dead child on his sergeant's desk. "Contact the coroner and file a report, Thomas. There

will have to be an inquest. Ask around in the area where the body was found. See if you can locate the mother, perhaps trace the shawl. Inquire about servant girls in the area whose fellow menials suspected them of concealed pregnancy.” Inspector Wise was not hopeful any useful particulars could be obtained, as it appeared unlikely that the shawl had any identifying characteristics, but since the inception of the Infant Protection Society a few years ago, there had been greater pressure on the police to investigate and prosecute these cases. Wise frowned in frustration. It was an exercise in futility for the most part, and a waste of everyone’s time.

“Right, sir.” Thomas Murdoch shrugged and turned away. It was pathetic, but he had seen much worse. For a minute more, Wise stared at the infant, then returned his attention to other responsibilities that might yield a more auspicious outcome. Because infant corpses were by no means a rare occurrence in London, to the gathered policemen, it was simply their turn to deal with a body.

Sergeant Collins, who worked the night shift and was coming off-duty, nodded to Murdoch on his way out. "Have you caught the latest bill of fare at the Garrick?" he asked, the theater being almost next door to the station in Leman Street. Without waiting for an answer, he continued gloomily, "Me and the missus went last Saturday night. Must ‘ave been almost two thousand people crowded into th’ gallery, costers an’ sweeps shoutin' out, the customers throwin' orange peels and’ nutshells about, people munchin' on pig trotters, drinkin' porter. The play's called 'The Starving Poor of Whitechapel,' an’ the audience's favorite scene is when th’ police are bested in a free-for-all. When they got to th’ fight, th’ crowd shouted out encouragement to th’ actors as they whaled away at th’ constables. Almost made me fear fer me life."

Murdoch snickered. "I'm not usually much for the theater, but it might be amusin' to see our lot get their comeuppance. Nancy and me might take it in. Out of uniform, of course." The Inspector laughed as well, and all three men returned to their work. The dead baby was soon forgotten.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Later that afternoon, Inspector Wise made an unplanned call on Professor Maximus in his rooms near University College. He knew this visit would probably make him late joining his family for dinner, and secretly he was relieved. Did his duty to society absolve him from his duty to family? He didn't know how to weigh such imponderables, but he knew he would rather be pursuing a lead, no matter how tenuous, than confronting the void at home, which everyone made more noticeable by their determined ignoring of it. Frankly, he also went to satisfy his curiosity. What he'd heard about Maximus' possible flirtation with Lady Fairhaven astonished and fascinated him. Although Maximus had contributed his photographic expertise to several of Simon's cases and Simon had once had him to an afternoon tea at his home, he admitted to himself that he knew very little of the man.

The professor, a bachelor, held several rooms on Gower Street, not far from the University. Inspector Wise climbed two flights of stairs and thought to himself he must do more walking. He knocked with his umbrella on the door, and from within heard childish giggling. When the door opened, a strange sight met his eyes.

The Inspector looked into an area that apparently served as a study. The walls were lined with books, a fireplace was set against one wall, a gas fixture gleamed overhead, and several comfortable-looking overstuffed chairs were strewn about. On the surface of a large table, a complicated jigsaw puzzle was in progress. Perched on an ottoman, three young girls, the oldest no more than eight, sat with their arms twined round each other. Despite the mugginess of the day, the room itself was warm, overheated, and the girls were barefoot, in simple white chemises. Some sort of diaphanous, twinkling material was wound about them, so that to the Inspector they looked like stars in the Milky Way. The youngest, a cherubic looking girl of perhaps three with silky brown hair in bangs and a bob, wore a wreath of flowers, no doubt artificial, about her head. She buried her face in her sister's lap and giggled again.

Bewildered, Inspector Wise gazed about the room again. "Professor Maximus?" he called out uncertainly. A figure emerged from behind the hood of a camera mounted on a tripod that had been hidden out of view when he opened the door.

Maximus looked equally bewildered. "Simon! Had we an appointment?" As he held out his hand, the Inspector noticed the chemical stains, and remembered that photography was known as "the black art."

Inspector Wise had begun to regret his spontaneity. "I apologize for the intrusion, Maximus, but I am here on official business." He glanced at the three little girls. "In connection with the death of Lady Alicia Fairhaven."

Professor Maximus looked pained. "Terrible, terrible," he muttered. "Sit down, sit down. I've ruined the plate anyway," he added, indicating the wet film that had

apparently smudged against his clothing. “And the light is failing. Do you know anything about spirit photography?”

“Pardon me?”

“Well, of course, it’s all rubbish, it’s all rubbish, trying to capture the essence of departed spirits with the flash of a camera bulb. Now, what I am trying to achieve is to make the spirit flesh. Do you see?” He pointed hopefully at the sparsely clad girls, then looked momentarily confused. “Or perhaps it is more accurate to say, making the flesh spirit. Spirit flesh, flesh, spirit. An interesting conundrum. Now, what would you like to ask me?”

“It is hardly a suitable topic for young ears,” the Inspector replied, looking meaningfully at the girls.

“Ah, quite so, quite so,” agreed the professor, for whom repetition of empty phrases seemed a kind of speech tick. “However, I have nowhere to put them. It would not be appropriate to have them in my bedroom. Their mother will not be returning for another hour. We will have to make do, unless you would like to return at another time.” Without waiting for a reply, he clapped his hands sharply. “Chop, chop, girls, to the puzzle. See if you can’t get it put together before your mother takes you away. And put on your clothes. No more pictures today.” The girls hastily, and somewhat haphazardly to Inspector Wise’s trained parental eye, began selecting clothes from a pile slung over the back of a chair. Then, without another word, they seated themselves at the table and addressed the puzzle, which the Inspector thought might be a representation of St. Paul’s. He still felt uncomfortable and lowered his voice.

“I understand you were acquainted with Lady Fairhaven.”

“Indeed. She sought me out to photograph her children,” the professor explained carefully.

“Yet you did not mention this when you saw her...” the Inspector took a quick breath, “...at her home. I noticed your distress, but attributed it to...” again he paused, “the circumstances.”

Maximus avoided the Inspector’s gaze. “I was shocked. I couldn’t make sense of what I was seeing. When I did so, it seemed selfish, a distraction, to discuss a casual connection in view of, as you say, the circumstances.”

“When was the last time you saw her ladyship?”

“She was here the last time we were here, professor,” piped up the oldest girl, without looking up from the jigsaw puzzle. Wise cringed, feeling he was not handling the situation at all well. He focused his attention on the professor.

“And when would that have been, Maximus?”

“Let me see. That would make it about a month ago if I am calculating correctly. That is the day we dressed you as fairies, was it not, Caroline?” Caroline nodded, then said triumphantly, “Here’s the last bit of the bell!”

“Was Lady Fairhaven a student of photography?” asked the Inspector helplessly.

“Not at all, no, not at all. But in the course of my work for her, it chanced that we spoke on occasion. She held advanced ideas, you know, had attended some of my public lectures on the rights of women, and if I may flatter myself, I believe she enjoyed my company.”

“Just exactly what did the two of you talk about?”

You know, the usual things. Do women have the ability for logical, rational thought? Are women closer to men or closer to primitives and children? Is intellectual striving too debilitating for a woman's reproductive system? Very stimulating, always very stimulating."

"And when you saw her last, did you notice any changes in her? Did she mention any concerns, did she seem abstracted, upset?"

The professor paused. "Inspector, Lady Alicia could be such a tease. She did say something odd, now that you mention it. She said, 'Theo,' (she always called me Theo, I believe she thought it very advanced), 'would you believe me if I told you I had something of a secret life a few years ago, and I intend to go underground again in the near future?' I couldn't imagine what she meant. I remember asking her if she proposed going down a rabbit hole, like Alice. She was delighted with the analogy, and kept exclaiming, 'Off with her head! Off with her head!' Of course, now it all seems rather morbid, but at the time we all had a gay old laugh, didn't we girls?"

The little girls responded with renewed giggles and nods. "I want to go to the Mad Hatter's tea party!" exclaimed the middle child, her rosebud mouth parted in glee. Inspector Wise felt that he might already be there.

"You know, Inspector, I took a picture of Lady Alicia that day. Once I had immortalized her children, she usually didn't show much interest in my little pastime, but I think because the girls were here, she felt obliged to join in the make-believe. Since we were all playing dress-up, I asked her if she would mind putting on a costume as well." Professor Maximus pulled out a photo album and flipped the pages, then handed it to Inspector Wise. The Inspector found himself staring into the very much alive eyes of



Lady Fairhaven, looking out from the folds of some sort of translucent fabric, her forehead encompassed by a jeweled circlet, her hair loose and streaming about her face. In her hand she held a wand, which she mockingly but good-naturedly seemed to be waving in the direction of the photographer. Queen Titania, thought Inspector Wise. Shakespeare realized that a queen could fall in love with a donkey. Was Theodore Maximus her Bottom? What puzzles had they attempted to solve in his cramped, stuffy rooms? What games had they devised together? And what kind of parallel universe might she have discovered “underground”?

“One of my better compositions,” said the professor with pride. “It’s how I like to remember her.” This statement seemed to serve as a cue for the three little heads hovering over the puzzle to peek between their fingers at the two grown men and chortle.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

Sergeant Murdoch was whistling under his breath. There were aspects of the Fairhaven case that were beginning not to make sense, and when that happened, he was always happy. He enjoyed seeing the careful stories of suspects unravel. Anticipating Inspector Wise’s approbation, he knocked on his superior’s door.

“Sir, there are a few developments in the Fairhaven case ye might want to know about.”

Wise looked up from his interminable stack of papers, welcoming the interruption. He wasn’t all that sure he wanted an advancement to superintendent if this is what it entailed. It seemed to him that the higher up the ranks one progressed, the

greater the politics, and the more the paperwork. The little additional monetary compensation struck him as a poor tradeoff.

“What do you have for me, Thomas?”

“For a start, one of the downstairs maids, whose responsibility it is to clean the mornin’ room, has reported that an ornamental dagger is missin’. It usually rested in a display holder on the writin’-table not far from where the body was found. A likely candidate for the missin’ murder weapon I’m thinking.”

Inspector Wise nodded. “Interesting. Yes, a good possibility.”

“And not only that, sir. If ye remember, Sir Gregory denied any absent items in the room. It could be he has somethin’ to hide.”

“And it could be simple forgetfulness. Or shock. After all, the man had just lost his wife to murder. Try to locate this blade. What else, Sergeant?”

Murdoch could scarcely restrain his delight. “Ye remember that the baronet assured us he had spent the night at his club?” Inspector Wise nodded, also recalling his certainty that the man had been lying. “A few words with the doorman of the Reform Club and I learnt that the fact of the matter is, our baronet left the premises in the wee hours of mornin’, and did not return till about six a.m.”

“Enough time to visit his house, do the deed, and sneak back to the club?”

Inspector Wise asked, wondering whether the solution could be this simple. He did not relish the thought of arresting the baronet, but it would be a relief to bring this case to a conclusion, and he’d suspected Sir Gregory from the beginning.

“Easy enough,” Murdoch confirmed with satisfaction.

“I think I will need to have another chat with Sir Gregory, Thomas.”

“I’m thinkin’ that would be a very guid idea indeed, sir.”

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

Looking back on it, Inspector Wise decided that his third meeting with the baronet had not gone well. When the Inspector took his leave, Sir Gregory was still in high dudgeon about the missing dagger, insisting that the police were trying to frame him as a result of a simple blunder on his part.

“How do you expect me to remember what’s in that room? I rarely went into it. It was Lady Alicia’s territory, so to speak, where she took care of her correspondence, did whatever was necessary for her charitable projects. She loved it because of the garden. In fine weather, she’d be out there every day, admiring her roses, tending the peonies and whatnot.” His face turned a furious red, and the veins in his neck bulged. “God damnit, you people are incompetent fools and bunglers! Not only do you continue to pester me in my grief, but you have the audacity to imply that I might be a murderer! I’ll have your job for this!”

When the Inspector confronted Sir Gregory with the testimony of the club doorman, however, the baronet turned icily silent. At last he said, “You have no scruples, no circumspection. It is useless to appeal to your sense of breeding. I suppose it will all come out now in any case.” He began to pace restlessly about the room, the thick carpet muffling his footsteps. “I visited a woman late that night, or early morning actually, for several hours. Her name is Arabella Bowdoin, and you can find her at Kate Hamilton’s establishment. She will swear I was with her from one a.m. or thereabouts until I

returned to my club at six in the morning.” Inspector Wise was too experienced to allow himself any expression of heightened attention, but this certainly was an intriguing turn of events. Kate Hamilton was a well-known madam, whose house of prostitution catered to a wealthy, aristocratic clientele. She was reputed to have in her employ some of the most desirable girls in the trade.

“It will be necessary for us to talk with her,” he said mildly.

“I expected no less,” Sir Gregory responded. “But know that if I find I am reading about my private life in tomorrow’s paper, I will make it my business to ruin you. In fact, I will take special pleasure in doing so.”

### CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The following day, Inspector Wise dispatched his sergeant to track down Arabella Bowdoin. He himself had managed an appointment with Frederick May, “the matchstick king,” as he was known. May’s factory was housed in a lugubrious, two-story building that reminded Simon Wise of a large cowshed more than the mechanized marvels of industrialization. Inside, he found perhaps two hundred children and young women at work at long tables engaged in repetitive tasks of filling frames, carrying sheets of matches to the drying room, and stamping boxes. Pots of paste and piles of hemp surrounded the women. An occasional man, presumably an overseer, walked the rows, inspecting the work. The fumes made the Inspector gag, then cough, and he thought of the hideous jaw disease caused by contact with phosphorus that eventually would disfigure many of the young faces that now appeared so concentrated. The offices of the

manager were located above the workspace. Structured along the lines of Jeremy Bentham's famous Panopticon, as were many prisons, they provided an omniscient vantage point from which the foremen could view the activities of every worker.

"Thank you for meeting me here, Inspector." Frederick Bryant May was a bear-like man, his massive frame squeezed into the requisite frock coat and trousers. His hands were large and hairy, the hands of a man who had built himself out of nothing, and now had the wealth to be proud of them. "The less my wife knows of your interrogations, the better."

The Inspector merely looked at him inquiringly.

"It is common knowledge that Lady Alicia Fairhaven and I saw rather too much of each other at one point in our lives. I presume that is why you are here." Still the Inspector said nothing. "All perfectly discreet, of course, but my wife got wind of the gossip and took it very badly. Very badly indeed. Even talked divorce at one point. Whole thing blown way out of proportion."

"Really?" the Inspector murmured.

"Really," May said with some annoyance. "I am a frank man, Inspector Wise, and I like coming straight to the point. You wouldn't be here unless you suspected I might have some involvement with Lady Alicia's death. Well, fire away. Just keep my wife out of it."

"If she has kept herself out of it, then I have no interest in dragging her in."

May suddenly developed a hard look in his eyes. "What are you implying, Inspector?"

"Was Lady Fairhaven an embarrassment to either of you?"

“I have no idea what you are talking about.”

“What was the subject of your conversation that night at supper?”

“What night?”

“Come, Mr. May. You claim to appreciate frankness. Let us not play games.

Your name was on the guest list for the supper party held at the Fairhaven home the night before the lady was murdered.”

“Yes, of course, I am certainly not trying to hide that, but we barely spoke.”

“You sat next to her at the meal.”

“Our discourse was inconsequential.”

Inspector Wise started to take a deep breath, then changed his mind. “You have an affair with a woman that becomes the talk of the town, so much so that your wife threatens to sue for divorce, you do not see each other for months, then out of nowhere you are invited to supper. And you are asking me to believe that your conversation when you meet is... inconsequential? You must have a very low opinion of the logical capacities of the police, Mr. May.”

Frederick May stood abruptly and strode to the panel of windows that overlooked his workers. He seemed to derive some calming effect from watching the monotonous, ceaseless labor below him.

“I was present at the Fairhavens with the full consent, and indeed request of, Sir Gregory. Lady Alicia and I discussed proposals to reform the match industry. I also engaged in conversation with Sir Gregory regarding legislation that may be introduced in Parliament to this effect. I cannot honorably say more, but I can assure you that whatever words were exchanged, they could not have the least bearing on her death.”

Inspector Wise gazed at the industrialist for a long moment. “I see, Mr. May. And I presume you are able to account for your whereabouts in the early morning hours of November 6?”

May turned from his monitoring. “Naturally, I did not attend the Mallory ball that evening. I travel in different social circles, although Lady Alicia was always glad enough to see me,” he added ironically. “After the dinner party, I came here, probably around midnight. I sometimes do that, to check the books, make sure the building has been properly secured. The smell is much less intense when the factory is quiet. All the jokes about fire and brimstone, you know. But this is not hell to me. No, this work raised me from obscurity to wealth and prominence. It is my light and my salvation.” The Inspector thought the industrialist looked sincerely moved, if only by his own rhetoric.

“How can I put it, Inspector? ‘East or West, Home is best?’ Unfortunately, this is no longer true in my circumstances. My home is no longer my castle. You can say it is my own fault, and you would be right. But what can I do? I gave up a woman I loved, probably because she didn’t love me, but also because I did not want it all to go to rack and ruin, I did not want scandal, I did not want divorce, I did not want my children shamed. The result is that I have nothing... no home, no warmth, no respect. Only the factory.

“That night I spent here. Perhaps the night watchman saw me. I don’t remember seeing him. I talked to the clerk who opens a little before six. That is all I can tell you.”

To Inspector Wise, Frederick May sounded like the last man on earth to murder Alicia Fairhaven, but he had had plenty of time.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Sergeant Murdoch made his way on foot to the Haymarket district, where he knew he would find the smart flash house out of which Arabella Bowdoin plied her trade. He had changed into ordinary street clothes to track her down. Commissioner Mayne had frowned on policemen ever being out of uniform and had a special prejudice against the “costumes” and “disguises” as he called them often adopted to do undercover detection work. Ever alert for insinuations that the Force was spying on the British citizenry, Mayne effectively eviscerated the hopes of the Metropolitan Police to develop a meaningful detective branch. The current Commissioner, on the other hand, recognized the necessity of a strong detective unit. Since Henderson had taken up the office, there had been more flexibility regarding the uniform. Besides, in this situation Murdoch wanted to keep a low profile. It would do no good to antagonize the powerful Mrs. Hamilton by attracting unwanted attention to her doorstep.

A pair of imitation marble pillars marked the entrance to the establishment. Their vulgarity suggested to Murdoch the decadence and depravity he expected to find inside. But even after showing identification, he had trouble persuading the doorman to admit him into the hallway. Though ordinarily a man with a hasty temper, having at last gained entrance, Murdoch held his peace. He knew he was here on sufferance. He watched the minutes tick by on a large gilt grandfather clock that stood in the hallway. Two chubby nudes in bas-relief appeared to clutch the edges of the clock.

Kate Hamilton, the owner of the house, was a byword in certain London circles. Immensely fat and at least as ugly as gossip intimated, she customarily wore extremely



low-cut gowns and a diamond perched in her piled red hair. Her salon was known as the preserve of dissipated aristocracy, and she was renowned for her expensive and accomplished courtesans.

She entered the room with a rustle of satin, carrying a glass of what appeared to be champagne in her hand. Her eyes caught Murdoch's briefly, looking him over boldly but with little interest. She knew he had invaded her domain. Kate whispered something to the girl accompanying her, and tittered. Murdoch noted with dispassion that her flesh shook as she laughed. He also noticed that she did not sip her champagne and that, squeezed between the folds of flesh, her eyes were cold.

Her tone, however, was jocular. "Sergeant Murdoch," Kate murmured, stressing his title ironically, "To what do we owe the pleasure of your company? Looking for a little pleasure yourself? Usually, the police are smart enough to give us a wide berth. A policeman comes here, he may see things – people – that will be embarrassing for him later. For him, you understand. Not for them. And certainly not for me." Kate chuckled and shook. Murdoch squirmed.

"I am lookin' for Arabella Bowdoin."

"I might know her, and I might not. What do you want with the girl?"

"You must have read of the murder of Lady Fairhaven. Her husband says he was here – with her – Arabella, that is... all night." Kate Hamilton's green cat eyes regarded him calmly but alertly. "I promise to be prudent," he reassured her. "We want no embarrassment to the baronet – nor to you, ma'am," he choked a bit on the title of respect, but judged that she expected it, "unless absolutely necessary."

“Nothing is ever absolutely necessary.” Kate seemed to consider for a moment, then smiled grimly. “Well, it’s true enough. The baronet was here. I can tell you that. You might as well speak with Arabella. But no scandal, mind.” She turned imperiously and waddled toward the door. Murdoch paced nervously about the room, unsure whether to sit on the sofa or remain standing. It was plainly evident he was not welcome.

A few moments later, a young woman entered. Murdoch felt intimidated by her beauty, her elegance and her statuesque appearance, although he was savvy enough to know that a few more years in her present profession would cause the bloom to fade. As soon as she saw him, the girl stopped abruptly and bent over, fiddling with her slipper. The action exposed a large expanse of creamy white breast, nestled in a maroon and lavender taffeta, for the sergeant’s inspection. Sergeant Murdoch blushed and averted his eyes, only to find her staring directly at him and snickering in a lascivious yet insulting manner. He admitted to himself that she had won the first round.

The girl took her time in straightening, then said rudely, “Wot d’ you want wit’ me?”

“Are ye Arabella Bowdoin, miss?”

“I’m only ‘ere cos Kate wants me t’ talk wit’ youse,” she replied, ignoring his question. “I ‘ate you rozzers, all of youse,” she went on conversationally. “B’fore I come ‘ere, I were in one of th’ regimental towns up north. Your people ‘arassed me somethin’ merciless. Thrown into jail I were on sev’ral occasions, fer no crime, just goin’ about me business. And did the soljers pay the consequences? Not once. Filthy medical examiner, wit’ ‘is filthy ‘ands all over me, pretendin’ t’ care whether I’d got me one of them ‘contagious diseases.’ Wot a larfff! So I relocated meself to London.

Thought I might 'ave th' opportunity to better meself. As th' sayin' goes, poverty may be no disgrace, but surely 'tis a great inconvenience." Arabella Bowdoin looked at Murdoch contemptuously. "Matter o' fact, you look like an ol' soljer yourself. Am I right?"

Murdoch felt distinctly embarrassed. "That's neither here nor there, miss. Nothin' to do with the business at hand. The Contagious Diseases Act doesn't apply in London, ye know. The police here have nothin' to do with all that." Briefly, he wondered at his defending his compatriots to a common prostitute.

"It's a discrimynation against women, is wot it is, and there is many respectable women, an' men, sayin' th' very same thing."

"Well, miss, if it matters to ye, I've heard my own Inspector say the numbers show it hasn't made a bit o' difference in reducin' disease, and only encourages men to engage in immoral and disgraceful practices." Murdoch didn't mention that he had disagreed vociferously with Inspector Wise during this discussion.

Arabella looked interested. "'E said that, did 'e? Fancy a rozzer sayin' that. Still, I'd wager if 'e was placed in charge of enforcin' that law, you wouldn't 'ear no objections then." She pouted prettily, then seated herself on an ottoman covered in dull red velvet. Gratefully, Murdoch took a seat in an armchair nearby. "Wot is it you want to know, then? You're interruptin' me beauty sleep. A workin' girl's got to 'ave 'er rest." Arabella smiled saucily again, and Murdoch was aware she was trifling with him.

"Miss Bowdoin, on the night of November 5, did ye or did ye not spend the entire evening, until six o'clock the next mornin', in the company of Sir Gregory Fairhaven?"

Arabella tried to look puzzled. "You mean Greggie? Is that wot 'e says?"

“It’s ye I’m askin’, miss. And it’s no laughin’ matter. His wife’s been murdered, ye know.”

“It’s all the girls is talkin’ about. Greggie - Sir Gregory – hain’t a bad man. ‘E likes ‘is pleasures, a bit on the wild side for a proper lady, I’m sure. But ‘im an’ ‘is wife, they ‘ad an understandin’.”

“Was he with ye?” Murdoch persisted, thinking the girl’s protest a bit too quick.

“‘E’s been good to me. Gives me little gifts, you know, and takes me places, Cremorne Gardens, Barron’s Oyster ‘Ouse, Jack Percival’s. We ‘ave fun together. Keeps promisin’ to set me up as a sportin’ horsebreaker in some fancy apartment in Regent Park, mebbe even give me me own carriage.”

“But he hasn’t yet, has he?”

Arabella’s face fell. “Don’ think ‘e ‘ad th’ nerve while ‘is wife were alive. ‘Ad ‘in under ‘er thumb, she did, so’s ‘e worrit ‘bout scandal much more’n mos’ gentlemen I know. That’s why ‘e liked me, you see. ‘E ran the show ‘ere.”

“Do ye think it possible he could have murdered his wife, Miss Bowdoin?”

“‘E was ‘ere that evenin’, Sergeant. Came around bit arter midnight, if I remember right. ‘Been to a ball,’ he sez. We walked round a bit, ducked into a music hall for a while. ‘E stayed with me till maybe six th’ next morning, then said ‘e ‘ad to get back to ‘is club. ‘E couldn’t ‘a killed ‘er,” Arabella said with finality.

Sergeant Murdoch regarded her intently. “You’re a bonnie lass, Arabella. Did ye never hope that, if Lady Fairhaven were out of the picture, ye might have had a shot at respectability? Did it never seem to ye that Lady Alicia Fairhaven stood between you and a great deal more security?”

Arabella returned his gaze levelly. "If 'is wife 'adn't been around, 'e might 'a spent more time wit' me, done more fer me." She stared defiantly at the sergeant. "It ain't un'heard of fer a gentleman to take up permanent like wit' a girl like me. Sure, I might've liked th' coast clear, so t' speak. Still," she emphasized firmly, "it were a wish only, not an act."

Sergeant Murdoch considered for a moment, then said, "Thank ye, miss. Ye've been of great assistance. That'll be all for now, but I may need to see ye again."

"Fancy that! Me bein' of assistance to the rozzers." Suddenly, underneath the rouged cheeks and painted lips, her face looked very hard. "None of us knows wot lies ahead, not great ladies, not riff-raff like me. Life is full of li'l surprises. Most of 'em is pretty ugly, but you nivver know wot might 'appen. When life goes down fer some, it goes up fer others. It's th' way o' th' world."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

The Wise girls scurried about with more than the usual excitement, Miss Gelbstein ordering everything with aplomb, Rebecca resenting her authority but acknowledging she kept the household together better than she, Rebecca, was yet prepared to do. The period before Sabbath eve was always one of commotion and bustle. So much had to be done before they, along with all other Jews in England and around the world, were enfolded into a brief alternative world of *minucha*, peace, rest and prayer. Rebecca was no longer sure what her father thought about the Sabbath, or even about Judaism. He pleaded work as an excuse for his nonobservance, but she suspected he was glad to avoid rituals from which he felt increasingly alienated. And she knew that the

Sabbath formalities rankled the freethinking Miss Gelbstein. But the holy day had been sacred to Rachel, and it was in honor of her memory that the family continued to make it a special observance.

When the Wise children knew their father was bringing home a guest, it made the preparations even more important. And a Gentile guest at that! Although it was a mitzvah, a good deed, to bring a traveler, even a beggar, into one's home for the Sabbath, it was almost unheard of to bring a Gentile. In fact, Rebecca could not remember another such occasion. Like many Jews, her father generally kept clear boundaries between his public and private lives. By day, he was the quintessential London policeman. In the privacy of his home, he could remain a Jew. It was neater, and easier, for all concerned if the two worlds were not allowed to intersect.

Rebecca let herself wonder why her father had decided to cross this line. Was it due to Dr. Talbot's interest in diseases of children, and particularly in the problem of mental deficiency? There must be some quality in the man that appealed to her father, that encouraged him to take a risk. He had mentioned that the doctor was intelligent, intense, charming. From what her father had said, Rebecca gathered there was no Mrs. Talbot, so to the doctor's list of attractive qualities she added loneliness. Rebecca understood solitude. Despite being surrounded by five younger sisters and David (or perhaps because of this), she often felt lonely, burdened by the responsibilities of surrogate motherhood, but with no one in whom to confide. Miss Hannah was all very well when one wanted to discuss women's rights or the relative merits of Dante and Goethe, but one could not expose the longings of one's heart to her. She wondered if Dr. Talbot had ever been married, and began to create a tragic, but romantic history for him,

imagining him as a kind of Jane Eyre's star-crossed Mr. Rochester. Already Rebecca felt a growing kinship with this stranger.

"Now Rebecca, stop your dreaming, we still have the table to lay." Miss Gelbstein all but clapped her hands to motivate her young cousin to action. She wanted Simon to be proud of this evening. She had sent Martha early that morning to the large fish market on Wentworth Street to get an especially fresh whitefish. Martha took great pleasure in these Sabbath preparations, and was fond of telling her friends, "There is no people in th' world knows how to cook fish as they do."

Obediently, Rebecca set her fantasies aside. "Deborah, help me with the tablecloth." On went the Sabbath china, the best silverware, the polished candlesticks, the china bowl filled with water for handwashing. "Sarah, find the *kiddish* cup." The smell of *challah* rose from the oven. The thought of the succulent bread sprinkled with sesame seeds made her mouth water. "Quick, girls, the sun is setting."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

When Inspector Wise and Dr. Talbot came through the front door, talking and gesticulating, at first Rebecca thought there were more than the two of them, they sounded so loud and... happy. She rarely associated that friendly excess of emotion with her father. Her first impression of the doctor was disappointing, though. He was smaller than she expected, and had a worn, slightly disheveled look about him. Still, his light, wavy hair, worn rather long, was charming, and his smile, as her father introduced his brood, made her want to say something to evoke it again.

Dr. Talbot was the epitome of dignified respect when he greeted Zadok Wise, who felt this refined acknowledgment confirmed his hopes of eventual full acceptance of English Jewry among the Gentiles. Toward Miss Gelbstein the doctor was appropriately deferential. Although she could not help wondering at this unusual guest, she was gratified that he appeared genuinely glad to meet her and did not treat her like a servant. Dr. Talbot knew something pertinent about each of the Wise children. "So you are the bug collector?" he tossed at Sarah. And, "I've a rather interesting map of central Africa," to David. He admired Miriam's recent grown-up stylishness, teased Deborah about wanting to learn the violincello *and* the harp *and* the guitar, and saved Naomi from incipient tears by miraculously discovering her lost block under his foot. Only when he came to Emily did his mood become serious.

"Hello, Emily," he said, reaching out as she perched in Rebecca's arms. Emily regarded him solemnly. Then, to Rebecca's amazement, he signed hello as well. He smiled very slightly, not condescendingly at all Rebecca thought, but as though he were enjoying a private little amusement of his own.

"You know sign language," she burst out, immediately feeling foolish.

"Only a little. Your father mentioned you are trying to teach Emily to communicate in this manner, and I have read treatises suggesting the value of this method of communication with the mentally deficient. It is certainly intriguing.

"What is your name?" he continued to sign. Emily laughed happily and reached for his fingers. "Could it be...?" By this time all the children were fascinated by Dr. Talbot's rapid motions. The forefingers of both hands steeping; the three middle fingers of the right hand placed against the open palm of the left; next the second and third



fingers of the left hand raised and separated, the index finger of the right hand touching the third finger of the left hand. E -- M -- I -- he was spelling EMILY. Rebecca was so rapt she could scarcely speak.

"It's your name, Emily. Emily!" she gasped.

Dr. Talbot smiled again. "And how old might Emily be?" he asked, signing and speaking simultaneously. Emily regarded him calmly but did not respond. "Could Emily be two?" he wondered, holding two fingers in front of his mouth.

At first Emily simply continued to stare at the doctor. Then slowly she shook her head and held up three fingers. Rebecca found she was trembling.

"She's never done that before. She's made a few signs to me, but she's never communicated with anyone from the outside. Never." For a moment, the entire family stood motionless, choosing to regard this event, occurring as it did on Shabbat, as a small miracle. Then Emily squirmed to be set down, and Naomi pulled on Dr. Talbot's coattails.

"Emily and I talk too," she said in a voice that suggested she did not want her own accomplishments overshadowed by the multitalented Dr. Talbot.

"Really?" asked the doctor in an interested tone.

"Yes, we do. I just talk both parts." There was a moment of silence, as the Wise family waited to see how the doctor would take this revelation. Michael Talbot laughed.

"And I imagine you are quite good at both of them," he said. And then everyone laughed, and Miss Gelbstein said, "Let us go into dinner." Dr. Talbot stood courteously as they gathered around the candlesticks, watching attentively as Miss Gelbstein struck the flame, passed her hands three times over the flickering lights, and covered her eyes. As

Rebecca glanced around the table, the faces of her sisters and brother seemed to shine. Somehow the petty quarrels and harsh words of the past week had evaporated. They looked like flowers unfolding, she thought, as Hannah began to chant the sacred words. "*Baruch ata adonoi eloheinu melech ha'olam...*" Blessed is the Lord God, Ruler of the Universe. Then everyone applied themselves to the hearty cholent and potato casserole Martha had prepared. To Rebecca, it felt something like happiness.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

After that evening, without anyone being sure exactly how it happened, Dr. Talbot became a regular guest at the Wise home. Simon appreciated his quick intellect and his concern for Emily. Soon the two men had shifted from formal address to calling each other Michael and Simon. The children looked forward to his visits. Sometimes, calling on his way home from the hospital or after visiting patients, he would bring several of the delicacies called "bowlers," round tarts made of sugar, apples, and bread, bought from a street vendor. At other times his pockets were stuffed with burnt almonds, treacle rock, toffee or peppermint sticks. He brought books as well, a beautifully illustrated *Water Babies* for Deborah to pour over, Lieutenant Cameron's account of his adventures in Central Africa to David's great delight, and a dog-eared copy of *The Origin of Species*, which he promised to study with Sarah to explore the theory of evolution.

The children soon discovered he was a remarkable conjurer, having mastered some of the same tricks as the greatly loved and recently deceased Charles Dickens, being able to produce a pudding from a seemingly empty saucepan, or transform a box of

bran into a live guinea pig. The younger children were entranced, while Sarah watched him closely to learn his sleight of hand, but could never catch him out. At other times he would make them laugh by carving a pig out of an apple or constructing a pair of fangs from an orange peel.

With the help of the older girls and David, he would invent a series of charades for the family to guess at. One of their most successful presentations was titled “A Dose of Lewis Carroll,” in which they enacted lines from some of the Oxford mathematics don’s nonsense poems. In one, Miriam came out holding a scouring pad to her lips, while mouthing a series of words. Then David followed, crouched down and dressed like a boy of five or six. Sarah was next, carrying a nasty-looking wooden paddle, from which she gleefully pretended to administer a series of blows to her brother. Finally, Deborah appeared, holding a voluminous bundle of tissues to her nose, and sneezing repeatedly. Rebecca and Miss Gelbstein laughed heartily and pronounced it great fun.

Discreetly, he examined Emily, and gave Rebecca advice on how to strengthen the child’s weak heart and develop her fine motor coordination. For the first time, Rebecca felt she had someone besides the kindly but overworked Dr. Baumgarten to take an interest in Emily. Dr. Talbot appeared concerned for her welfare and rejoiced in her accomplishments, no matter how trivial. Gradually, when he called, Rebecca allowed herself to mention her yearning to be of use in the world, and as she had hoped, Dr. Talbot encouraged her. In fact, he suggested she consider training at the College for Young Women. They talked excitedly about his Institute which, since Lady Fairhaven’s death unfortunately was stalled for funds, but surely soon would acquire new patrons and new inspiration.

In these discussions Dr. Talbot never made concessions to her age or inferior education, but rather talked to her as a colleague. At times he was so ardent about his pursuits that the words fairly spilled out, so that she could barely grasp his meaning. Other times he seemed exhausted and dispirited, the result of the strain of his work she conjectured, but allowed himself to be cheered by her steadfast conviction of his ultimate success. Rebecca didn't dare admit to herself how she looked forward to his calling.

Even Miss Gelbstein, who initially regarded Dr. Talbot with suspicion, was won over by a present of the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and a collection of contemporary speeches on women's suffrage. As a scientist, Dr. Talbot found the theoretical equality of women and men an intriguing concept.

"I am not sure I can go as far as you do, Miss Gelbstein," he would say thoughtfully. "My clinical experience suggests that women are by nature weaker, more susceptible to nervous ailments, and generally have not the logical reasoning abilities of men." But when Miss Gelbstein spiritedly refuted each of his arguments, he conceded, "A point well taken, well taken indeed, Miss Gelbstein. Perhaps you have the right of it after all."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Sunday afternoon, Miss Gelbstein had shepherded the younger girls to the Zoological Gardens to be astonished by the variegated animals housed there. Now, after an early dinner, installed in front of the fire, they could not stop talking about the parrots,

the monkey house, the elephants, polar bears, tiger, lion, and hippopotami, a pluralism that Miss Gelbstein assiduously urged on them to ever louder gales of laughter. Naomi had unearthed an old zoetrope, on which pictures of zebras, giraffes and lions moved and jumped.

“I have no need to visit the Gardens,” Simon remarked in a playfully severe voice. “You seem to have brought the monkey house home with you.” The girls were momentarily chastened, but one look at their father thrust them into yet greater merriment.

Simon, sitting under the one good lamp, scanned the evening paper. Disraeli was manipulating to make the Queen Empress of India, there had been an earthquake in Turkey, a boat had sunk off Dover. A slew of moral reform societies announced their meetings, while servants of all stripes advertised for positions. When he turned to reported deaths, he saw a rather floridly written obituary for Lady Alicia Fairhaven, described as “a sublime mother, an incomparable wife, much beloved by all” who was now enjoying “a holy and uninterrupted communion with God.” It crossed his mind that the demise of the nameless baby wrapped in a dirty shawl would go unnoticed and unmourned.

The wonders of the gardens at last accounted for, Rebecca tried to organize a contest of piggy-in-the-middle with Naomi and Emily who, whenever she was on the outside, persisted in tossing the ball to the person in the middle, in oblivious violation of the rules of the game.

“No, Emily, you are ruining everything!” Naomi protested.

Emily squealed delightedly.

“Deborah,” queried Miss Gelbstein, “Whatever are you doing?”

Deborah, daydreaming about a bestiary of fantastical creatures, fish flapping birds’ wings and monkeys marked by zebra stripes, started. “Nothing, Miss Hannah.”

“Precisely, child. You are wasting time, a reprehensible and immoral habit. If you are unable to occupy yourself, I will set you a task. You could take up your embroidery, or gum those interesting ivy leaves you gathered at the Gardens onto the earthenware vase in the kitchen.”

Deborah, who hated embroidery and did not like being told what to do, scowled at her, marched over to the piano, and sat down with a thump. Soon the room was filled with the sounds of Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavichord, sounding very ill-tempered indeed. The remaining children became quiet and industrious, while Simon sought refuge in his paper. *Beit shalom*, peace in the household, he prayed.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

"Let us consider what we know, Thomas." Inspector Wise and Sergeant Murdoch were waiting at the edge of the street, while a ragged sweep dashed out amidst the carriages and cabs to brush aside the dust. Miraculously it had remained dry today, although rain threatened. The two men clutched black umbrellas and looked suspiciously at the glowering sky. By common but unspoken consent they were making their way toward the Ten Bells, a local public house known for its tasty eel stew and generous portions of ale. It was a habit of theirs when a case was not going well.

Inspector Wise handed the child a penny, thinking that he was probably close to the age Leah would have been, although he might be small and undernourished. The boy tipped his cap in gratitude. "Good day to 'ee, guv'nor."

They made their way around a crowd watching the perpetual spectacle of Punch abusing his wife Judy, while Toby the dog barked encouragement. A group of Italian musicians serenaded the passers-by with the opera of the poor, warily keeping one eye on the overhanging clouds. Newsboys cried out the latest national gossip, while costermongers pushed their barrows of oysters and fish, shopgirls walked arm in arm chatting animatedly, a scissors-grinder hopefully carried his wheel, and independent shoeblacks, always on the lookout for the police, mingled with businessmen and lawyers bustling along self-importantly.

Inside, the ripe smells of men's bodies packed close mingled with the fumes of ale, whiskey, gin, and tobacco smoke. Inspector Wise descried two ragged children waiting by the bar, no doubting fetching a jug of beer for their father. Farther down the row, a woman with unkempt hair and a tattered shawl attempted to quiet her fussy baby with sips of gin. Smoked eel, onions, pickles and bread circulated around the room. Wise and his Sergeant shouldered their way toward the back, until they found a place at the end of a roughly hewn table. The other occupants, seeing Murdoch's uniform, quietly withdrew. Murdoch smiled tightly, then went to fetch two ciders and sandwiches. He knew the Inspector never drank and had strong feelings about the incidence of drunkenness on the Force.

"It wasn't a burglary, sir."

"No, of course not. We've got beyond that point at any rate." How much more convenient for everyone if an unknown scoundrel from the underclass had emerged to wreak this havoc, then subsided again into the swamp of criminal pauperism. "No valuables missing, no evidence of prior casing of the house. These days, our criminals are too sophisticated to simply barge into a wealthy area and hope for a windfall."

On the irregular surface of the table, Wise spread out the daily occurrence sheet, which he had to prepare for Superintendent Walker, who would amend it as he saw fit before passing it along to Commissioner Henderson. Under the Fairhaven murder, Wise had written: "Suspects: Sir Gregory Fairhaven, spouse; Abraham Rothstein, acquaintance; Alfred Rothstein, acquaintance; Frederick May, former lover; Professor Edward Maximus, acquaintance, former lover (?); James, the Fairhaven footman; Arabella Bowdoin, paramour of Sir Gregory; Molly Reid, dismissed maid. No progress." What an unwieldy collection! No wonder he was getting nowhere. They suspected just about everyone and had evidence against almost no one.

"I still think it's likely to be someone on the inside. Which means one of the servants... or the master," Murdoch said with satisfaction. Like the Inspector, he knew that the most likely perpetrator in this kind of domestic murder was the spouse, and it didn't matter one whit to him to what class they belonged.

"He has an alibi," the Inspector said thoughtfully.

"The alibi of a whore. He's lied to us once already, sir. Maybe he's arranged for his lady-friend to lie for him as well. And, though we've labeled Sir Gregory a cold fish, according to Arabella he can be verra headlong, at least between the sheets." Murdoch had to stop a moment to enjoy the libidinous image. "Maybe in other ways as well. He



could still have gone back to Berkeley Square after puttin' in an appearance at Kate Hamilton's, murdered his wife, then returned to his mistress, simple as pie." Murdoch licked his lips at the savory analogy, and Inspector Wise thought how much his Sergeant would like to pin Sir Gregory to the wall on this one. He briefly entertained the unwieldy and unsettling thought of the substantial baronet squirming on a specimen board like a stuck butterfly. He had to admit this thought did not displease him either.

"But why was Lady Fairhaven waiting up? Why didn't she retire? I still favor the assignation hypothesis, Thomas. She may have been expecting someone, someone who could have entered by the garden, for whom she willingly opened the door. Perhaps one of the Rothsteins. Perhaps a lover."

"Excuse me, sir, but we know she was insomniac. She may have been waitin' only for sleep, when someone already in the house took her unawares and did her in."

Inspector Wise looked unconvinced. "If that were the case, then why did she not change out of that splendid, but surely uncomfortable, ball-gown?"

"Most likely, she was waitin' for her husband, and didn't want to change until they had spoken," Sergeant Murdoch insisted stubbornly. "We know they quarreled at the ball, and she may have thought to apologize for her unseemly behavior there."

"From what I understand of Lady Fairhaven's character, she rarely apologized for anything. Besides, she expected her husband to be spending the night at the Reform club. They had agreed upon that arrangement beforehand. No, it seems to me if she were waiting at all, she was waiting for someone else," Wise argued. "The industrialist, the professor, a baron, her adorable footman, someone that she knew... and trusted. Frederick May says he spent the night on the premises of his factory. His watchman

confirms he saw him, but from what we can put together, the watchman himself was probably in a drunken stupor a good part of the time. And May will not divulge why the Fairhavens suddenly readmitted him into their lives."

"But he claims to have been in love with Lady Fairhaven still."

"So he does."

"Then why murder her?" Murdoch argued with what to him appeared irrefutable logic.

"Thomas, have you never known a man to kill the object of his desires? Perhaps simply because she is unattainable?"

Murdoch nodded reluctantly but still seemed skeptical. "Well, what about the murder weapon, sir? Mighty convenient, wasn't it, that Sir Gregory didn't notice that fancy dagger missin' until one of the undermaids pointed it out?"

Inspector Wise shook his head in mock dismay. "Have you always had such a cynical nature, Thomas, or has life on the force corrupted your faith in humanity? I find it compatible with the baronet's general state of shock and confusion that he should have overlooked the absence of this item. Indeed, Lady Fairhaven's morning room is so full of knick-knacks and bric-a-brac it is a wonder anyone has the slightest idea of what should and should not be there. It makes sense that the maid, who is responsible for dusting the objects daily, should notice one missing more than the baronet, who simply passes in and out of the room. Anyone could have picked up that dagger, stabbed Lady Fairhaven, then secreted it away."

"I'll concede that is possible, Inspector," said Murdoch with barely concealed ill-grace, "but realistically, who else could she have been expectin', sir? We cannot shake

the stories of the servants verifying that Sir Rothstein left without admission to the house and did not return. Mr. May might have paid the lady a late-night visit, but he is alibied by the testimony of the watchman for what it's worth. Professor Maximus has no alibi, but from your description, sir, no disrespect to the learned gentleman intended, I can scarcely picture him sneakin' into Lady Fairhaven's mornin' room and stabbing her to death. And I have it on good authority that the lady's flirtation with James the footman was nothing serious."

"Perhaps not from the vantage point of the charming lady's maid Mathilde, but Mrs. Shaw told you Mr. Creavey was planning to dismiss James for his cheekiness. James sounds like an ambitious and intelligent young man. A dishonorable dismissal such as that would be a definite blow to his career aspirations. Perhaps he confronted Lady Fairhaven, demanded a clandestine meeting, threatened her with scandal. When she refused to intercede on his behalf, he became enraged, grabbed up the dagger, and killed her."

Sergeant Murdoch took a judicious bite of eel, then washed it down with a swig of cider. He looked at Inspector Wise quizzically.

"Do ye think James is our murderer, then?"

It was the Inspector's turn to focus his attention on his food. "No, Thomas, I do not," he at last admitted reluctantly. "I do not. Talk to him anyway, and I will continue to scrutinize Lady Fairhaven's powerful friends. When someone has a secret to hide, sometimes simply staring at him can make for a fair degree of discomfort." Sergeant Murdoch could not tell whether the Inspector was making a joke, but he tried to look amused just to be on the safe side.

## CHAPTER FORTY

It was disgraceful, Sir Gregory thought. More than disgraceful, disgusting really. So soon after Alicia's vicious murder, the woman not yet cold in her grave, and already he was in his carriage, on his way to Arabella. If this visit became known, he would be the talk of the town. With an impatient gesture, he turned toward the carriage window, as if to avoid his self-reproachful thoughts. London hustled by, and he remembered the consternation of a French acquaintance at the English inability to do anything except with alacrity and earnestness. It seemed true today too, perhaps exacerbated by the icy gusts that swept the street. Clerks and costers alike scuttled along, like drab leaves propelled by the wind. Sir Gregory glimpsed a small throng gathered around a bedraggled dancing bear, who limply raised one paw then another to the mournful tune of a hurdy-gurdy.

Damn it all, he had tried to act the part, arranged a sumptuous funeral, accepted the condolences of well-wishers, handled the growing outrage of Alicia's family that the perpetrator had not yet been apprehended. The worst were the children. Sir Gregory had no idea how to console them. Couldn't console them, of course. They were bereft, they had lost their mother. Anthony and Clarissa he left with the nanny as much as possible, they were too young to understand their mother was gone. Anthony with his round eyes and fat cheeks would say solemnly, "Mummy is in Heaven," but the next day he would ask how far away heaven was and when she was coming back. Sir Gregory had brought Charles home from school, it struck him as the proper thing to do under the circumstances, but now he wondered if that had been the wisest choice. Charles, older,

angrier, seemed to blame him, his green eyes bitter, wordlessly asking his father, "How could you let this happen?"

How, indeed? He could never explain to his children, it would never be comprehensible to them. It was impossible to tell them he too felt something, it was not only their loss, but the whole situation was considerably more complicated than their guileless minds could ever grasp. He missed Alicia, he truly did, such an adornment as everyone said, so beautiful, so intelligent, a bit willful perhaps, but one could forgive her anything, she was such a fascinating woman. Yes, damnit all, he missed his wife, as well as the dignity he attained through his association with her. But he could not hide from himself his relief. He might as well admit it. Alicia being dead made everything so much simpler. He thought again of Arabella.

He was a man, damned if he wasn't, and he bloody well had the needs of a man. This was something Alicia never understood. She had not found the sexual act painful or revolting, as did some well-bred women, but simply tasteless, slightly vulgar. Arabella, on the other hand, was never troubled by such excesses of civility. She did things to him he scarcely dared imagine afterwards, even in his fantasies. His member grew erect as he thought of her clever fingers, her warm, moist orifices, her probing tongue rough as a kitten's.

The baronet's carriage arrived at Kate Hamilton's door. Telling his coachman to wait behind the building in the mews, Sir Gregory presented himself. The footman was too well-trained to betray any curiosity at Sir Gregory's arrival. However, when Kate herself came to greet him, she allowed a slightly mocking smile to cross her face, and made sure Sir Gregory saw it as well.

“The widower seeking solace? How touching.”

“Come, Kate, I’ve no time for your asinine games. Let me see Arabella.” It was foolish, he knew, but the ritual of entrance and access into the forbidden realm of the bordello always excited him.

“Why such haste, Sir Gregory? Have a glass of bubbly.” Kate handed him an elegant crystal stem, which he accepted, then downed in a single gulp.

Sir Gregory tapped his black armband peevishly. “I’ve spent more than a fortnight surrounded by crepe, mourning wreaths, ceaseless tears,” he said, reckoning time from the day of his wife’s death. “Unspeakably dreary and depressing. I need a change, or I think I shall die myself. I’m only human, Kate.”

“All too human, I should say.” Nevertheless, she escorted him up the curved staircase to Arabella’s room. Walking slightly behind her, the baronet eyed her ample behind and wondered whether anyone dared to penetrate its mysteries.

Their first moments together were awkward, even after Kate left them alone with only a parting raised eyebrow. Finally, Arabella held out her hand. It was the start of another ritual, the one he liked best of all, a titillating entertainment in which Arabella acted the part of a country squire’s virtuous young daughter, with Sir Gregory introducing her to the temptations of the big city.

“Come, Sir Gregory. Take off yer ‘at an’ stay awhile, whilst me father is away.”

Sir Gregory permitted himself to be led to the opulent bed, a canopied four poster affair hung in a wine velvet that encouraged reveries of enjoyable decadence. In an innocent voice, Arabella murmured, “Oh, you mustn’t sit too close t’ me, Sir Gregory. It wouldn’t be right, you know.”

The baronet obligingly moved away from Arabella, then unobtrusively grasped her hand, and pulled it toward his mouth. He experienced each individual finger as an indescribably enticing morsel. She made a feint of pulling free, then contented herself with exhaling noisily and gazing out the window, as though her hand had no connection with the rest of her, and its being fondled in this fashion could in no way compromise her.

About to continue with the next line of their little play, Sir Gregory suddenly had an unnerving vision of the dark, lean police inspector, hovering like a bird of ill omen about their lovemaking. Abruptly, he took Arabella's fingers out of his mouth.

"What did you tell the police, Arabella?"

Out of role, Arabella stared at him boldly. "I tol' 'em you was 'ere." She smiled slyly. "An' wot did you tell th' police, Greggie?"

"I told them I was with you."

"Then that's fine, ain't it? We got nuffin' to worry about. Everythin's goin' to be good, verry good, Greggie. We was together then, and we're together now." Her plump arms circled his neck, then began to explore the lower regions of his body.

Sir Gregory hoped she was right. For now it was enough to lose himself in the scent of her skin, the warm, living flesh.

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Sergeant Murdoch had commandeered young William Benjamin Brown to accompany him when he conducted his next set of interviews with the Fairhaven

servants. Brown was intelligent, he was ambitious, but he was also green, and Murdoch took seriously his responsibility to break in the lad to the realities of actual detection.

Although it was still early, already the sweeps were busy clearing the thoroughfares of dust, debris, and above all manure. Constable Brown remembered hearing that one hundred tons of horse manure were dropped on the streets of London each day. Looking around him, it was a fact not difficult to believe. As usual, the thoroughfare was bustling and noisy. Carriage wheels and horses' hooves clattered on the pulverized stone of the streets. Constable Brown detected the bell of a muffin man, the cries of a peddler selling rat poison, and the faint noise of a hurdy-gurdy. As usual, the street was filled with children, street arabs, selling matches, cheap knives and pens, and orange slices, looking for the pennies that would keep body and soul together until the next day. To William Benjamin Brown, still fresh from the Midlands, despite its poverty, dirt, and noise, London was possessed of a tremendous excitement. This was by far the largest city in the world, a place where important things happened daily, and he intended to be part of those important things. Constable Brown regarded accompanying Sergeant Murdoch as a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate his potential to his superior and he planned to make the most of it.

Sergeant Murdoch nodded at the constable, who pulled the Fairhaven bell rope. James the footman opened the door, seemingly instantaneously. He looked as handsome as ever, well over six feet and with nicely turned-out calves, impeccably attired in livery. But his face appeared pale and drawn to the observant Sergeant.

"We're here to speak with Mr. Creavey." Sir Gregory had left instructions that the butler could handle all subsequent interrogations of the servants.



"Very good, sir." James exited smartly.

"He doesn't look like much of a murderer to me, sir," Constable Brown opined dubiously.

"A statement of inexperience," Murdoch replied. "I've seen little old ladies, innocent young boys, military officers - all of them murderers through and through. Some cold-blooded, some not, some a bit twisted, some more sane than you or me. Never assume, laddie."

Mr. Creavey entered the room, his distaste palpable. It insulted his dignity to have any sort of exchange with these policemen. Prolonging resolution of this sordid affair only made the embarrassment and scandal to the family more unavoidable. At some point in the not-too-distant future, unless the murderer were found, his association with the Fairhaven residence, remunerative though it was, would besmirch his reputation, and he would have to tender his resignation. The thought brought a grimace to his lips, but his utterance was the essence of courtesy.

"You will be more comfortable in here," Mr. Creavey said, ushering them into his pantry, which also housed the best wines and family silver. The comfort of these policemen was not uppermost in his mind, and he had instantly concluded that today a mere sergeant and an even more lowly constable could not be seen in the house proper. Although they had wandered the premises freely the day of the murder. "Now, how may I assist you?"

"We need to speak with James," Constable Brown began, but Murdoch silenced him with an unfavorable glance.

"James is a handsome fellow," he began conversationally. Mr. Creavey stared at him in stony silence. Murdoch continued unperturbed. "Lad seems to know it too. No chance, I suppose, of his ever thinkin' himself as above his place, if ye know what I mean?"

"I'm afraid I do not grasp your meaning," Mr. Creavey said unhelpfully.

"No, of course not, ye wouldn't now, would ye? Well, never mind. I'm a plain man, and I don't mind plain speakin'. Would he have been havin' a relationship with his mistress?"

Mr. Creavey gasped involuntarily at the vulgarity of the sergeant's language. With an effort, he regained his poise. "I should have you thrown out," he said quietly. "Have you forgotten? This is a house of mourning."

The geniality fell away from Murdoch's face, and Constable Brown imagined he could see the soldier who had stood shoulder to shoulder with his comrades in the Thin Red Line, immovable to the point of death, and if need be, beyond. Murdoch took a step closer to the butler.

"Ye foolish, supercilious man. Are ye still tryin' to protect the 'honor' of this house? Your mistress is dead, man, murdered in a horrible fashion, and the niceties of her private life don't matter a damn now. We know from Mrs. Shaw that ye planned to dismiss him." He stared hard at Mr. Creavey who, though shaken, stared back with equal intensity. Constable Brown looked from one to the other and was glad his role in this confrontation was only as observer. Then Murdoch made a nonchalant motion.

"Very well, man. I'll find out from someone else, if not you. Send me the footman." He turned away in dismissal, then stood silently but calmly with his back to the door until James knocked on the door and entered.

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

Constable Brown waited expectantly, but Murdoch seemed to have lost interest in the case. Seizing the moment, Brown cleared his throat a trifle nervously, whipped out his notebook and pencil, and commenced the interview in what he hoped was a professional manner.

"You are James the footman?" he asked, somewhat unnecessarily. "And what might your family name be?"

James looked at the floor, which was covered by a serviceable Brussels carpet, before replying. "Actually, I ain't James." The niceties of his servant-trained speech seemed to have fallen away.

Constable Brown looked disconcerted. "Not James?" he echoed, wishing profoundly that Sergeant Murdoch would busy himself elsewhere.

James regarded him unperturbed. "That is to say, James ain't me real name, wot is 'Enry Marsh." Constable Brown continued to stare uncomprehendingly. Over by the window, Sergeant Murdoch made a peculiar sound that, to Constable Brown's oversensitive ears, sounded disturbingly like a smothered chuckle.

"But they all seem to call you James here," Constable Brown persisted doggedly, at the same time surmising that this line of inquiry was not going to bring him any accolades.

"So they do."

"And why is that?"

"Th' explanation be simple enow. Th' footman before me were called James, not that I know if he were actually a James or not. An' th' one afore 'im, too. Th' baronet an' 'is family was in th' habit of referrin' to their footman as James, an' when I got 'ere, it seemed t' Sir Gregory easier fer me t' change than fer them t' change. I 'adn't much say in it, th' way Mr. Creavey explained it t' me. But Sir Gregory had th' right of it, it warn't really hard, an' now I scarce remember me God-given name, 'cept when I'm conductin' official business as it were."

"I see." Now Constable Brown not only wished Sergeant Murdoch were somewhere else, but that he also were absent, preferably at the ends of the earth. "Well, James, or Henry..."

"James will do. It's wot everyone calls me."

"We want to know more about your mistress, Lady Fairhaven." Constable Brown paused, congratulating himself on remembering a small trick Sergeant Murdoch had told him. "Don't babble, laddie. Be quiet as a field, laddie, and the guilty will sow in it the seeds of their own destruction. Be still as a lake, and the wrong-doers will drown themselves in it." James stared at him, probably wishing he too were anywhere but where he was. Constable Brown noticed that, although he had not moved, Sergeant

Murdoch had turned around. Perhaps, he thought hopefully, there was still a way to redeem himself.

"What kind of mistress was she?" Brown persisted. "Was she kind, or cruel? Generous, or stingy? Certainly, she was a beautiful woman. We could see that, even in the... condition in which she was found." James winced but remained silent.

"Come now, James. Have you gone deaf and dumb?"

"She were good t' me," James mumbled reluctantly.

Constable Brown pounced. "Good to you, was she? In what ways good to you? You're not a bad-looking bloke, you know." James blushed to the roots of his blond hair looking embarrassed and, in Brown's professional judgment, desperate.

"It's no good trying to deceive us. We've spoken to the other servants. You may have thought you were discreet, James, but there was gossip. And Mr. Creavey planned to dismiss you. You knew that, didn't you?" But James looked honestly bewildered.

"No, no, Mr. Creavey couldn't..." He took a deep breath, seeming to decide something in his mind. "You don't understand. I've always given satisfaction. There was never any complaints against me. It's true, Mr. Creavey, 'e spoke to me 'bout me rememberin' my place with th' mistress. I told 'im it wouldn't happen again, and that were the end of it, I swear."

"From what I can judge of Mr. Creavey, stepping over any line of his making once is once too many. I don't believe anything you might have said to him softened his heart. I plain don't believe you, James. You knew he would send you packing, and without giving you a good character. For all your handsome looks, with no reference, your dreams for the future would be ruined." Constable Brown felt himself warming to

the chase. To his own ears, he sounded positively eloquent. He debated sneaking a glance at Sergeant Murdoch but thought better of it. He wanted to appear wholly engrossed in the attack and pushed forward.

"You importuned a clandestine meeting with Lady Fairhaven when the rest of the household would be asleep. Out of pity, or passion, she agreed. When you met, you begged her to intercede on your behalf. But she refused. Perhaps she was tired of you, perhaps you had become an embarrassment to her. Faced with the destruction of your hopes, you seized the ornamental dagger and stabbed her. In your disordered mind, at the time, it was almost self-defense." Constable Brown thought this last a rather nice touch, a way for the suspect to save face, and wondered whether it might impress his sergeant.

James looked appalled. Constable Brown could almost taste his surrender to the inevitable. "No, I swear... you've got it all wrong. Mebbe Lady Fairhaven did flirt with me now an' then, but it warn't nothin improper. You didn't know her." The impeccable footman had lost his self-possession and seemed on the verge of tears. "She were a real lady. She would never have compromised herself with th' likes o' me. She were just interested in people, in 'ow they lived their lives. She were interested in me," he said defiantly, daring the policemen to contradict him. Sensibly, they said nothing.

"She wanted t' know about me, where I'd come from, wot my family were. You talk about dreams. She wanted t' know my dreams. She'd call me into that morning room o' hers sometimes... just t' talk. Well, mebbe t' smile, t' give a playful glance. She were a beautiful woman, wot liked t' be admired. An' to 'er, it were no less admiration if it came from 'er footman. That's where th' gossip came from. But she didn't care. I told 'er I aspired to be a butler some day, an' she sez she'd 'elp me, talk t' some of 'er friends

in other great 'ouses. I would never 'ave 'armed 'er." James glanced about pathetically.

"She were th' only one as still called me 'Enry sometimes, when no one else were about."

As Constable Brown struggled to absorb this outburst, Sergeant Murdoch moved swiftly across the room and touched the footman's arm, not unkindly.

"I don't suppose ye can prove your whereabouts on the night of the murder."

James looked sheepishly at the floor. "Ask Cynthia, th' upstairs maid. I were with 'er in th' laundry-room. All night."

"Very well. Tell Mr. Creavey we'll speak with Cynthia." As James gratefully left the room, Murdoch turned to face Constable Brown. His expression was severe, although the constable imagined he saw a gleam in his eye. Perhaps it was wishful thinking.

"Don't babble, laddie. Don't babble."

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

"Inspector," Lady Penelope teased gently, "do you never think of anything but your cases?" When he did not reply immediately, she added, "It must make for a dreary life."

Inspector Wise hoped he did not look as gloomy as Lady Abbott suggested. He justified this additional call on Lady Abbott by the need to obtain more background information about her dead friend, but he knew this to be a thin excuse. If Lady Abbott only realized how little the Fairhaven case preyed on his mind at the moment, and how much she herself did, she would think him foolish indeed.

“It is difficult to allow myself recreation or enjoyment when I have failed to resolve an assault of such a heinous nature,” he replied stiffly, precisely because he seemed, in his own eyes, to be so grossly deficient in the kind of single-mindedness of which she accused him. In fact, he admitted to himself, it was the pursuit of momentary pleasure, rather than the possible solution of crime, that had motivated his appearance on her doorstep.

She smiled, seemingly unaware of his cool tone. “You know, Inspector, Jews are said to be gamblers, yet you seem a cautious man.”

Inspector Wise looked at her inquiringly. Could it be that she was encouraging the very fantasies he found so upsetting? Was she daring him to take a risk with her? In his confusion, once again he took refuge behind a self-protective response.

“Jews are ‘known’ for many things, Lady Abbott. But as you can see, I do not deal in old clothes, nor do I put the amassing of money before all else.”

“That is hardly fair, Inspector. I simply meant that I do not know many members of your tribe, and so I must draw conclusions from what I have read and heard.”

“My particular ‘tribe,’ as you put it, has been in England for over two hundred years, since the Resettlement, and for two hundred years before the Expulsion. Whatever strangeness may have characterized us has long since washed away in the London rain and fog,” the Inspector replied, conveniently forgetting that the more recent arrivals from eastern Europe who populated East End were a much less assimilated lot.

“I offer my apologies, Inspector.” Lady Penelope made a wry face. “I seem to spend a good deal of our time apologizing. Please believe I spoke thoughtlessly.”



There was an awkward pause, which Lady Penelope filled by saying, "One thing the English are very good at is knowing how to paper over all social faux pas by serving tea. Would you care for some?"

She tinkled a porcelain bell to summon the redoubtable Abigail. Inspector Wise was grateful that his hostess chose to overlook his disrespectful manner, which failed to take into account her elevated social status. Instead of spurning him, an entirely appropriate option, she had responded with lighthearted grace. He suddenly felt surprisingly contented in Lady Penelope Abbott's presence and the arrival of the tea tray only made him feel more so.

Pouring the tisane into a cup that seemed too dainty for the Inspector's large, bony hands, Lady Penelope noticed him examining a painting on the wall of two young girls, obviously both poor, one blind, sitting in a yellow field, while behind them a rainbow broke through clouds.

"A Millais," she explained. "Actually, a reproduction of a Millais. I still enjoy what I choose to regard as its little chuckle, although I suppose the irony was unintended and the style is no longer in fashion. Every detail is painted so carefully, so realistically, each flower, every bird – every detail that the poor blind girl will never see. Of course, the rainbow is intended to be a symbol of hope in the afterlife, and Millais himself piously called it '... a sign of Divine promise specially significant to the blind.' But it seems to me a promise very far in the distance for this poor child."

Inspector Wise had heard of the well-known and successful painter John Everett Millais, who kept an elegant home in Palace Gate. But Wise was no art critic. The two young creatures, clinging to each other, reminded him of his own daughters. The picture

seemed to him very touching. He wondered whether the rainbow was an indication of Divine promise for the mentally defective as well as the blind. On the other hand, as Lady Abbot observed, there was no rainbow in sight for the blind girl nor for Emily. Perhaps there was a touch of sarcasm embedded in the painting after all.

“The colors are vivid,” he ventured. “It makes one hopeful.”

Lady Penelope appeared abashed. “Perhaps I am too much of a cynic. Millais wanted to call our attention to worldly suffering, but also to Divine reward. I’m curious, Inspector. Does your faith believe in an afterlife?”

For the Inspector, it was a jarring question. For most of his life, he had tried hard to keep his personal and professional spheres separate, but lately the lines had begun to blur. He had invited Michael Talbot to Sabbath dinner, and somehow the doctor had insinuated himself into their household so that he almost seemed a friend of the family. Now here he was with Lady Abbott, talking about Jewish views of life and death. Yet he felt it impossible not to answer her query.

“The Hebrew religion accepts the notion of life after death, although that has not always been the case. But in general, we do not concern ourselves overmuch with the nature of it. That we leave in God’s hands. We have more than enough to do occupying our time with the problems of this life.”

Lady Penelope smiled with appreciation. “It seems to me a very sensible philosophy. Death remains the great mystery.”

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

Lady Penelope paused a moment, then added, “Did you know my husband eventually died as a result of wounds he received in the Crimea, long after he returned home? He was a war hero, awarded the Victoria Cross for valor at Inkerman and Malakoff.”

“I also served in the Crimea,” Inspector Wise murmured, trying to leave his own ghosts buried as he spoke.

An unreadable expression crossed Lady Penelope’s face. “Is that so? Then perhaps you will be amused by this piece of trivia. Each Cross is supposedly forged from captured Russian guns. I suppose it is so rarely awarded because we didn’t capture all that many.” Listening to her, Inspector Wise could not decide if there was a sardonic twist to her words, any more than he could make up his mind about the meaning of the painting.

“I will tell you another interesting fact, something my late husband shared with me under penalty of secrecy, but after twenty years I see no reason why I should not disclose it.” She looked temporarily lost in her own thoughts, but then continued. “When Lord Cardigan led the noble charge of the Light Brigade against the wrong emplacement of Russian guns, he consulted a pocket-mirror to adjust his mustaches and wore a corset into battle. What do you make of that?”

Wise, whose 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had been entrenched, swimming in mud, at Sevastopol during that engagement, tried to remember the horrors of Balaclava, then tried not to.

“Indeed, it is true,” Lady Penelope resumed. “Of course, he survived, while most did not, so perhaps there was some secret merit in all his fastidious preparations.”

“I was very young at the time, Lady Abbott, probably too young to make much sense of the waste and ruin I witnessed. But absurd as it may seem, once we admit that etiquette and decorum have no place on a battlefield, we are left with nothing but the horror.’

Penelope Abbott looked slightly abashed, but only very slightly. “It is not really my place to speak of such things, as I remained safe in England. It is only that, in conversing with you, I am reminded of stories my husband confided, many tragic, some humorous, all disappointingly absurd. That is what I was left with, the horrible absurdity of war, and unfortunately, despite our Queen’s predilections for military adventures around the globe, I have never been able to rid myself of that impression. Not very patriotic of me, I’m afraid. Perhaps if I had not watched my husband’s sufferings, I would have felt differently. Were it not for the injury to the social standing of my sons, I might even contemplate becoming a Quaker.” Lady Penelope’s lips turned up slightly at the absurdity of such a thought.

It was now the Inspector who felt he had overstepped bounds. “I apologize, Lady Abbott, it is I who have spoken out of turn. Although I lost many good comrades in the Crimea, I did not have to sacrifice my spouse on its blood alter. I too reached a similar conclusion to your own. I am no fan of warfare, no matter how necessary to spread the Empire.”

Lady Penelope studied the Inspector closely for a moment, as if weighing an important decision, then said bluntly, “My husband was an addict when he came back from the Crimea. His wound never healed properly, and he was often in agony. One man went away to war, and another returned home. Pain can do that, I suppose. In any

event, he tried anything that might give him relief, codeine, morphine, opium. He used to gulp that horrible Daffy's Elixir by the bottle. He drank. And gambled. It was to escape the pain, you see. The pain... and the memories." Wise had the feeling she was trying to convince herself, not him. "He was a generous man while he lived. He always provided me with pin money, and our marriage settlement included a jointure for me and portions for the boys. But he left many debts. I didn't realize until his solicitor paid me a visit soon after the Colonel's death. I was bound by honor to pay them."

The Inspector said slowly, "It is probably difficult for anyone who was not there to understand what the Crimea did to men – good men, virtuous and loyal men. Suffering can overwhelm anyone." Lady Penelope cast him a grateful glance.

"Thank you, Inspector. It is pleasant to converse so openly regarding memories I thought had long since disappeared. There must be a certain sympathy between us because we have shared this ugly history. Tell me, if I may ask, have you children?"

"Eight, seven," the Inspector quickly corrected himself, "Six girls living and a boy."

"It must be a lovely family," Lady Penelope said, politely ignoring his inadvertent reference to Leah's death. "And your wife?"

"My wife is dead," the Inspector said shortly.

"Ah, I see. I am terribly sorry. I did not realize just how much we had in common." She smoothed the skirts of her dress, then said, "I myself was left with three boys. Mark and Andrew are now away at school, while my oldest Jeremy is in his second year at Christ Church. He is supposed to be studying, or 'sapping' as he puts it, although I suspect he sees a good deal more of the inside of the music halls than the

libraries.” To the Inspector’s eyes, Lady Abbott seemed suddenly small and sad. “My husband died when the younger boys were little more than babies, and even Jeremy grew up essentially without a father. He is... high-spirited. He was suspended once last year, and has been gated, confined within college boundaries, several times.”

She shook her head. “I am afraid he is a less than serious student. In my opinion, from the little I have seen, most young men seem to go up to Oxford because it is expected of them. For the most part they are frivolous and self-indulgent in the extreme, and spend fabulous amounts on expensive furniture, tobacco, dining at taverns and clubs, riding and hunting. They engage in the most absurd pranks, engineering explosions in the quad, painting the dean’s door red. Still, Jeremy is a good boy. He wants to have me purchase a commission for him in the Army. I suppose he has visions of replicating his father’s glory, such as it was. The farther we move from war, the more noble it becomes, don’t you agree? In any case, the poor boy doesn’t understand that is no longer how things are done, that one must attend Sandhurst or another military academy, that one must be more... serious these days.” She smiled self-consciously. “I don’t know why I am telling you these personal things about my family.”

“You are a mother, I am a father. All parents worry about their children.”

“Yes, that is true. I suppose that must be it.” She looked at him directly, and Inspector Wise imagined a certain warmth.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

There were several moments of silence, then Inspector Wise cleared his throat. “Lady Abbott, it is conceivable that Lady Fairhaven received an early morning caller the day of her death. She and Sir Gregory had attended a ball given by Lord Mallory the previous evening. They left early, around midnight. According to Sir Gregory, he stayed in town, as he had business to conduct the next morning. Abraham Rothstein escorted Lady Fairhaven home, but he appears to have left immediately afterwards. Lady Fairhaven dismissed her lady’s maid, saying only that she wished to be alone. Apparently, she did not retire at all, but went into the morning room around two o’clock. Since there are no signs of forced entry, we have concluded that her murderer was known to her. It may have been someone from inside the house, but as the door to the garden was unlatched, it may have been someone from outside the household as well. She may have arranged to meet this person at some early hour while the rest of the household was still sleeping. Possibly they quarreled, she was attacked, then the assailant fled.”

“You remain convinced it could not have been a burglar?” Lady Abbott asked, reluctant to relinquish the more reassuring explanation.

“We think it unlikely. We think it was someone she knew... and trusted.”

“But that is impossible. Lady Alicia did not consort with the type of people, someone from the criminal classes, who could do something like that.” The Inspector mused wryly that, even in someone as broadminded as Lady Abbott, it was much more convenient to believe in a random burglar who violated the homes of the wealthy, then receded like a dirty low tide back to the alleys and byways of St. Giles than to acknowledge what he saw every day, that unimaginable evils thrived at every level of society. However, he did not bother to challenge her preconceptions directly.

“Is it conceivable Lady Fairhaven might have threatened to expose embarrassing information about one of her acquaintances? Could she simply have been caught up in a lovers’ quarrel?”

Lady Abbott frowned. “I cannot imagine what you can mean when you say embarrassing information. In society, people always know things about other people, things that would be embarrassing to be revealed. But since everybody who is “in society” unofficially knows about these little scandals already, they are hardly worth committing murder over. As for Alicia’s romances, as I have told you, she was not above a flirtation now and then, but her affairs were always genteel. She was consistently discreet... and never serious. She was a curious, rather than a passionate woman, ruled by her head, not her heart. She may have arranged an assignation, but she would never be willfully malicious toward one of these ‘friends.’ She and her lovers always parted on the best of terms.”

“I have spoken with both Mr. May and Professor Maximus. Neither has a completely convincing alibi for the period of time during which Lady Fairhaven was murdered. Mr. May seemed particularly concerned that his wife be kept ignorant of our interest in him.”

“His wife is a hypochondriac who rarely leaves their home and is rarely seen in society. The least agitation sends her into nervous spasms and Mr. May understandably does his utmost to protect her from any unpleasantness. His reluctance to involve her in this frightful business is hardly an admission of guilt.”



“Do you think it possible that their old romance was being revived? After all, Frederick May was a dinner guest at the Fairhaven home the night before her ladyship’s murder.”

For a moment, Penelope Abbott faltered. “It is all very silly, but Alicia had mentioned something about the matchstick monarch attempting to renew his attentions. It seems he was quite smitten with her. But Alicia, who sometimes had a short attention span, had completely lost interest in the man. In fact, she was so annoyed with him I believe she had threatened to inform his wife about his advances. Not that she would have done so, you understand, she would have loathed becoming involved with Mrs. May even more than she would have despised a reattachment to the husband. As a matter of fact, she mentioned to me that it was Sir Gregory who had invited Mr. May, to discuss a matter of business.”

Inspector Wise filed away this intelligence for the time being, thinking that, if Mrs. May proved half the harridan her reputation suggested, an act of violence to forestall her wrath might not have struck her husband as disproportionate.

“What do you know about Lady Fairhaven’s relationship with the Rothstein brothers?” the Inspector asked, trying a different tack.

“Very little. I know their social circles intersected occasionally, and she found the family fascinating. Who would not? But surely there is nothing suspicious in the mere fact of a social connection?”

“I do not know enough at this point to be able to say one way or the other. Maybe our suspect should not be a disgruntled lover at all. Conceivably Sir Gregory interrupted her with another man who fled the scene. In a fit of rage husband attacked wife.” Simon

realized uneasily that he was treating Lady Abbot more like a colleague than an informant. He knew he should not be speculating in this way with her but could not resist the comfort he experienced talking with her, sitting in a well-padded chair in her cozy parlor. For a moment, it almost felt like home.

Lady Penelope shook her head. “Then why has this mysterious lover not come forward to tell what he knows?”

“Perhaps to avoid the scandal,” Inspector Wise suggested dubiously, admitting to himself she had made a good point.

“I cannot believe anyone would be that contemptible, that cowardly,” Lady Penelope replied indignantly. “It is difficult for me to convey to you my convictions about Sir Gregory and Lady Fairhaven on this point because you did not know them. Sir Gregory did not have fits of rage about his wife’s peccadillos. He would have regarded it as ungentlemanly. Besides, as I have mentioned, they had an understanding. As for Alicia, it would have been beneath her to become involved in such a sordid situation as the one you are describing.”

“Perhaps it is you who did not really know them,” the Inspector suggested, abruptly reminded of how the upper classes automatically closed ranks about their own. “There must have been some provocation on Lady Fairhaven’s part, or at the least knowledge she possessed that menaced someone. I am sorry to offend you, but her life could not have been as flawless as you seem to think.”

Surprisingly, Lady Penelope did not become offended, but leaned forward and touched his arm gently. “I believe you are sincerely committed to solving Lady Alicia’s

death, Inspector Wise. Let me make a few inquiries. Lady Alicia was my friend, but perhaps there were things about her I did not know.”

The remainder of the interview was routine in the Inspector’s view. Lady Abbott had not conversed with her friend in the week preceding her death, and so was not able to shed light on the possible reasons for what Baron Rothstein described as Lady Fairhaven’s aroused emotions. Lady Abbott had no knowledge of a dismissed maid but noted that in a household as large as the Fairhaven’s, servants were always coming and going. As for James the footman, Lady Alicia had confided that she found him delicious, but after all, if a cat could look at a queen, surely a lady could look at her own footman.

Outside the shelter of the house, the wind penetrated Inspector Wise like a dagger, but a curious warmth from Lady Penelope Abbott’s hand lingered on his arm, a comforting balm against the harshness of the day.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

Inspector Wise harbored no illusions as he walked into Superintendent Walker’s office. Almost three weeks had elapsed, and he was no further along in solving the Fairhaven case than when they had first discovered Lady Alicia Fairhaven’s body. He had plenty of suspects, most of whom had weak but possible alibis. As yet, he had not developed a convincing theory incontrovertibly implicating any of them.

Robert Walker looked up from his desk and scowled. “Let me tell you, Inspector, Commissioner Henderson is not pleased with the way this case is going. In fact, to put it bluntly, this case is not going anywhere. There have been inquiries made at the Home

Office, and heads will roll unless we come up with a suspect. Lady Fairhaven came from an influential family and had powerful friends. Thank God no real evidence implicating the Rothsteins has emerged yet. This office could not withstand the combined pressures of the Prime Minister and the banking house that, even as we speak, is masterminding control of the Suez Canal for England. It was sensible of you to pursue other leads.”

Inspector Wise remembered being mystified by Sir Rothstein’s allusion to the Suez, but apparently such international machinations were not unusual for the powerful Baron. “I pursued other leads because those were the directions in which the evidence pointed, not out of any political considerations,” he said resolutely, and did not bother to add that he had made no concessions to shared religious beliefs either.

“Quite right. But the fact remains, we need an arrest.” Superintendent Walker waited expectantly, but the Inspector merely returned his stare. “Come Simon, is it not likely Sir Gregory himself? Crime of passion, what?”

Inspector Wise nodded. “I agree there is statistical probability in support of your argument. But I cannot agree that we have enough evidence to make an arrest. Besides, the baronet is alibied.”

“By his whore? Do you take that seriously? The two of them are probably in cahoots.” Inspector Wise maintained an obstinate silence. “Look, Simon, I admit implicating an MP is not a pretty picture. But there is tremendous pressure to solve this case, from Lady Fairhaven’s family, who never liked Fairhaven, and from the Rothsteins, who complain their name is being tainted by the lack of resolution. We have to do our duty.”

The Inspector bristled, thinking that Superintendent Walker cared considerably less about his duty than about his job, which was surely in jeopardy if he disappointed his political masters. “Sir, when have you known me not to do my duty? Indeed, you originally called me into this case because you thought the ‘duty’ involved would be even more unpalatable and involve someone even more influential than Sir Gregory. Fortunately for all of us, that has not yet proved to be the case.” He took a breath, then continued. “Sir, I believe you know me well enough to trust that I will do whatever justice requires, no matter how distasteful. It is simply the case that we have no solid evidence against the baronet, nor against anyone else at this time.”

“Calm down, Simon. I didn’t mean to ruffle your feathers. Of course, I trust your judgment, always have. I merely want you to understand the pressure I’m under from above. Have you ruled out a jealous servant? What about other dubious relationships? Look more closely at the help, old lovers, perhaps that impertinent little dollymop herself.”

Inspector Wise heaved a deep breath and tried to overcome his growing irritation with the Superintendent. If he ever needed assistance in having the obvious pointed out to him, he knew exactly where to come.

“Right you are, sir. As a matter of fact, we are chasing down some of those very leads. I can tell you that two servants might have had motive, that Lady Fairhaven in all probability possessed sensitive knowledge about the proclivities of an eccentric professor at London University, and that Frederick May, the matchstick king himself, worried that Lady Fairhaven intended to reveal their flirtation to his volatile, divorce-minded wife.”

“Well,” said Superintendent Walker, somewhat mollified. “Here’s progress. The last situation sounds as though it has potential. Is May so hen-pecked that he would commit murder to avoid his wife’s ire?”

“I asked him the same question, this morning, sir, before I came to see you. He insists he respected Lady Fairhaven’s desire not to resume their relationship, and on the night of the dinner party confined his attentions to business discussions with Sir Gregory. But, to answer your question sir, I believe Mr. May was infatuated with Lady Fairhaven. He seems to fancy he was in love with her. On the other hand, I also believe he is afraid of his wife... or afraid of the scandal that would ensue should she have decided to initiate divorce proceedings.”

Superintendent Walker took his feet off the desk to indicate the interview had concluded. “Well, Simon, once again you have convinced me you are earning your keep.” He smiled mirthlessly at Inspector Wise, who tried to pretend that the Superintendent was merely being humorous. “Just remember. We need quick action on this one. So do your best.”

“I always do, sir.” Simon Wise nodded stiffly, because although for the moment he had pacified his chief and presented the appearance of purposeful activity, in reality he felt completely at sea, unclear where to search for the solution, uncertain where to probe.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

Later that evening, after the dinner dishes had been cleared away, Naomi sat curled in her father’s lap, playing with his side-whiskers, while he attempted to read the

paper around her. The little girl's curls had escaped the tight plaits in which Miss Gelbstein scrupulously but futilely braided them each morning, and now made a halo of frizzy ringlets around her head. Miss Gelbstein found her appearance undignified, but her father thought her adorable. He had a special soft spot in his heart for this little one, his next to last, who had lost her mother at such an early age. He remembered that Naomi had a favorite doll with a china head and eyes that opened and shut. When it sat up, it cried "mama," but after Rachel died Naomi refused to touch it. Inspector Wise hadn't seen it in years and suspected that Miss Gelbstein had given it away to the Jewish orphanage in Goodman Fields.

Naomi continued to fiddle with his whiskers. At last, bowing to the inevitable, Simon leaned toward her.

"Let's see how your reading is coming along, miss," he suggested, pointing to a *Punch* cartoon.

The little girl struggled with the unfamiliar words. "The Spinks..."

"That's Sphinx," corrected David, looking over her shoulder.

"What is a Spinks?" asked Naomi.

"A big statue in Egypt," replied her brother, happy to show that, when they were talking about interesting things, he was as impressively well-informed as that know-it-all Sarah.

"The Spinks, She winks, At Dizzy's cup..."

"Coup!" David exclaimed.

"Coo: 'Yes,' thinks the Spinks, 'I think 'twill do.'"

“Very good, Naomi. Now, David, since you have been so helpful to your sister, please explain to us what it means.”

“Well, sir, Dizzy is the Prime Minister,” began David.

“Mr. Disraeli to you, young man. That magazine positively flaunts its shocking lack of respect. I don’t know why you take *Punch*, Simon. It certainly is not humorous,” huffed Miss Gelbstein who, while loathing Disraeli’s Tory politics, respected the man for attaining such eminent political heights and was determined the Wise children should respect him as well.

Rebecca and Sarah exchanged glances. They suspected that the witticism did not exist that could bring a smile to Miss Gelbstein’s proper lips.

“I think it’s a kind of congratulations for winning the Suez Canal for England.”

David looked hopefully at his father.

“Close enough. It is a tribute to Disraeli’s achievement in bringing the Canal under British control. It is a great coup, that is accomplishment Naomi, not cup, for the British Empire.” Although he had not told another soul of Rothstein’s foreshadowing of this great event, nevertheless Simon took a certain private satisfaction in knowing that he might have been among the first, along with the Foreign Secretary Lord Derby and Queen Victoria herself, to learn that, with the help of the House of Rothstein, the French had been outmaneuvered again. England was indeed fixated on protecting her route to India. Ironically, Rothstein money had helped finance the Crimean War, fought for essentially that same purpose twenty years ago, and now once again Rothstein money secured direct access. Simon wondered anew at the strange workings of fate that had brought him into such unlikely proximity with that great family.



Naomi did not appear impressed, however, and wriggled off her father's lap to watch David and Deborah balancing Emily on the old rocking-horse, one on each side, giving gleeful shouts as the little girl moved slowly back and forth. After having been through seven other children, the ancient horse seemed unwaveringly amiable, disposed to carry on without complaint, no matter the level of boisterousness.

"Careful she doesn't fall off," Rebecca cautioned. Simon thought yes, be careful, for God's sake be careful. Life is so frighteningly fragile. The children just laughed harder, Emily most of all. Naomi picked up a blue rhinoceros from the children's Noah's ark collection and began to lick the paint to see if the color would hold. David threw a pillow at Deborah, who sat daydreaming by the fire. Surprisingly, instead of bursting into tears, she smiled and then, when he least expected it, tossed it back.

Simon, contemplating the flames of the fire, felt himself sinking into musings about his conversation with Lady Abbott the previous night that had nothing to do with the case. He tried to concentrate on the day's news, but soon shook his head in exasperation. "Frankly, Hannah, I don't know what to make of these female Evangelists and temperance women who lecture before promiscuous audiences. They are advocating a worthwhile cause undoubtedly, but speaking in public seems scandalous for women of upright reputation."

Miss Gelbstein frowned. "I find the term 'promiscuous' objectionable, Simon. What you mean to say is that it bothers you when intelligent and articulate females address a mixed gathering of men and women."

"Yes, that is precisely what I mean. It seems to me improper, undignified. People mock them by referring to them as 'shrieking sisters.'"

“Even though these women are all of respectable backgrounds, married, dress modestly and speak only against vice and depravity. I would say such derogatory and ignorant terms denigrate the speaker much more than their object. Shrieking sisters indeed!”

Simon forbore to comment that such an appellation he thought might easily at times be applied in his cousin’s case. He plunged resolutely back into his paper.

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

Despite his determination not to be swayed by Superintendent Walker’s anxieties, Inspector Wise decided that the surface of Sir Gregory’s relationship with the lovely Arabella needed to be probed more deeply. So it was that cascading pressures brought Sergeant Murdoch back into the imposing presence of Kate Hamilton. He was confounded by her agreeable demeanor, until he reflected that alienating a baronet was considerably less dangerous than risking the wrath of the truly mighty. Kate Hamilton did not want to be at odds with one of the great banking houses of England or, heaven help her, the Prime Minister himself. And Murdoch suspected that, should it suit her interests, Kate would be only too ready to sacrifice her protégé, Arabella Bowdoin.

“Take his coat and hat,” Kate instructed the maid, who deftly collected the requisite apparel and disappeared from the room. “No champagne, I suppose?” she asked, waving what appeared to be an omnipresent glass. “Well then, Sergeant, make yourself at home and tell me why you’re back.”

“We need more information about the relationship between Sir Gregory and Arabella Bowdoin.” Murdoch saw no point in wasting time. “It was more than casual, was it not?”

Kate studied the Sergeant closely for several moments, then took a sip of champagne. “Do you know what the French call the culmination of the sexual act, Sergeant?” She appreciated that, as a woman, she had shocked the Sergeant by directly referring to bodily pleasures. She had fully intended to do so. “*Le petit mort*, the little death. When properly induced, the ecstasy of that moment is so sublime, so exquisitely painful that to the French, who are much better lovers than we passionless English, it is like a heavenly ascent, like death itself. Some men are willing to risk a great deal for this experience.” Kate looked at the Sergeant slyly. Fortunately, thinking of his nights with Nancy, he thought he grasped what she was talking about.

“The baronet was a regular patron of Arabella’s. In my opinion, he was somewhat intimidated by his intelligent, articulate wife, and overwhelmed by her many enthusiasms and projects. He could impress Arabella easily, and I imagine he took pleasure in doing so. And, pardon my frankness again, but he was positively transported by their sexual intimacies.”

The Sergeant kept his composure. He was experienced enough not to be deflected by Kate’s little games. “Do ye think it possible that Sir Gregory was sufficiently enamored to lose his head over Miss Bowdoin, to ‘risk a great deal’ as ye put it?”

Kate delayed fractionally before offering the Sergeant a response. “I didn’t know Sir Gregory well, of course. We have exchanged a little harmless banter, shared a few glasses of champagne, negotiated fees. I can’t pretend to know what was in his heart.”

“Ye aren’t answerin’ my question, Mrs. Hamilton.”

“No, I am not. All I can tell you is that in the last few weeks before Lady Fairhaven’s death, Sir Gregory seemed anxious and preoccupied, and occasionally made disparaging remarks about his wife in my presence, a type of grumbling I had not heard him indulge in previously.”

“Can ye recall the nature of these comments?”

“Just general statements. He complained about her excessive independence, her arrogance. Once I remember his saying she didn’t give him the proper respect due a husband, that she was very selfish, always spending too much, things of that sort.”

“Verra well. That is helpful, Mrs. Hamilton. And would ye say that Miss Bowdoin reciprocated the baronet’s feelings for her?”

“Arabella was besotted with Sir Gregory,” Kate Hamilton said candidly. “You can hardly blame her. She was a good deal more used to soldiers than to baronets. Sir Gregory was clean, he was well-dressed, he had lovely manners and apparently plenty of money, he kept a carriage and had a country estate... What more could a girl want?”

“Now that’s the question, isn’t it, Mrs. Hamilton. Did she want more?”

“What do you mean?”

“Could she have wanted Lady Fairhaven out of the way to improve her chances with the baronet? Could she have imagined her future would be more secure if she had an exclusive claim on Sir Gregory’s affections?”

Kate swallowed the rest of her champagne in a gulp and stood. This meant that Sergeant Murdoch was forced to stand as well.

“Anything is possible, Sergeant. Arabella is an ambitious girl, and she is not in the first bloom of youth. She is at least twenty-three or twenty-four if she’s a day, and in this profession that is close to becoming used goods.” She shrugged her shoulders impatiently, and her immense breasts heaved in sympathy. “Who can really know another, Sergeant? I believe Arabella was not entirely impervious to the delusion that if the position of Sir Gregory’s wife became... vacant, so to speak, there was a chance she might at least hope for a left-hand marriage. You know, in this profession, girls still talk about the romance and eventual marriage between the aristocrat Charles Fox and the former courtesan Elizabeth Armistead.”

Kate Hamilton leered knowingly at the Sergeant. “One’s fantasy of love is always so much more pleasing than its inevitably disappointing reality, don’t you agree? Especially when one is young and naïve. Now, Sergeant, I really must go.”

“One last question, if I may, ma’am. Do ye think her capable of this brutish murder?” asked Sergeant Murdoch, thinking of Arabella’s succulent flesh and provocative eyes.

Kate gave the suggestion a judicious pondering worthy of the Chancery court. Finally, she retorted, “From what I understand, the murder had a certain artistry to it, so you are not looking for a simple brute. Arabella is not what you would call refined, but she does like to keep things tidy. She also has a temper and isn’t afraid of going after what she wants. I don’t know whether she would go so far as murder, but a few months ago she and another girl got into a quarrel over a gilded bracelet. The accusations flew back and forth. When the girl wouldn’t relinquish the band, Arabella jumped on her, biting and scratching, and gouged out her eye.” Kate Hamilton looked directly at the

Sergeant. "That is no figure of speech either, Sergeant. The poor girl lost her sight as a result. I had to let her go. She was no good to me anymore, no man wanted to be with her. Good day, Sergeant." And Kate swept from the room.

Sergeant Murdoch was left with the disagreeable image of the lovely Arabella digging a carefully manicured thumb deep into an eye socket of the poor girl who had dared to oppose her desires. On his way out, Murdoch reminded himself to inform Inspector Wise of Sir Gregory's marital dissatisfactions and his fascination with Arabella as well as the courtesan's own ambitions and vicious proclivities. If Kate Hamilton were to be believed, Sir Gregory and his mistress might have had both means and motive to do away with the unsuspecting Lady Fairhaven.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

When Sergeant Murdoch arrived at the Whitechapel station the next morning, he was confronted by an agitated dustman running on about the corpse of a "monster" he had found thrown amidst the garbage outside the London Foundling Hospital, the first establishment of its kind, founded by a former sea captain Thomas Coram, where women could bring their unwanted babies for succor. Murdoch shook his head impatiently. There were corpses all over London, and most of them were fairly monstrous. But to quiet the man, he sent Brown to investigate.

From the size of the covered body, Constable Brown realized that this was the remains of a small child, perhaps no more than a baby. He remembered the other dead infant and wondered what cruel fate kept sending these small gifts his way. But when he

pulled back the tattered blanket, he gave an involuntary gasp. The small body was deformed, with a misshapen, tiny skull, the nose an undifferentiated fleshy mass, the upper lip turned inside-out, the legs emerging at an unnatural angle from the pelvis, the feet warped and twisted. The diminutive hands had no thumbs.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. The dustman also turned pale but attempted to cover his fear with the nonchalance of familiarity.

"I told youse, it ain't somethin' to be seen everyday."

Brown replaced the blanket quickly. When he returned to the station, he made arrangements for the medical examiner to take charge of the body. He also made a full report to Sergeant Murdoch, omitting no details however gruesome; and Murdoch, in turn, passed the report along to Inspector Wise.

"Another abandoned baby, Thomas? Are we perhaps not getting more than our fair share?" inquired the Inspector with a slight feeling of unease.

Murdoch delayed a beat before replying. "Ye know, sir, there are likely a hundred infant murders throughout England every year, half of them in London. Women who need to rid themselves of sickly or illegitimate children, or simply too many mouths, can find one means or another."

"Come now, Thomas, such ideas are greatly exaggerated. At most, if you look at court cases, there are only a little over 2 infanticide cases per year, and less than half of those end in conviction. It is much more likely that the mother of this poor infant simply felt unable to manage and left it by the foundling hospital hoping it could somehow be helped."

“Perhaps, sir,” Murdoch said darkly, “but if a woman really wants to save the life of her bairn, she’ll knock on a door, attract some attention to it, not leave it exposed to the elements. Besides, we need a medical examination to determine cause of death, better yet an autopsy if the coroner thinks it will be paid for. What’s to say the creature wasn’t done away with before it was deposited? Ye and I know that a goodly number of the wee ones makin’ up the infant mortality figures have been helped on their way to the hereafter.”

“Hogwash,” Wise said impatiently. “As for the poor woman not calling attention to the baby, the foundling hospitals turn away far more children than they accept. The two hundred or so infants the London Foundling Hospital may accommodate in a year are a mere drop in the bucket. The mother may have felt that had she stayed to plead her child’s case, she would have worsened its chances of admission.” Thinking of Rachel he said, “It is well nigh inconceivable to me that mothers would deliberately murder their children, no matter how poor or bereft the women might be.”

Murdoch shook his head. “Respectfully, sir, I’m thinkin’ ye know verra little about the ways of women. What happens at the Old Bailey is nae the whole story. If a lass donna wish the child when it’s in the womb, she finds some juniper oil or those little lead pills to help nature along. And if it’s let go till too late, why there’s always the pillow or the cold night air. Ah sir,” he admonished, “you’ve lived a long time to be such an innocent. Who could want a child such as this one?” he asked rhetorically. Then, as the image of the Inspector’s little Emily leaped into his mind, he stopped hastily, realizing his blunder. The Inspector’s mind, however, seemed elsewhere.

“What were the results of the inquest on that other baby?”



“Ach, ye know sir, the favorite noncommittal verdict, ‘Found dead and exposed.’. The medical examination did determine that the child had drawn breath, had been a live birth.”

“Have you discovered anything about its origins?”

“Not yet, sir. It seems to have come from nowhere. But there was one peculiar thing.” Murdoch had delayed giving the Inspector this next piece of information. “Ye remember ye asked me if the bairn looked unnatural? Well, you were right, sir. It was a Mongoloid, according to the doctor that performed the autopsy.”

There was a long moment of silence. Inspector Wise pushed back from his desk, and went to stand by the window, his refuge when the office seemed too small. But he only said, “Keep making inquiries, Thomas. And about this latest infant as well. Send Constable Brown into St. Giles, Whitechapel, any other likely areas to ask a few more questions. Better yet, you go with him. He isn’t properly seasoned yet, and he might not get out alive. He seems to have more enthusiasm than common sense.”

Murdoch grunted his assent. He felt a rough affection for William Benjamin Brown. To his mind, the lad was keen enough. Reminded him of himself at that age a bit.

“Verra well, sir. I’ll do my best.” Then, wanting to move past this awkward subject, Murdoch added, “By the way, Inspector, there looks to be a crack in the Worthington bank robbery case.”

Wise turned back from the window. “What has developed?”

“Sutton turned informer. They’ve rounded up four others he named. They’re bound to swing.”

“Yes, of course,” Inspector Wise said reflectively. “The caretaker was murdered,” and he thought for a minute about the justice and the vengeance involved in hanging one’s fellow man.

Murdoch returned to the outer office, apparently deciding that working on a few of the interminable incident reports piled on his desk was in order, although having received a somewhat rudimentary education, writing was not his favorite part of the job. The Inspector, however, remained by his window, remembering Margaret Shelley’s shrieking, and the baby “found dead and exposed” who bore more than a passing resemblance to Emily. On an impulse, he prepared a telegram to all divisions regarding the recent appearance of “dropped” infants. What sorts of numbers were being reported? Were the figures higher than usual, especially for babies with some physical deformity? Where were the babies being found? He reread the memo. He had no idea what he was trying to learn, or why he felt apprehensive, but he left the message anyway in the operator’s box for dispatch first thing in the morning.

## CHAPTER FIFTY

It was very late when Simon finally returned home. When he opened the front door, he was greeted only by the sound of silence, the quiet of a busy household that has been put to bed. The Sabbath candles still sputtered on the table. The Inspector breathed a sigh of relief. Tonight, he would not have to contend with his children’s enthusiasms, their quarrels, their need for attention, their need for a mother. Tonight, he could be alone with his loneliness.

After removing his damp greatcoat and hat, he took the bedroom candlestick from the kitchen that Miss Gelbstein always left for him, lit it from the hall light, and mounted the stairs slowly. He felt unaccountably weary, and as he climbed, his thoughts turned to the empty bed awaiting him and memories of Rachel. The Jews of England, along with Jews all over the world, seven weeks ago had completed observance of the Great White Fast on the Day of Atonement. As usual, the Great Synagogue with its massive gilt chandeliers, majestic pillars, and high ornate roof had been filled to overflowing with lavishly dressed women seated in the Ladies Gallery and bearded men wearing top hats and holiday garments, as this religious observance attracted even the laxest of Jews.

Since Rachel's death, Yom Kippur had become a particular trial to Simon Wise. He went to the synagogue, wrapped himself in his *talith*, and muttered the familiar prayers of repentance and imploring forgiveness. But in his heart, he felt that not he, but God, should atone. This was the day when the King of Heaven decided who should live and who should die. Just three years ago this same God must have looked at his beautiful Rachel and claimed her as His own, refused to inscribe her in the Book of Life. Then, not satisfied, He had taken little Leah too. Of course, Simon knew that on this day, atonement was intended to occur not only between God and man, but between man and man. But his heart was stone. He could not ask forgiveness of any man, or grant forgiveness either. He was waiting, as he had waited every year, for a sign that God apologized to him. "I'm sorry," he imagined God saying, "I am sorry I took your child. I am sorry I took your Rachel." But this year, as always, God was silent.

Rachel had been buried in a plain deal coffin. He had clipped a lock of her hair for every child and put strands of theirs next to her. The horses of her hearse wore no

plumes, in accordance with Jewish law. She had been buried in a simple ceremony in the Ashkenazi cemetery in Alderney Road. And that was it. She was gone.

Simon thought of the ridicule to which Queen Victoria had been subjected after the death of the Prince Consort, her people after a time finding her mourning rituals excessive - and expensive. Sorrow was understandable, but this perpetual indulgence of her emotions was undignified, even foreign. As Henry Ponsonby had complained, "We are all of us prisoners of the Queen's grief." Rumor had it that even five and six years after his death, on his side of their bed, she kept a picture of Albert; and that she sometimes slept with his nightclothes in her arms. Perhaps bizarre, but had he not done the same with Rachel's dressing gown? He clung to that remnant, a piece of cloth. It was all he, and his Queen, had left of their love.

It had taken a flesh and blood man, the wild Highlander John Brown, to rouse the Queen from her somnolent misery. Perhaps alone among her subjects, Simon did not begrudge her the simple warmth of human companionship, the knowledge that there still existed one person in the world who cared about her happiness and had sworn to protect her. The anxious jokes about "Mrs. Brown," the bawdy rhymes of the patterers and the satirical *Punch* cartoons criticizing the Queen as love-sick had not bothered him. Instead, he envied his monarch, and wondered whether one day the fire of his anguish could be banked in the affection of another human being. It seemed unlikely.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

The St. Giles rookery, or the Holy Land as it was derisively called by its inhabitants, was a notorious slum of ninety-five small houses, with almost three thousand people packed into them. Like now, they were often flooded by sewage. Constable Brown knew that the Third Public Health Act had been passed by Parliament this year to clean up the streets, put a stop to infectious diseases and maintain the water and sewage systems. Looking about at the effluvia spreading over the cobbled roadway on all sides, the most he could hope for was that the law had not been implemented yet. In the narrow lanes the inevitable children swarmed, often squatting in the clogged gutters to relieve themselves.

Even before Constable Brown and Sergeant Murdoch turned the corner, they could hear the rowdy crowd. The constable stared with disgust at the public house down the street, where dockers and riverside workers were exiting and entering (more the latter than the former activity). Disheveled women, some with infants at their breasts and children clinging to their skirts, clustered about, pounding on the doors, shouting and berating those inside. Drunken jeers came from the pub in retort, and occasionally the dregs of a mug of beer and rotten refuse were hurled through the open window.

“It’s disgraceful!” Constable Brown could not refrain from remarking. “The poor have no sense of restraint. How can they create such a spectacle, and in front of children too? Why, those children should be in bed!”

Sergeant Murdoch opened his mouth, then set his teeth, and was silent for a moment. “Ah, laddie, you’re fresh yet to the ways of London. Too much of the country still in ye.” He shook his head. “And do ye think that if those bairns were at haim, such as it be, that they’d be able to sleep for lack of food in their wee bellies? It’s on account

of the bairns that their mothers are there, causin' this commotion." Constable Brown looked at him blankly.

"Don't ye understand, laddie? It's Saturday night. The dockers must go to the public house to receive their weekly earnin's, else they don't get paid. And it should come as no great shock to ye that the public house be owned by their employers. Before ye know it, the week's wages have been drunk, and the poor family is no better off than it was. Is it any wonder their wives are frantic, seein' the rent, the next day's dinner poured down their men's throats? Indeed, might not ye be abangin' on those doors yourself, William, if ye found yerself in the same circumstances?"

Constable Brown had the grace to remain silent.

Murdoch carefully approached one of the women, who seemed calmer than the rest, and conversed with her for a few minutes. As both men were out of uniform, their appearance excited no disturbance. William Brown continued to watch the scene, but with greater compassion. Murdoch returned in a few minutes, shaking his head.

"I'm no wiser than I was. I know her to be a local midwife, the fourth one I've talked to, and the fourth who's told me nothing. I can discover nothing about these dropped babies, yet there be their little bodies. It's a mystery, William, is what it is." Whenever Murdoch felt himself baffled by the intricacies of life, he turned to more elemental pursuits such as food, drink, and intimacies with his wife if practical. Now he professed himself hungry and stopped at a street seller's stall to purchase a string of oysters covered with salt, pepper, and vinegar, which he downed whole, one by one, smacking his lips in appreciation.

“Come laddie. We’ve been hard at work all day. Do nae tell me you’re not hungry. I’ll treat.”

Brown quailed watching the raw slimy seafood descend the sergeant’s gullet, then accepted a bowl of Dutch eel soup, which he tried to drink without touching his lips to the rim. Dirty it might be, but it tasted delicious and warmed him considerably.

“You know, sir, maybe we need to look to the workhouses, the lying-in homes for single mothers, like Queen Charlotte’s. Perhaps there we might find out something about the source of these nurslings.” Sergeant Murdoch clapped his protégé on the back in frank admiration.

“Right ye are, laddie. I knew all this time I’ve spent with you was nae wasted. You’ll do me proud yet.”

## CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

On Sundays, because the Wisers did not attend church, Miss Gelbstein had decreed that after chores were completed, the children needed to engage in some useful pursuit. Now she looked at Miriam suspiciously, her nose buried in a book.

“And what might you be reading, miss?”

“It’s Mr. Trollope’s *The Way We Live Now*. It’s very good.” Secreted inside Trollope was the thrilling story *Virtue Tempted* that Martha had obligingly sneaked into the house. Miriam knew that if she were found out, nothing she might say would convince Miss Hannah that this penny dreadful constituted “improving” literature.

“I don’t approve of your reading Mr. Trollope. I consider that he has a very unfavorable view of Jews.”

“I haven’t even paid the slightest attention to what he says about the Jews,” Miriam protested, thinking to herself that since she hadn’t read the book, she had at least avoided being contaminated by his hostile perceptions.

“Nevertheless, he is suspicious of us, so I am suspicious of him,” replied Miss Gelbstein with inarguable logic. “Too often he portrays Jewish characters as rapacious financial speculators whose commercialism has corrupted English culture, or as transgressors and conjurers who continually violate their proper place in society.”

“But *Nina Balatka* is so romantic.” Miriam had not actually read this work either, but since a friend had mentioned it involved a passionate love between a Gentile and a Jew, she hoped this would appease Hannah.

“Trollope is no Romanticist, Miriam, he has too much awareness of the political and social situation for that, but it is still an absurd notion to suggest love conquers all.”

Crestfallen, Miriam put down the novel with a regretful glance, but privately resolved to finish the exciting story hidden within under the safety of a different book cover.

As a general rule, Miss Gelbstein did not interfere excessively with the children’s reading, which was unusually eclectic. Rebecca favored Jane Austen but found the Brontes too passionate and agonized. Miriam was titillated by romantic, melodramatic tales when she could get them. Sarah found fiction tiresome, confining herself to botany texts and books examining the life cycle of insects. At the moment, David was deep into *Robinson Crusoe* while Deborah was enchanted by L.S. Carroll’s *Through the Looking*



*Glass*. She had already bumped her nose trying to “melt” into the full-length mirror in Miriam’s bedroom and been scolded by Miss Gelbstein as a “foolish, fanciful child.”

Hannah tolerated this wide range of reading matter because she felt it did not malign others but she drew the line at popular children’s books intended to teach beneficial moral lessons. Books such as *Jack Saunders: A Tale of Truth* that described children as young as seven or eight committing petty wrong-doings, lying, swearing, or cheating, and suffering terrifying consequences - disease, maiming, torture - she found excessive. Although the young protagonists generally died repentant, with a prayer on their lips, as Miss Gelbstein observed, “Naturally, it is a Christian prayer and in any case, it is too late to do the little ones any good in this life.” She felt strongly that to terrorize a child into good behavior was unnecessary when appeals to their reason could be made.

And appeal to their reason she did. The Wise children almost longed for a case of the pox or a good beating rather than listen as Miss Gelbstein held forth interminably about the ethical inconsistencies of taking the last currant bun. “Such an act violates every principle of consequentialist philosophy. How can eating the bun be reconciled with Mr. Mill’s injunction to uphold the greatest good for the greatest number?” She waited expectantly as each child struggled in vain to apply moral philosophy to justify consumption of the rapidly cooling bread. Only Sarah was able to meet Miss Gelbstein’s ethical standards by regretfully suggesting the fruit-filled roll be divided into seven equal segments. The knowledge that the principles of utilitarianism had been satisfied was small consolation for the minuscule mouthful each child hastily swallowed.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

No matter how the day had gone, Sunday evening was generally a companionable time at the Wise household. Settled in his armchair by a well-stoked fire, Simon would open his *Times* or the latest edition of *Punch*. The children read, played cards or dominoes. On this night, Simon Wise was preoccupied with the Fairhaven case. He kept returning to Lady Fairhaven's respectfully laid-out body and Professor Maximus' comment about her going "underground," until he could no longer concentrate on his reading matter.

"Abba," piped up Sarah, "I want to be a detective." David, sitting at one end of the dining table, laboriously transcribing a series of Hebrew sentences, hooted with laughter.

"Girls can't be detectives!" he shouted.

"Yes, they can," Sarah said stoutly. Then her confidence wavered. "Can't they, Abba?"

Simon raised his head, considering whether Lady Fairhaven had conceivably arranged to meet someone that night and why she had apparently had no premonition of the danger she was in.

"Can't they, Abba?" Sarah persisted worriedly.

Simon deliberated. Why were children so much more complicated than even his worst cases? His instinctive reaction was to agree with his son. A female detective? Absurd. But he realized the room had become unnaturally silent, and that five pairs of eyes – female eyes – were waiting expectantly for his response.

“Ahem,” he cleared his throat. “A woman detective has never existed,” he opined, being rewarded by a complacent grin from David, “but neither is it entirely beyond the realm of possibility,” at which the female members of the family burst into delighted clapping. “In fact, it was a woman, Alice Nelson, who gave the police information about those two felons, Pierce and Agar, who had stolen a consignment of gold coins and ingots worth 12,000 pounds from a train of the South Eastern Railway Company. The Great Train Robbery,” he reminded them, giving the event the stunned respect it deserved even after twenty years. “They were true professionals. If she hadn’t... ah, come forward, they would never have been apprehended.” He neglected to mention that Alice had been the mistress of Robert Agar, the screwsman responsible for obtaining the keys to the supposedly impenetrable Chubb safe, that she had been caught rolling a drunk and tried to buy her way out of jail time with information about the robbery, that Edward Pierce masterminded his own escape, and that the gold bullion was never recovered. On second thought, perhaps he had not chosen the best example of female assistance.

“But she wasn’t a detective,” David noted quickly, and Simon prayed his son would not know that Alice Nelson was a prostitute, while Sarah looked disappointed, and Naomi burst into tears because Emily had grabbed her sister’s braid and given it an inadvertent yank. Deborah, acting in keeping with her biblical namesake, tangled fist from hair, bounced the ever-jolly Emily on her knee and slipped Naomi a sweet.

“Another example closer to our own time is that of the mysterious A.B., whose identity was never discovered, a woman of great skill and cunning who investigated

lying-in hospitals for poor mothers and published a brilliant expose only five years ago that led to a parliamentary inquiry.”

“But she wasn’t a real detective either,” David persisted dogmatically, and Simon was forced to concede that she was not.

“John Stuart Mill wrote that women’s social oppression has prevented anyone from knowing what they might be able to accomplish,” Sarah said, parroting sentiments that would have made Miss Gelbstein proud, had she not been attending her weekly Women’s Literary Circle meeting. “That means that I might be a famous detective, or a great scientist, if only I have the opportunity.”

“It also means you might not,” observed David.

“But that’s true of anyone. I just want the chance to find out.”

“In his *Autobiography*, Mr. Mill credits his wife Harriet with all his greatest ideas,” Rebecca volunteered, looking up for a moment from her game of patty-cake with Emily.

“That’s why his ideas are so preposterous,” said David with satisfaction.

“If being a detective requires intelligence and quickness of mind, then Sarah is well qualified.” Rebecca felt compelled to defend her younger sister. “She knows more Hebrew than you do, David, even though she never had the formal study that you’ve received at *shul*.”

“And she was lucky she didn’t,” muttered David, who still resented the long hours he spent after regular school under the tutelage of cantankerous and heavy-handed rabbis who did not seem to appreciate that this was the modern era and that boys had more to interest them these days than obscure Talmudic debates. Truth be told, David

cared a great deal more about the mysteries of darkest Africa than he did about the *pilpul* of religious scholars. He prayed heart and soul that the source of the Nile would not be discovered until he was old enough to find it himself. If he had to brave hostile Africans, marauding Arabs, and intertribal warfare to do so, so much the better. And if, after a life of daring exploits and adventure, his heart, like Livingston's, was cut out and buried under an mpundu tree, while the rest of his body was returned to England embalmed and wrapped in bark, then buried in Westminster Abbey, he could think of no more fitting conclusion to a life well-lived. He hoped earnestly that, when the time came, the Queen might somehow make an exception for his Jewish origins.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

Through persistent sleuthing, Murdoch finally discovered that Molly Reid, the Fairhaven's dismissed maid, currently resided in Lambeth. Because of the annual tidal overflow of the Thames, itself turned into a greenish black sludge from the quantities of rubbish and offal thrown into the river from nearby slaughterhouses, tanneries, tar works, and sewers, Lambeth was a particularly disease-ridden area. Nevertheless, determined to leave nothing to chance, Sergeant Murdoch made his way through the narrow streets, Constable Brown in tow. Laundry fluttered like sodden angel wings from poles that stretched the short distance from one side of the street to the other, the foul weather making a mockery of their feeble flapping. The winding passages were littered with garbage, horse dung, and rubbish of all sorts, and teemed with what seemed like hundreds of unwashed, skinny children. Their mothers sat on the pavement knitting and chatting,

while men squatted in the road playing cards and marking down their scores with pieces of chalk. Along the exteriors of the houses, Constable Brown noticed a hip level smear extending the length of the street.

“It’s where the men and boys lean when they’re out of work, day after day, smokin’ their tobacco, and wonderin’ how to feed their families,” Sergeant Murdoch explained.

The air was thick and fetid. The boots of the two policemen tapped on the filthy brick of the street. They passed a “penny hang,” where Constable Brown, peeking in, was amazed to see seamen draped across chest-high ropes, hanging like clothes on a line.

“Only costs ‘em a penny, and most of ‘em are drunk anyway,” Murdoch commented.

At last, they reached their destination. An overflowing shared privy stood in the outer court. Constable Brown covered his nose with his handkerchief as he passed. Inside a labyrinth of ramshackle buildings, they eventually found Molly’s tiny cubicle, measuring only about six feet by eight, the walls covered with smoke, the floor black and damp, broken windows stuffed with rags and paper, threadbare coverings of an indeterminant substance dangling from the walls in moldy sags. The front door was warped and hung at a crazy angle that permitted a perpetual draught the run of the house. The front room, which they were told belonged to a family of seven, contained a smoking fireplace, over which a grate had been placed for cooking. In Molly’s small back room was a flock mattress, covered with a mildewed blanket, which even at a distance Constable Brown could see was teeming with bugs, a broken chair, and a damaged chest of drawers, on top of which rested pathetically a faded photograph of a stern, unsmiling

woman seated behind two little girls. The rotting floorboards were covered with three or four mats sewn together to form a makeshift carpet. As there was no place for the policemen to sit down, they stood.

“Are ye Molly Reid?” Sergeant Murdoch asked.

A thin young woman, perhaps in her early twenties, lay amongst the heap of coverings, wearing torn rags that looked stiff as cardboard. Her feverish eyes, red cheeks, and frightening cough all indicated consumption. A strong smell of liquor also rose from the bed, and Sergeant Murdoch noticed an empty bottle pitched on the floor. Nevertheless, the woman quickly roused herself and glared at them hostilely, but said nothing.

“We’re police, miss,” Constable Brown said gently, his heart touched by the terrible squalor of the room and the obvious sickness of its inhabitant.

“D’ you think I care?”

“We only want to ask you a few questions about your former master, Sir Gregory Fairhaven. You’ve heard about his wife?”

“It war murder, warn’t it? It’s all th’ talk, even ‘ere.”

“It was death by the hand of another,” Constable Brown replied circumspectly.

“And I fer one am glad she’s gone!” the girl burst out passionately. “She could’ve saved me, if she wanted, but she couldn’t be bothered and I were turned out. Lost me position, lost me baby, and now I’m about to lose me life.” The pitiful creature began to whimper, hiding her face in the bedclothes.

“There miss,” the Sergeant said. “It might make ye feel better if ye could tell us what happened.”

“I were only one of the ‘ousemaids, but I were makin’ eighteen pounds a year, an’ I ‘ad prospects. I did me job well. There were one wot took up th’ carpets in th’ drawin’ room, an’ th’ sittin’ rooms. I were expected to clean th’ dinin’ room, library an’ smokin’ room, sprinkle dried tea leaves on th’ floor an’ sweep an’ dust. A third girl did th’ schoolroom, th’ entrance hall, all th’ grates an’ coal boxes. Glad that warn’t my job, dirty it was. Then I’d take hot water up to th’ governess an’ th’ children, an’ make up th’ fires upstairs. Later on we’d all work in th’ bedrooms, cleanin’, dustin’, turnin’ mattresses, makin’ beds, changin’ sheets, emptyin’ slop basins.” Molly stopped to catch her gasping breath, but she seemed to find a certain comfort in chronicling the back-breaking drudgery that apparently constituted the best days of her life.

“Then, before luncheon, more hot water goin’ up, then th’ dirty water comin’ down, an’ th’ fires made up again.” Her face had a regretful expression. “I had a fetching little black gown, with a white apron an’ cap that I wore in th’ afternoon when I were asked to help serve tea.” She turned to look at the two policemen. “I worked from six in th’ mornin’ till often eleven at night. But now I see it warn’t a bad life. I had t’ sleep in a little iron bed in th’ attic with th’ two other girls, but at least it were clean. An’ they never skimped on th’ food. We’d have a roast sirloin of beef with broccoli an’ potatoes fer dinner, tea with bread an’ butter an’ cake, an’ supper o’ cold mutton an’ rice pudding. I still remember th’ food, I do.”

Constable Brown thought ruefully that if she saw half that food in a week now she’d be lucky. Sergeant Murdoch only said, “But what happened to make ye so angry with Lady Fairhaven?”



“Mr. Creavey, curse ‘im till he burns in hell, found I were with child. I weren’t showin’ yet, it were still early, I could ‘a stayed on fer three or four more months. But no, he got on his righteous pedestal, and lectured me on th’ sin o’ bein’ a woman. As tho’ it were my choice! Then he pitched me out.” Molly groaned. “I begged her ladyship t’ let me stay, but she were hardhearted. Said it warn’t her decision, an’ that I should come t’ her when th’ baby were due, she’d help me get a place in Mrs. Main’s Refuge fer Deserted Mothers an’ Childrun, th’ one on Coram Street.” Molly refused to look at her interrogators, but a harsh laugh escaped her lips. “O’ course h’it never ‘appened, for by that time I were living in a different world, an altogether diff’rent world.”

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

“What about the father?” asked Sergeant Murdoch.

“I know some o’ th’ other girls thought as ‘ow it might be Sir Gregory were th’ father, but warn’t so. ‘E found ‘is amusements safely elsewhere, is wot I ‘eard. Not that it matters now, but th’ father were th’ footman ‘Enry, wot is called James.”

“And would he not marry ye, lass?” the Sergeant said softly.

“Not ‘im. Once I told ‘im wot was wot, ‘e warshed ‘is ‘ands o’ me that quick. Said I warn’t good enough fer wot ‘e ‘ad in mind fer himself.”

Constable Brown was irate. There were laws against this sort of thing, and he felt it a slur on his own standing as a policeman when they were not enforced. “Why didn’t you prosecute him?” he asked indignantly.

“Me? You’re th’ innocent un then, ain’t youse? Fancy me gettin’ up in front of all those men in open court, an layin’ me claim? I’d like to die o’ th’ shame. Besides, those judges still want, wot do they call it, ‘corroberratin’ evidence,’ an’ ‘ow am I goin’ t’ prove that ‘e done wot ‘e done?” Sergeant Murdoch clucked sympathetically. He knew that, despite recent changes in the bastardy law to make it easier to identify fathers of illegitimate children and hold them financially accountable, most unwed mothers simply ignored the legal proceedings available to them as embarrassing and expensive.

“What happened to you... and the baby?” asked William Brown, fairly certain he did not want to know the answer.

“Wot could happen t’ me? I couldn’t go home to me mum, could I, disgraced an’ all? I took to th’ streets, an’ that warn’t too bad for awhile, only I got beat up a few times, an’ then I got sick. When I started t’ show, no one wanted me.”

“And the baby?” Brown prompted.

Finally, Molly looked at them. “When it were born, it were weak an’ sickly. There were sumpfin’ th’ matter with it.” Her breath caught. “It were a girl too. I left her at th’ church, as the law allows. And I were worried, I wanted to see what ‘appened to her. But when I asked at the church the next day, they said they’d never seen her.” She shook her head. “Who knows wot happened? I’m thinkin’ she died somehow.” Molly caught her breath again, then said defiantly, “Truth be told, I’m that glad she’s gone. She would’ve had a life o’ misery.” Constable Brown stared at his shoes. Illogically, he felt somehow responsible for her misfortunes.

“Where were ye, miss, the night of November 5?” asked Murdoch, more abruptly than he intended.

“Where was I when? ‘Ow should I know? Oh, I see. That were the night her ladyship were murdered.”

“Just answer the question, miss.”

Molly began to laugh, and then to cough. “Oh, I see. I see. It’s too rich! Won’t me mates get a chuckle out o’ this one. You think I did ‘er in?” Molly paused, trying to catch her breath. “You know,” she continued, suddenly reflective, “I might ‘a wanted to. I did blame ‘er fer th’ baby, for I felt if she’d taken more of a personal interest like in me, things might not’ve gone so bad. Wot made it worse was that everyone downstairs knew about ‘er good works, all ‘er comin’s and goin’s t’ benefit unwed mothers an’ orphans an’ whatnot. But when it were right in ‘er own back yard, she couldn’t be bothered.” She laughed again. “If I’d thought on it, I probably would’a gone arter ‘er.” Suddenly she looked sullen and drained. “But I didn’t think on it, an’ I didn’t done it. I hain’t been out o’ this bed fer th’ past month, an’ I probably won’t be gettin’ out o’ it again neither.” She held out an emaciated arm. “Do I look like I could travel across th’ City, burst into th’ mansion, an’ do a strong woman like Lady Fairhaven to death? Would that I could.”

Murdoch and Brown exchanged glances. It did not seem likely. Yet here was someone who scorned Lady Fairhaven’s pretensions to good deeds and expressed open enmity for the woman.

“Do you live alone then?” asked Murdoch.

“Not likely,” Molly scoffed. “This ‘ere’s the home o’ Mrs. Nichols, ‘oo were a friend of me mother’s, an’ Mr. Nichols, wot works on th’ docks when ‘e can, an’ a whole passle o’ little Nichols, wot is prob’ly out on th’ street, sellin’ matches, lookin’ fer

discards, and wotnot. I b'lieve the missus is at the standpipe, gettin' 'er twenty minutes worth o' water for th' day.

“The Nichols rent out this room t' help make ends meet. There be six other people in this space besides meself, and they hain't all gels neither. I paid 'em rent square, 'til I got sick. When I were on the streets, I were makin' a good living, but I'm not good fer much anymore. Sometimes, when I 'as th' strength, I scavenged by th' river at low tide. If I were lucky, I'd find a bit a' coal or copper nail, somethin' to sell for a haepenny t' a rag an' bone man. And that were me next meal. Now I 'ave t' count on their charity.” She added grudgingly, “They're decent folk. They ain't pitched me out yet. But I'm afeared I'll die at th' Field Lane Refuge.” Both Murdoch and Brown were all too familiar with the notorious London poorhouse and could not blame the poor girl for not wishing to spend her last days amidst its dreary institutional walls.

But Murdoch only said, “Then would any of these individuals be able to verify your whereabouts on the night in question?”

“They... come again? Oh, right enough, they'll tell you I were 'ere, I'd swear at least some of 'em was millin' about that night, although th' mister do occasionally give way to drink down at th' corner pub, an' then 'is missus must be goin' to fetch 'im, moanin' an' groanin' about th' money 'e's wasted. But 'oo can blame 'im? When 'e cain't find work as a lumper or a ballast-heaver, th' poor man must be inside th' 'uge wheels wot move the dock cranes, six t' eight men inside each wheel, walkin' like convicts on a treadmill. It h'ain't much of a life, an' 'oo's to criticize if a swaller o' gin makes it a bit more toler'ble. Besides, why should I complain, when 'e gen'rally brings me somethin' to wet me throat, a pint o' ale, or a glass o' purl,” she said, referring to the

sweetish mixture of hot beer laced with gin and spiced with ginger that was a popular winter drink. Molly shot Murdoch a crafty look. “You look like a drinkin’ man, if I ain’t mistook. Wouldn’t ‘appen to ‘ave a drop on you, would youse, now that I’ve cooperated wit’ th’ law?”

Murdoch shook his head, more in sorrow than annoyance. “Nae, lassie, ye know we cain’t drink on duty. Besides, the demon is no good to you in your condition. It can only make things worse.”

Disappointed that no draught was forthcoming, Molly scowled at the Sergeant. “Worse? Wot do you know about worse?” She turned away toward the wall. “Now arrest me, if you want, or leave me alone. It’s all th’ same to me.”

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SIX

That afternoon, in a rare moment of solitude, Inspector Wise put his feet up on his desk and examined the weekly crime sheet. Two bargemen licensed by the Watermen’s Company had been caught stealing wheat. The Inspector was exasperated. He knew that, even if they were convicted and sent to prison, once released they would probably quickly be rehired. There was much concern about the shabby standards applied to the licensing of bargemen, but little was done to remedy the situation. He reflected thankfully that, with the exception of this small annoyance, all was quiet in the station house, in a manner of speaking. True, he had not yet solved the murder of a high-ranking society lady, dead babies were cropping up from nowhere, the souring rural economy had produced an influx of petty street criminals, public drunkenness among the lower classes

was still rampant. On the other hand, he also knew the statistics showed a marked decrease in juvenile crime and a continuing trend toward less violence in crimes, with thieves and robbers relying more on skill than brute force to accomplish their ends. For now, the fabric of society appeared to be holding, however unsteadily, which was important to the Inspector.

Wise held the view that man had the will to choose good over evil, that self-sacrifice and moral rectitude were the pillars of true manliness, that right was right and wrong was wrong, and that the greatest source of happiness was to do good. But recently he had begun to question whether in fact, for all his efforts at selflessness and scrupulous righteousness, he had been able to do good. The more he saw of crime, the less easy it was for him to apportion blame. Was there a criminal class, or were there only desperate souls who had grown up with every disadvantage, and now faced unremitting poverty, starvation, and disease? Did the crimes of the wealthy, the nobility, really receive the same justice as those of the poor? He no longer knew.

Sometimes he reflected on the famous magistrate of the Bow Street Court, John the Beak, who over a hundred years ago was responsible for forming the first detectives, precursors of the modern police force. The Bow Street Runners, as they came to be known, kept a rough sort of justice, although in later years scandal and corruption compromised their reputation. What gave sightless John Fielding his vision of justice? How had he dared, old and blind as he was, to walk among the crime-ridden streets of London? How had he been able to trust in his ability to discriminate the truth and enforce the law without misgiving? It was said that his hearing was so acute that he could recognize three thousand thieves by their voices alone.

Even when his own home had been virtually demolished during the Gordon Riots, in which anti-popery sentiment became an excuse for widespread looting, burning, and drunkenness, Fielding had not swerved in his dedication to reestablish the rule of law. There was tremendous property destruction, eventually two hundred and eighty-five rioters were shot by troops, and probably in all over eight hundred persons lost their lives. The authorities were indecisive and afraid to act. Fielding was among a handful of magistrates who attempted to restore order by making arrests in the crowd. Inspector Wise envied the long-dead magistrate both his courage and his certainty.

Several years back, Inspector Wise had seen a painting by John Martin, “The Fall of Babylon.” Something had both attracted and horrified him about the depiction of that doomed city, the writhing figures, the apocalyptic fire, the massive towers, all about to be consumed in a great fireball. Was that really London, and he simply did not see it? Most of the time his life felt much more mundane. Occasionally, the sense of the prosaic gave way to a barely concealed terror, how he imagined John Fielding must have felt during the Riots.

Such an occasion of terror for Wise had occurred nine years ago, during the time of the Reform League agitations in Hyde Park, followed the next year by the horrific Fenian bombing of Clerkenwell Prison. It had been a painful period of economic depression, bank collapses including the esteemed house of Overend and Gurney, soaring food prices, a cholera epidemic, bad harvests, bread riots in the East End, and the collapse of the Thames shipping industry. The Leaguers had taken advantage of the general unrest to organize a massive demonstration fifteen thousand strong in favor of the secret ballot and extending the franchise, marching with bands to Hyde Park, only to find

the Park barricaded against entry by the order of Lord Derby. However, the people, as it turned out, would not be denied their royal park. Wise, a sergeant at the time, remembered the railings coming down, the police helpless against the sheer press of humanity, he vainly trying to rally his men, their futile rushing like blue thumbs in a dike from one point to another as more and more bodies pressed against the park's iron fencing until it simply collapsed.

Later, the crowd would be described as “disorderly, though good humored,” but at the time, to Wise at any rate, it felt as if the entire civilized world were spinning out of control. Commissioner Mayne, then almost seventy, had ordered in the troops, soldiers from the Magazine barracks as well as five companies of reinforcements. It was the first time such a call for help had been issued since the formation of the Metropolitan Police in 1829. Wise remembered soldiers with fixed bayonets driving back the crowd who, well-disposed toward the army, perversely cheered them even as they retreated, and Mayne riding through the park on horseback, bleeding from the side of the head where he'd been struck by a stone, arguing with a woman who had had the poor judgment to choose that day to bring her baby to the Park.

The fallout of Bloody Sunday, as it came to be known, was disastrous. The police appeared impotent in the face of a crowd that could easily have become a mob, and then perhaps a revolution. Walpole had resigned, while the *Saturday Review* sanctimoniously opined that “...a country which cannot control the fermenting scum of its city arabs, what power can it have in the councils of Europe, or the politics of the world?”

While some regarded this statement as political hyperbole, privately Simon Wise had agreed. Watching the park railings cave in, he feared that the orderliness and civility



of his world were succumbing to random, overwhelming chaos. Aside from the societal ramifications, twenty-eight officers suffered injuries so severe that they were left permanently disabled. One of these was Inspector Matthew Turner, Wise's mentor, who had to resign from the Force.

It was an experience that Wise hoped would never be repeated. Yet a scant few months later, botched handling of intelligence from Dublin Castle had enabled Michael Barrett and his fellow Fenian terrorists to blow down sixty yards of wall at the Clerkenwell House of Detention aiming to free Richard O'Sullivan Burke, who had earlier organized the successful escape of his fellow Fenians Kelly and Deasy in Manchester and subsequently had been arrested as an arms dealer. The escape attempt failed because Burke had been moved to a different prison. But twelve persons died in that bombing and a hundred twenty more were maimed. Barrett was apprehended and eventually won the dubious distinction of being the last man executed in England at a public hanging, where the atmosphere was so intense that nineteen spectators were suffocated or trampled to death in the crowd.

The outcry against the police was enormous, and England was gripped by a state of panic close to paranoia. The Queen called for suspension of habeus corpus, and fears that the railroads would be bombed and telegraph wires cut by Fenian conspirators spread like wildfire. All suspicious packages were to be taken "as quietly as possible" to local police stations to be disarmed, and special chemical lights were installed on the Big Ben Tower, Buckingham Palace, and the Nelson monument in case the gas supply was disrupted.

In the end, no mass Fenian attack occurred, the Fenians themselves being hopelessly disorganized, factionalized, and penniless, while Mayne obliged his critics by dying soon after. Wise, who had little direct involvement with the handling of the Clerkenwell bombing, but who had stumbled across disquieting information regarding the event that, because of its political sensitivity, had been repressed, even benefited in terms of his personal career.

Mayne had been a remote and dictatorial leader who, despite his great personal integrity and loyalty to the Force, inspired fear rather than devotion from his officers. Although Simon Wise served under Mayne more than ten years, he had never known him to be anything other than stiff and formal in their rare interactions. For his part, Wise complained more than once about the Commissioner's fondness for picayune rules. For example, a few years after Wise joined the Force, Mayne issued a regulation that forbade constables from carrying umbrellas. A similarly absurd decree enjoined patrolmen to restrain children from bowling hoops in public places and outlawed the throwing of snowballs in public parks.

Wise, along with many policemen, as well as the *Punch* cartoonists, regularly made fun of these ludicrous and unnecessary laws. But he also suspected that Mayne, a traditionalist to the core, could not reconcile the thought of a Jewish policeman with his cherished image of the Metropolitan Police as a body of former laborers from the country, stalwart but not overly quick, who could be molded at will. At any rate, soon after the appointment of Mayne's successor, the current Commissioner Sir Edmund Henderson, Wise received what many who knew him considered a long overdue promotion to inspector.

It was months before Simon Wise could enjoy his well-deserved good fortune. After Clerkenwell, he began to have nightmares again about the Crimea. The bodies he helped clear outside the Clerkenwell wall mingled in his imagination with those of fallen comrades at Sevastopol. He recognized the frozen looks of horror, the incredulity, a hand arrested in motion, lives forever interrupted. The incidents in Hyde Park, and the brutal deaths at Clerkenwell, like his Crimean experience, reminded him of the thin veneer protecting civilization from the barbarians. Sometimes he felt guilty about the promotion, just as he had felt guilty about surviving the war. But eventually he learned to sleep calmly, and for a time life made sense again. Even the deaths of his wife and daughter, which cast him into such despair, seemed curses of an individual nature. He had lost control of his private universe, perhaps forever, but England still stood. That had to count for something.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-SEVEN

Miriam was hard at work on a new dress, which she was sewing from a cutout paper pattern she had found in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*. As a special indulgence for his most lovely daughter, Simon had recently bought Miriam her own Singer sewing machine, which she quickly learned to employ with great dexterity. Now, she contemplated the sleek lines of the costume with satisfaction.

“I am thankful crinolines have gone out of style. I could barely have maneuvered in those horrid old birdcages,” she enthused to her less than attentive audience. “It has a

perfectly adorable skirt, narrower and shorter in the front than the fashions of a year ago, and even a little train.”

“Choo-choo,” said David archly, mocking his older sister.

“David, don’t be ridiculous,” scolded Miss Gelbstein.

“Crinolines are anti-feminist,” Sarah said, looking about for Miss Gelbstein’s approval, who nodded and contributed in a didactic tone, “Even the simplest acts were made nearly impossible by the crinoline. Stepping into or out of a carriage was a challenging feat of maneuvering. Merely lying down or playing with one’s children required ingenious stratagems. Why, women even burned to death trapped inside their highly flammable crinolines.”

“Were they prisons, with real iron bars?” asked Deborah excitedly.

“Of course they weren’t prisons, Deborah,” Miriam explained. “Besides, they were made out of steel, not iron. But look, Becca, these styles are so much more flattering. I’m thinking of a light organdy over the silk. Wouldn’t that be divine for next summer?”

Rebecca smiled indulgently. It wasn’t Miriam’s fault that she was so pretty, but she knew her sister was more intelligent than she pretended. She wished there were not the ridiculous societal expectation that the ideal woman should have nothing in her head but marriage, children, gossip, and fashion. There were more serious things to be concerned about, homeless children, unwed mothers, rampant illness among the poor. She wanted to do good. Although sometimes she worried that, like Dorothea Brookes in *Middlemarch*, her good intentions were horribly naïve. At least she felt confident she could do good for Emily. That would be a start.

“Organdy is lovely, Miriam. Just the thought of it makes this rain easier to bear.”

At that moment, the family heard Simon leaving his overcoat and umbrella in the hallway. The children, excited by this unexpected early arrival home, jumped to their feet, shouting “Abba, Abba!” He smiled at them indulgently, hugging Naomi as she leaped into his arms, tousling David’s head, and beaming at his other daughters. When everyone had taken a seat again, Simon glanced at Miss Gelbstein and cleared his throat.

“I’ve come to a decision, children. We will be having a small dinner party this coming Sunday.”

A dinner party at the Wises was something of a rarity. Since Rachel’s death, the family kept much to itself. Therefore, Simon’s announcement that they would be entertaining that Sunday night brought giggles and questions from the children, gasps and exclamations from Martha and Hannah.

“Why, Abba? Why are we having a party? Is it my birthday?” Naomi asked.

“Of course it’s not your birthday, you silly goose,” Miss Gelbstein intervened.

“Why shouldn’t we have a party, I’d like to know. It’s a perfectly ordinary thing.”

Nevertheless, she was quite anxious. As for Martha, lighting the parafin lamps, she was in despair.

“How can we get the house ready? I don’t even remember where I’ve stored the good china.”

“Ladies, please,” said Simon. “We are not contemplating a presentation at St. James Court. It’s only to be Dr. Baumgarten and his wife, Inspector and Mrs. Turner.” Inspector Matthew Turner, badly maimed and partially blinded during the Clerkenwell bombing seven years ago, had been compelled to leave the force, his dreams of becoming

a superintendent forever quashed. Simon still turned to him for guidance, however, and missed no opportunity to include him in the family's infrequent social gatherings. "And our new acquaintance, Dr. Talbot." Despite herself, Rebecca's heart thumped when she heard this name. Each of his visits had brought with it much merriment to the younger children and agreeable small talk with Hannah, Miriam and herself. She could not have explained her delight at seeing him again.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-EIGHT

If the St. Giles workhouse was not something directly out of *Oliver Twist*, Constable Brown reflected, it came fairly close. He could see why people chose to beg in the streets and sometimes freeze to death rather than go on the parish. The dull brick structure exuded a kind of authoritative coldness that underscored the late November gloom.

Brown and Sergeant Murdoch had already visited the two metropolitan lying-in hospitals that accepted unmarried women, Queen Charlotte's and the General Lying-In Asylum, as well as Daniel Cooper's Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children, probing for traces of convenient deaths of infants born to single mothers. Their receptions had not been friendly for, although surveillance had produced no prosecutable evidence, the police were known to suspect that abortions were commonly practiced in these lying-in homes. The two officers had learned little from uncommunicative and hostile workers.

The administrator of the workhouse, Mr. Dawson, was a fat, greasy-looking man of less than average height. He nodded curtly when the officers introduced themselves.

“We run a clean establishment here,” he said. “We can give a full accounting of the expenditure of funds.”

“There’ve been no complaints on that score,” Sergeant Murdoch said reassuringly, and a servile grin spread across the man’s features. Constable Brown noticed he was gap-toothed.

“Then perhaps the officers would appreciate a tour of the workhouse,” Mr. Dawson offered with more confidence. When Sergeant Murdoch nodded assent, he led the way, bouncing a little on the balls of his feet as though seeking to invigorate with his enthusiasm the pervasive despondency of their surroundings. As they walked through the building, Constable Brown noticed Biblical quotations engraved into the walls: “The poor ye shall always have with you,” “He who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal,” “Laziness casts into a deep sleep, And an idle man will suffer hunger” and “The way of the sluggard is as a hedge of thorns.” Rows of drably dressed women sat picking oakum apart, their faces thin, gray and hopeless. William Brown knew that one of the most hated policies of indoor relief was the mandatory separation of families, husbands from wives, children from mothers.

“Useful work for idle fingers,” Mr. Dawson commented with satisfaction.

“I wonder how useful all that oakum picking really is, now that it’s no longer used in shipbuildin’,” Sergeant Murdoch said innocently.

Mr. Dawson was undeterred. “It is the principle of the thing, Sergeant. We are teaching these idlers the inherent nobility of work.” Murdoch said nothing, but to the Constable’s observant eyes, he looked exceptionally skeptical.

Next came the sleeping quarters, a barracks-like chamber with stacks of bunkbeds that reminded Constable Brown of coffins. The space was completely impersonal, each bed identical, no distinctive knickknacks of any kind disturbing the repetitive monotony.

“When they enter the poorhouse, they must relinquish their personal belongings. They must also dress in the simple but serviceable clothes we provide and eat their plain but restorative meals at the established times. Our purpose is to sever them from their debauched, idle lives and acquaint them with order, regularity, and hard work.”

Most of the beds were empty, but every so often Brown became aware of a slight form, lying motionless under its thin covering. Mr. Dawson noticed the direction of his gaze.

“We aren’t ogres, you see, Constable. When they are too sick to work, we allow them a half-day of rest.”

“It’s curious more of them don’t take advantage of such a policy.”

“Well, naturally, if they don’t work, they can’t eat. Separates the malingerers from...”

“The dying,” Sergeant Murdoch suggested brusquely.

“The indisposed,” Mr. Dawson finished suavely.

But Sergeant Murdoch had had enough. “We’re here for information, Mr. Dawson.”

“We always stand ready to be of assistance to the forces of law and order.”

Constable Brown looked about, to see if someone else had accompanied them, thus justifying the man’s persistent use of the plural pronoun, but he could see only Mr. Dawson.



“Then we understand each other. We want to know what happens to the infants of women who have fallen and must deliver their babies here.”

“Such an unfortunate situation. A symptom of the decline and ruination of society.”

“We are not interested in your opinion of the matter. What happens to the infants?” Murdoch repeated.

Mr. Dawson coughed discreetly into his hand. “Naturally, we permit mothers to nurse newborns for a brief period, but it is of the utmost importance that the children be separated from the pernicious influence of these women. The mothers are required to find dry nurses for the infants as quickly as possible.”

“And of those infants who are placed with dry nurses, how many do ye suppose survive?” Sergeant Murdoch looked hard at the administrator, who had stopped smiling.

“It’s difficult to say,” Mr. Dawson replied. “We don’t keep statistics.”

“But some do. It’s less than ten percent, Mr. Dawson.”

Mr. Dawson looked pained. “Tragic,” he pronounced succinctly. “But the little ones, however innocent, are not our main concern. Rather, our charge is the rehabilitation, such as it may be, of those who, in Henry Mayhew’s immortal words, ‘will not work.’”

Sergeant Murdoch suppressed a grimace. He suspected that Mr. Dawson spent very little time worrying about the restoration to productive well-being of any of the poor unfortunates under his supervision.

“Have ye heard anythin’ about someone who might be willin’ to help these poor wee innocents to an untimely end? Maybe an unscrupulous midwife or dry nurse?”

“Naturally, we are not unaware that such things sometimes occur. Disgraceful, of course. But I am certain that none of our women would consider such an alternative.”

“And how can ye be so sartain, Mr. Dawson?”

“As I mentioned, we are unable to aid women in actually finding dry nurses for their offspring. Haven’t the resources, you see. But we provide our unwed mothers with strict guidelines. We warn them to guard against women who are not good Christians, who take in more than one nurse-baby at a time, who have succumbed to the evil of drink, that sort of thing.” Privately, Murdoch thought this list probably described most of the available dry nurses in London.

“I see. So ye feel confident that these guidelines prevent any of your women from strayin’ from the straight and narrow?”

“Without a doubt.”

However, when Mr. Dawson stepped into his office, searching for workhouse birth statistics over the past year that would demonstrate to the officers how this particular social problem was overwhelming his meager resources, a shadowy figure slipped from a corner and tugged at Murdoch’s sleeve.

“If you please, sir, I couldn’t ‘elp overhearin’ your questions to Mister Dawson.”

An emaciated woman with intense black eyes stared at the Sergeant insistently.

Constable Brown thought she looked slightly crazed. “E’s wrong, you know. Plenty o’ th’ girls ‘ere is lookin’ for ways t’ loose their babies. I were in th’ same situation myself, not too long ago. But my little un died on its own, afore I had t’ worrit wot were t’ become of it.”

“Do ye know of anyone who might be willin’ to accommodate such mothers?”  
Murdoch asked the woman, gently removing her hand from his arm.

“I don’t know fer sure, but I’ve ‘eard stories of a midwife ‘oo is bent that way. Don’t know ‘ow you kin find ‘er, but she be out there.”

“Thank you, my good woman,” Sergeant Murdoch said courteously. Constable Brown thought it likely the woman was confabulating, merely to get attention. They were about to move away when she tugged on Murdoch’s sleeve again.

“Ain’t there nothin’ youse can do about Mr. Dawson?” she asked piteously.

“What do you mean, woman?”

The woman picked at her hair, then looked at the floor. “He makes us lie with ‘im fer an extra piece o’ bread, or a potater. Only th’ potater’s moldy, often as not. It hain’t right, I know it, but wot can we do? If we refuse, ‘e beats us.”

Mr. Dawson chose this moment to come scurrying up to the policemen, and his displeasure was evident.

“Get away from the officers, you foolish woman,” he said. His hand began to lift in an unconscious gesture but, recollecting himself, he raised only his voice. “Get away, I said.” He smiled obsequiously at Sergeant Murdoch. “That one is quite mad, you know. We are looking to find her a place in Bedlam.” Constable Brown thought this explanation entirely plausible, but Sergeant Murdoch stared at Dawson with distaste, and said, “I think we will be having another chat, Mr. Dawson. In fact, I would say ye can be confident of it. And until that time, I strongly advise ye to give your greatest possible attention to the health and well-being of your patrons here. If anythin’ were to happen to anyone, say for example this miss here, I would be holdin’ ye directly accountable.”

When they left, Mr. Dawson remained standing on the workhouse steps, running his fingers abstractedly through his greasy hair.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-NINE

“Let us get some air, Murdoch, shall we?” Inspector was had just learned of a third dead infant prominently posed by Traitor’s Gate. The body had been partially decomposed and gnawed, probably by rats. The medical examiner estimated that the child was only a few weeks old, and had only partial limb development, its tiny, fused fingers extruding like pincers, and stumps of legs resembling lobster claws. Given the condition of the body the examiner could not commit himself fully as to whether the child had died of its deformities or had been smothered.

The two men walked in silence for a few minutes, the need for conversation partially obviated by the pounding of horses’ hooves on the granite paving, the shouts, and not infrequent curses, of cabbies, the cries of newsboys, costers hawking their delicacies.

“Shall we duck in here? We could do with a bite.” Wise hastily indicated the entrance to the Ten Bells. It had begun to rain, and Inspector Wise realized he had forgotten his umbrella at the station.

Inside the familiar pub, Wise settled into a seat, grateful for the noise, the laughter, the primitive, animal spirit that motivated eating and drinking, urging the species toward survival. Something of that same spirit must have animated those dead infants as well, he reflected, however briefly their flame had flickered.

“Now Murdoch, indulge me for a moment,” Inspector Wise began. If he were honest with himself, he had to admit that he was bothered less by the deaths of this deformed creatures in and of themselves, and more by a feeling of disorientation, the sense that the deaths did not make sense, did not fit the usual pattern of dead babies. “Unfortunately, dead babies are nothing new, London has plenty of them, more’s the pity. The statistics on infant mortality are appalling, as Dr. Baumgarten often reminds me. We probably don’t even find out about a good many of the infant deaths that occur, especially in the poorer areas where it is often difficult to find a doctor to certify, and therefore register, the death, and where one’s very survival often depends on a policy of non-interference with the habits of one’s neighbors. But I am troubled by the placement of the babies. If the mothers are seeking assistance for a still living child, then to leave them exposed in this rude weather seems irresponsible indeed. If, on the other hand, the mothers are attempting to rid themselves of an already-deceased child, then surely they would choose less obvious places for concealment.”

“I don’t know what to make of it, to be honest, sir.” Murdoch paused to take a great bite of bread, beef and cheese, and washed it down with a generous portion of cider. It was clear he was not about to let a handful of dead infants spoil his midday meal. “As ye say, bairns die, especially the poor ones and the sick ones, like these seem to be. They’re buried and, like as not, before the one’s fair in the ground, the poor woman has another on the way to worry about. Sometimes there’s been foul play, this is true. Too many mouths to feed, no food anyway, a squaller that can’t be kept quiet, a mother goes mad after the birth, whatever it may be, and the next thing ye know the poor thing’s shook too hard, or a cloth gets stuffed in its mouth. Occasionally we hear complaints,

and then we investigate, but usually we're none the wiser. But why leave the body exposed where it is likely to be found, I can't grasp it, sir." Murdoch paused to take another bite of his savory meat pudding.

"I suppose, sir, it is possible that unwed mothers are becomin' more sophisticated regarding the niceties of the law. According to the Offense Against the Person Act, a woman may only be charged with the crime of concealment if she has placed the infant in a location where it is unlikely to be discovered - a water closet, a dresser drawer, an obscure alley. If the child is placed where it might reasonably be found, then there canna be a concealment charge."

The Inspector looked unconvinced.

"Have we gotten the findings of the coroner's jury on that last child?"

"It was a pub jury," Sergeant Murdoch said disgustedly, referring to the fact that, while unusual, it was still legal to hold inquests in a public tavern, a venue that often influenced in a negative direction the solemnity of the proceedings. "If ye want my opinion, sir, I think they decided they needed to fortify themselves in anticipation of viewin' the wee corpse. Their verdict, if ye can call it such, was 'Visitation by God.' In other words, they didn't know what to make of the bairn's demise. Lankester would never have let them get away with such a ridiculous conclusion." Inspector Wise nodded in agreement. Dr. Edwin Lankester, appointed coroner of the Central Middlesex district in 1861, had been an eminent biologist and botanist known as the nation's conscience on the issue of infanticide. Under his stewardship, inquests on suspicious newborn deaths had increased dramatically. But since his death last year and the consequent removal of

both his attentive oversight and his ties to the press which he never scrupled to invoke, juries throughout London were becoming markedly more indulgent.

“Something else bothers me as well, Murdoch. The two infants we have discovered have all had various kinds of abnormalities. Is this simply coincidence? We know that such children are more likely to be abandoned because of the difficulty in caring for them. But if they were being delivered to married women, then it would not be so easy to dispose of them without husbands, friends, or midwives knowing something about it and coming forward. It seems more likely that these babies are illegitimate, born to mothers who have hidden their condition as best they could, and given birth in secret, or with only the most minimal assistance. “

Murdoch shook his head dubiously. “It seems unlikely to me, sir, that in the span of a little more than two weeks, within the city of London, three such bairns would be born illegitimately, and all deserted by their mothers. So where are they comin’ from, these little ones, and why are they comin’ to London?”

“I can’t give you an answer to that one yet, Thomas. But I have the feeling that when we find it, we won’t much like it.” The Inspector stood up, frowning. “We need to get back.” Murdoch swallowed the last of his cider standing, then the two men pushed into the weather. It was raining harder, water splashing up from the passing hansoms and carriages, and Inspector Wise once again regretted the absence of his umbrella.

## CHAPTER SIXTY

Even in foul weather, perhaps *especially* so, on Sunday afternoons Miss Gelbstein took pride in leading a family promenade in St. James Park, where all classes mingled to enjoy a breath of air and be seen. Whenever possible, Simon accompanied his family on these afternoon strolls, but today he had begged off, citing a backlog of reports as his excuse. Miss Gelbstein herself had considered canceling the expedition, as she had to prepare for the small dinner party that, quite surprisingly, Simon had organized for this very evening. However, having left the redoubtable Martha moving like a whirlwind in the kitchen, clicking her tongue over the difficulties of getting a good cut of meat, Miss Gelbstein trusted the meal would be not only ready, but impeccably presented and delicious. Although she would never say so to Simon, Hannah Gelbstein was pleased that he seemed to be acknowledging that a world without Rachel could still contain moments of pleasure and enjoyable companionship.

The park seemed somewhat forlorn, the strollers more determined than frolicsome, a lonely hawker half-heartedly peddling roast chestnuts, the bandstand deserted, surrounded only by the phantoms of happy crowds, eating ices and drinking lemonade, listening to ghostly vestiges of the Overture from *William Tell*. Suddenly the children, moving in the habitual straggling chain that Miss Gelbstein, pushing Emily in the perambulator, was perpetually trying to bring into some semblance of order, spotted Dr. Talbot proceeding toward them from the east entrance. They gave gleeful and, in Miss Gelbstein's opinion, perfectly unseemly shouts.

Michael Talbot raised his hat hopefully to Miss Gelbstein, who did not fail to register that the good doctor had stopped by the house three times since his Sabbath dinner with the family – she quickly made the calculation, 16 days ago - ostensibly to



evaluate Emily, but perhaps for other reasons as well. Was it possible Rebecca had charmed him? He must be a decade older than Rebecca if he were a day. Miss Gelbstein vowed to be more scrupulously attentive, if that were possible, in fulfilling her obligations as guardian of the children. Nevertheless, she returned his greeting politely and noted they were anticipating his company that evening. Dr. Talbot nodded in acknowledgment and affirmed his gratification at the invitation.

After this exchange of pleasantries, rather than continuing on his way, the doctor casually joined their party, first chatting with Miss Gelbstein about an open-air suffragist speech he had heard given by the daughter of JS Mill, then inquiring of Rebecca about Emily's most recent cold. After a time, he dropped back to walk with Sarah, who lagged behind the others, inspecting the insect life inhabiting the shrubbery that lined the pathway.

This was one of the things Rebecca liked very much about Dr. Talbot. She sensed he was drawn to her, might even at some point like to court her. But he behaved as a friend of the family, one day bringing an army of iron soldiers representing Wellington at Waterloo to amuse David, another time finding a rare music box for Deborah and bringing sweets for the younger children. She knew he was impressed with Sarah, although she was only fourteen. "She has the mind of a true scientist," he told Rebecca. Rebecca wasn't sure that a girl could have a scientific mind, but she looked the other way when Dr. Talbot brought Sarah a book of anatomy and physiology that was probably not proper for a respectable young lady to read.

"Look over there, Miss Sarah. I believe that is a Coleoptera Cicindelidae, a Tiger beetle, on that shrub. Shall we have a closer look?" Sarah accompanied the doctor

toward the bush, focusing on the purplish-brown beetle that clung to the underside of a thin branch. Her eyes shone. She felt proud and honored to be the recipient of Dr. Talbot's attentions. Although Sarah felt herself capable of great things, in her mid-calf plaid dress with her black boots sticking out, she knew she still looked a child. Dr. Talbot was the only adult she knew who didn't treat her like a little girl, who didn't treat her as a girl at all.

Seemingly in perpetual motion, Dr. Talbot caught up to Rebecca again. Miss Gelbstein shot him a severe glance, as much as to say he would not find the young lady unprotected. The doctor, however, seemed equally pleased to see the chaperone as her charge, and only gave the slightest of smiles when shrill sounds from the trailing goslings forced Miss Gelbstein to investigate Deborah's accusation that Naomi had tied the ends of her braids together.

When Miss Gelbstein reluctantly disappeared, Rebecca felt herself blushing, and pulled her mantle more closely about her. Dr. Talbot had the grace to stare straight ahead but could not prevent himself from humming tunelessly under his breath.

"It is an invigorating day for outdoor exertions," he said at last, although the biting wind and darkening clouds boded poorly for the near future. The hood next to him nodded.

"I am particularly fortunate to come upon you in the park today, as your father has been kind enough to invite me to share a meal with your family this evening as well."

"I am aware," came the muffled reply. "It is true we are entertaining a small company."

“I say fortunate, because this chance encounter allows me the pleasure of seeing you twice in one day,” the doctor continued boldly. The fur-lined edges of the hood quivered, but the girl inside was silent. “Miss Wise, allow me to say that, although I have only known you a brief time, during my visits to look in on Emily I have been uncommonly impressed with our conversations. You are the sort of young woman who can change the way people understand all sorts of issues, including mental defect.”

Encouraged, Rebecca emerged from her hiding-place. “Do you really think so, Dr. Talbot?”

“You are young, idealistic, uncontaminated by the harshness of the world. You are not afraid of new ideas. Witness the initiative you took in learning sign language, and then applying it to Emily’s case. Of course you can accomplish a great deal.”

“You are not so very old yourself,” Rebecca faltered, thinking that it might be perceived as unseemly for her to risk such a personal comment, but wishing to make it quite clear that she saw him as an older... brother, not someone nearly so remote and ancient as her father or Dr. Baumgarten.

“Perhaps not. Sometimes I feel worn down by how little I know and how much I must do.”

“You have no idea how much I admire you,” Rebecca ventured.

“You flatter me, Miss Wise. I am simply a worker bee, as Miss Sarah might label me.”

“Surely not, Dr. Talbot. My father says you are a great scientist and may make important discoveries that will help children like Emily.”

Dr. Talbot was uncharacteristically quiet. They walked on, the doctor striking aimlessly at the bushes bordering the footpath with his umbrella. A few bold drops of rain spattered.

Finally, Rebecca said hesitantly, “That is what I want to do also – help children like Emily, I mean. I am not scientifically inclined, but I have thought that a school of some sort, perhaps teaching sign language...” Her thoughts dried up as she confronted the immensity of her own proposal. But Dr. Talbot seemed to regain his former enthusiasm.

“A school? Of course, it’s just the thing.” He smiled. “You see, your hope revives my hope.” Dr. Talbot opened his umbrella and chivalrously sheltered Rebecca under its broad black shield. Of necessity, they moved closer together. “I wonder if you know these lines of verse? They speak to me most keenly at the moment. ’The face of all the world is changed, I think, Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul...’”

“How beautiful. And how kind. But I don’t recognize it.”

“Elizabeth Barret Browning. Since my discussions with Miss Gelbstein, I am not too proud to quote a female.”

“Do you think that is possible? To hear the footsteps of another’s soul, that is?”

“Not only do I believe it is possible, I believe it is absolutely essential.” The doctor beamed at her playfully, and although the sky was still overcast, Rebecca wondered if the sun were about to burst through the cumulous billows overhead.

Instead, the towering clouds suddenly ruptured, scattering water across the carefully tended grass until it glistened like seaweed. As the rain began to fall in earnest, Miss Gelbstein scurried past, turning her brood homeward.

“Try this one,” Dr. Talbot challenged, grinning despite the wet. “I wield the flail of the lashing hail, And whiten the green plains under...”

“Too easy,” Rebecca said triumphantly. “And then again I dissolve it in rain, And laugh as I pass in thunder.”

## CHAPTER SIXTY-ONE

They returned home wet and happy, excited as sometimes happens by the force of the elements. For Miss Gelbstein, however, the tumult of the storm only contributed to her internal disquiet that she had permitted more than was proper between Rebecca and the persistent Dr. Talbot. She snappishly ordered the children upstairs to change and rest before dinner. Rebecca went upstairs singing a melody Miss Gelbstein had never heard before. When she inquired as to its name, Rebecca only laughed.

The guests arrived damp but agreeable. Dinner progressed smoothly and enjoyably. Rebecca and Miriam, as young ladies, were allowed to join the company, but the younger children had been sent to bed, despite vociferous protestations. Sarah, defiant and determined to be grown up too, waited until the friendly commotion of the meal was well underway, then sneaked onto the upstairs landing to listen to the table talk, her cold feet tucked up under her nightgown.

Under Miss Gelbstein’s stringent guidance, Martha outdid herself, serving first a thick hot soup, followed by salmon, sweetbreads, asparagus, a kosher roast saddle of mutton, and a flavorsome Madeira wine. The month’s budget was spoiled, but the meal was a feast, and their guests clearly impressed, Inspector Turner remarking to his wife

that, confronted with such a repast, he thanked God his sense of taste had not been impaired in the blast.

After a dessert of ices and pineapple cream, the women retired to the small parlor, while the men pulled out tobacco and settled into their chairs, Simon unobtrusively guiding his former mentor. Inspector Turner turned his unseeing face toward his one-time protégé.

“An unsolicited word of advice, Simon. Keep an eye out for Scotland Yard’s detective unit. It’s beginning to emit a noxious odor, and the stink is bound to get worse.” Wise leaned forward with interest, and the two were soon immersed in a discussion of police force politics. Dr. Talbot pulled his medical colleague aside.

“Recently I’ve seen something strange, Dr. Baumgarten, a case on which I was called in to consult. It struck me quite forcibly, and I find my mind returning to it again and again. I presented my findings last week to my colleagues at the Great Ormond Street Hospital. Possibly you might find it of interest as well.”

“By all means, Dr. Talbot.” The family doctor was in a jocular mood. It had been too long since he had seen such convivial contentment in the Wise household, and he was determined to make the most of it.

“I traveled by rail to Leicester this past week. I had been asked to attend a young lad, about fourteen years of age, who was in hospital with tuberculosis of the hip. I was told he was an incurable, living in the Leicester workhouse since age five or six, although his family was not destitute; indeed his father still worked as an engineer.

“When I arrived, I was taken to a private room, quite unusual for a small hospital. There, lying quietly in a bed, was the most lamentably grotesque individual I have ever

had the misfortune to see. The poor creature had an immensely ponderous, misshapen head. From the brow there projected a huge bony mass, while from the back hung a bag of spongy, fungous-looking skin. Another mass of bone projected from the upper jaw, protruding from the mouth like a pink stump, completely inverting the upper lip. Its nose was a mere lump of flesh. The face seemed frozen, incapable of expression. From the back of the head hung sack-like masses of flesh.”

“Some sort of pediculated tumors?” Dr. Baumgarten interrupted

“So I thought. The right arm was of enormous size and shapeless, overgrown with pendent masses; the right hand was almost completely useless, with no distinction between palm and back, the thumb had the appearance of a radish, and the fingers resembled tuberous roots. The feet were massively deformed as well. Only the left arm was naturally shaped, indeed was a surprisingly graceful and aesthetically pleasing limb.”

On the landing, Sarah could only think that the boy was her age exactly. She was not sure why this fact appalled her so. She tried to retain a proper scientific objectivity about the details she was hearing.

“It sounds a most... interesting case.” Dr. Baumgarten was not a squeamish man, having seen more than his share of horrors in thirty years of practice. Still, this story was not the sort of thing he had in mind to complement an evening of hearty food and racy jests.

“Interesting, perhaps. Yes. But the hideousness of this creature’s visage, the overwhelming nature of his deformities, such extreme abnormality lingers in my mind.”

Talbot leaned toward Dr. Baumgarten, who obligingly filled his glass with port.

“I ask myself, what is the point of such a life?”

“Perhaps only to satisfy the curiosity of medical men?” suggested Dr. Baumgarten in a feeble attempt at humor.

Dr. Talbot gave his colleague a displeased look. “Creatures like this boy, albinos, dwarfs, pig-faced women, are anomalies, Elias, have little to teach us. Indeed, they *are* considered monstrosities, and are more likely to be put on exhibit by street showmen, forced to perform for the amusement and ridicule of others, than to advance science. I am beginning to think that their presence serves no useful purpose and is only an example of racial degeneracy.” Dr. Baumgarten seemed taken aback, but Dr. Talbot continued doggedly.

“We men of science think to remedy the disabilities of these pathetic creatures. But what is your honest opinion, Elias? Can science ever find ways to overcome the flaws of their bodies and free their spirits?” In a tone Sarah thought filled with doubt he continued, “Will science one day be able to repair nature’s mistakes? It is a question to which my work is devoted, but I sometimes fear it is almost too much to hope for. Yet, if science cannot save them, they are doomed, by their own incapacity and by the ignorance and cruelty of society, to lives of abject misery.”

“But Michael, consider your own research. Has something happened to discourage you so?”

Dr. Talbot started to reply, then seemed to change course. He smiled ruefully. “It is true that I have run into some impediments. You know, my mentor once told me that the most prized quality in a research scientist was not intelligence but patience. I confess to my own tolerance for navigating predictable obstacles being in somewhat short supply at the moment.”



“Will he die, do you think?” asked the older doctor, for whom the theoretical potentialities of science were rather too abstract to satisfy his more immediate clinical curiosity.

“He has a powerful will to live. I predict he’ll survive. But he will suffer. Perhaps it is better that he should die.” Hearing this, Sarah felt relieved but also afraid. She was glad the boy was going to live, but it unsettled her that Dr. Talbot thought it might be preferable that he did not survive. Why did he have to be her age? Somehow, she felt this created a link between them that she wished did not exist.

“And is there nothing you can do for the poor boy?”

Dr. Talbot shook his head in exasperation. “No, there is nothing. It is maddening, but for all my knowledge, all my studies, I can offer him nothing that will improve his life materially.” His tone was so bitter that Dr. Baumgarten looked at him with consternation. Michael Talbot swallowed his glass abruptly, a contrite expression on his face.

“Forgive me, Baumgarten. I have spoken in a gloomy manner. It is just that I cannot bear the wretchedness, the pointlessness of such a life.”

“No harm done, Michael. Here, have a little more sherry.”

Upstairs, Sarah’s eyes filled with tears, even though she told herself she was behaving like a stupid girl. Apparently, the scientific pursuit of knowledge was not as simple or pure as she had supposed. She hugged her knees closer to her undeveloped chest. Underneath her nightgown, her feet felt very cold.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-TWO

Simon had begun having nightmares again. It was surprising, really. Of course, he still dreamed of Rachel sometimes. In the morning, his face would be wet with tears, but they were tears of sorrow and longing. After these recent hallucinatory reveries, however, he jerked awake suddenly, his heart racing, his palms icy, in a state of sheer terror.

One of his most vivid memories of the Crimea was how very beautiful it was, and how quickly that beauty could be transformed into appalling horror. Varna, for example, was a charming little town, whitewashed houses clumped together like bunches of grapes, minarets and the gold-leafed domes of the mosques glinting in the sunlight, undulating meadows blanketed with flowers, crocuses, primroses, violets, wild peonies, an abundance of fruits, grapes, melon, cherries, strawberries. At first there was plenty to eat, and plenty of money to buy the local food, hard bread and goat cheese, from friendly Bulgarians. The English soldiers went swimming, fished in the lakes, and hunted in the woods for buffalo and boar.

But within six weeks, the heat was unbearable, gnats and flies swarmed through the camp, and cholera struck. Men could be perfectly well one moment, laughing and joking, then fall to the ground in an agony of stomach spasms, diarrhea, and vomiting. Their faces turned black, and within four hours they were dead. The army was too ill to eat, too exhausted to empty the latrines, and soon too demoralized to do more than shovel bodies into shallow graves that were often dug up by wild dogs.

The same cycle repeated itself at Balaclava, base camp for the assault on Sevastopol. The people welcomed Lord Raglan and his troops with trays of fruit and

flowers and bread sprinkled with salt as evidence of their well wishes. Balaclava also was a quaint village, the green-tiled dwellings nestled in honeysuckle vines, the sparkling harbor encircled by overhanging cliffs that made it seem like an inland lake, rather than an arm of the sea. It was unbelievably picturesque, something out of a fairy tale. But as time passed, generals squabbled and bumbled over the organization of the siege, locusts devoured the fruits and vegetables, cholera broke out again, and soon twenty-five men and more were dying daily. The harbor, too small for the size of operation planned, became jammed with ships, some of which turned around and sailed back to Constantinople without unloading their supplies.

In the first grim winter of the war, the harbor filled with floating corpses of camels, horses, mules, dogs, cats, men with swollen heads, hospital refuse, discarded boxes, smashed cases of medicines, soggy bales of hay and moldy rations. There was no wood for fires, and a constant, torrential rain soaked through everything, tents, food, clothing. Men subsisted on salt beef and ship biscuit, which they soaked in water to accommodate their scurvy-loosened teeth. They were issued coffee beans daily, but since there was no way of grinding them, and no means of cooking them, they sat useless, and back in England became a symbol of the mismanagement of the war. The men received two glasses of rum daily, not enough to drink themselves into oblivion. Searching frantically for escape, men put bullets through their feet, and sometimes through their heads.

It was disease that killed most of the soldiers, cholera and typhoid and dysentery, but the battles, a morass of confusion, foolish orders, unfeasible orders, contradictory orders, even no orders at all, contributed their share. Often, in Simon's mind, they

blurred together, all bloody, absurd, full of anguish and overpowering noise, exploding shells, the whistle of grape and musket-balls, the thump-thump of round shot bouncing like croquet balls along the turf, distinguished from each other only by peculiar, idiosyncratic features. At the Battle of the Alma, the first major engagement of the war, men still had a sense of humor, and gave the Russian guns names like “Annie” and “Bessie” after the unpopular wives of their officers. He remembered men crossing the river into the cannonade, carrying bunches of grapes between their teeth that they plucked as they advanced but did not have time to eat, so that their hands would be free to discharge their Minie rifles in the direction of the enemy.

At the Battle of Balaclava, during the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade, General Bosquet, watching the almost seven hundred cavalymen riding toward certain death, remarked, “C’est magnifique, mais ce n’est pas la guerre,” as tears streamed down his cheeks. At Inkerman, what stood out for Simon Wise was the terrible, suffocating fog, so thick one could not distinguish friend from foe, and firing was blind and haphazard. Occasionally a Russian soldier would emerge from the fog, seemingly at random, his broad, flat face under the government-issue muffin cap uncannily white and expressionless, as if he were already a corpse. Even now, in the pea-soup of London, the Inspector sometimes panicked, certain that out of the haze his death would rise to meet him.

More than once Simon helped transport wounded comrades to the field hospital at Balaclava, although that was a journey most men tried to avoid if it all possible. The surgeons operated in full-dress uniform, drenched in blood, the few instruments they possessed scattered about them, some still carrying the wooden mallets they used to

render patients unconscious when anesthesia was unobtainable. Their patients lay stretched on the ground or on doors pulled from barns or cottages, moaning for the water that would give them dysentery or kill them if they had abdominal wounds. Amputated limbs, hacked off as quickly as possible, lay in heaps, spare parts that, despite legendary Victorian ingenuity, could never be salvaged. The omnipresent carnage made it difficult to differentiate between hospital and battlefield. Wading through the dank debris, Simon felt he was drowning in a sea of gore. The smells were revolting, putrefying flesh, waste and vomit. It was not uncommon to be able to scoop handfuls of maggots from the soldiers' wounds. In the winter, when surgeons unwrapped injured extremities, frostbitten fingers and toes would simply break off in their hands.

These memories were the raw material of Simon's dreams.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-THREE

It was seven o'clock on a Monday morning. Simon gulped a cup of tea, while Miss Gelbstein attempted to force a piece of toast smeared with butter and a poached egg in his direction. Rebecca wanted the household to buy margarine, which had only been invented a few years before and was half the price of butter. But frugal though she was, this was one economy Miss Gelbstein refused to make. "It tastes like wax," she said decisively, and the Wise family continued to eat butter.

Simon tried to put out of his mind the remnants of yet another disquieting dream. He was loping through some labyrinthine maze, the sides of which were sheer granite, pressing closely about him, that reminded him of the Crimea. But his sleeping self knew

that this landscape contained a present horror. The path was boggy, so that he was toiling through mud and mire, rather than running. A fierce wind blew down the twisting passageways, and he had to lean into the sides of the labyrinth to prevent himself from being blown away. Each time he turned a corner, he stumbled over a dead baby. When he bent down to peer more closely at the child, its features shifted and became fluid, until he found himself staring into Emily's face.

Taking another swallow of tea, Simon Wise shook his head to dislodge the disconcerting images. He was still troubled by the poor little creature Constable Brown had brought to the station house, and the two following. More than once since the discoveries he wondered whether, had circumstances been different, he himself might have contemplated leaving his own infant burden somewhere. Somewhere public where she could be found and cared for. Or somewhere private where she might never be found. He recalled a case tried at the Chester Assizes thirty years ago recently dusted off by the Infant Life Protection Society to further their Parliamentary cause. A Mr. Robert Standring had been accused of poisoning his mentally defective daughter, presumably for the eight pounds in burial money that was payable upon the child's death. Despite overwhelming evidence against the man, the jury voted for acquittal. Since Emily's birth, Simon often speculated whether secretly they must not have sympathized with Standring's plight and could not judge harshly the solution he had chosen.

As Simon attempted to unscramble these thoughts, Miriam walked into the kitchen, looking far too elegant for the early hour.

“Good morning, papa. It was awfully fun last night, entertaining I mean.” Miriam was the only one of his children to call him papa. He thought it affected, but smiled nonetheless. She really was charming.

Before Simon could reply, Miss Gelbstein pounced. “Awfully, indeed, Miriam! Do you know what the Poet Laureate said about that dreadful slang?” Miriam looked unabashed as Miss Gelbstein advanced. “When a foolish young lady like yourself used that phrase in Mr. Tennyson’s presence, he remarked, ‘Awfully! Don’t you know the meaning of that word? God’s *wrath* is awful!’” The clear implication was that God’s wrath would descend on Miriam should she dare to use that particular colloquialism again.

Miriam shrugged. “Oh Hannah, you are an old puss.” Miss Gelbstein gasped. By this time Sarah and Rebecca had straggled into the kitchen. Undaunted, Miriam turned toward her father.

“Did you have any dreams, papa?” When her father remained silent, she continued blithely, “Last night *I* dreamed I was dancing with a succession of suitors, one after the other, flirting outrageously with each in turn. It was all highly improper, but then one can’t help one’s dreams, can one?”

Miss Gelbstein would not dignify this sortie with a reply, but Sarah said slyly, “If you had one true suitor, you wouldn’t need a succession of them.” It was Rebecca, not Miriam, who blushed, dropped the milk pitcher, burst into tears and ran out of the room. A thought, only half-formed, flitted across Simon’s mind. Could Rebecca have a young man courting her? Simon could not countenance the possibility. After all, she was only eighteen. He grabbed his top-hat and beat a hasty retreat, praying that the God he so often

questioned would somehow find it in His magnanimous heart to grant them just a little slice of peace in the family. Miriam smiled sweetly at him as he exited, thinking her father quite distinguished in his black frock coat, black waistcoat, black chapeau and boots. Her elusive suitors lingered agreeably like partially tongued lollipops on the borders of her imagination.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FOUR

Inspector Wise knew from the sound of the knock that it was Sergeant Murdoch. He did not want to admit him, but he could not think of a good reason to keep his sergeant's diligence at bay. Reluctantly, he opened the door.

“This is Nicholas Prodger, sir. He makes his livin', such as it is, wall workin', puttin' up advertisin' boards, and sometimes as a boardman himself, wearin' a notice of the latest show or newest invention on his back. But as it isn't the steadiest of incomes, Mr. Prodger is willin' to help out his friends on the Force now and then with a bit of information. He has something to say that I found so interestin' I thought ye might like to hear it as well.” The glint of a self-congratulatory smile betrayed Murdoch's attempt at an impartial demeanor. He gave the boardman a shove forward.

After a nightmare wracked night, Inspector Wise felt particularly oppressed at the thought of Murdoch's inevitable gusto and similarly inevitable impending deluge of information.

“Excellent, Murdoch. I commend your efforts. Well, Mr. Prodger, what do you have to say for yourself?”



The boardman looked uncomfortable. “Mind, Inspector, it’s only a rumor.”

“Get on with it then.”

“I’ve heard talk of someone goin’ about, puttin’ out th’ word as to how they be interested in loose children.”

“What exactly do you mean by ‘loose children?’”

“You know, sir, children wot h’ain’t wanted. From mothers wot don’ want ‘em or can’t care fer ‘em. And the younger they are, th’ better. It’s th’ newborn babies this one is arter.”

“I see, Mr. Prodger. And is that all you know?”

“It’s on th’ street that if there be somethin’ wrong wit’ th’ child as well, some blemish, some defect, that don’t present no kind o’ problem.” Inspector Wise and Sergeant Murdoch exchanged glances.

“And who is this person?”

“I can’t rightly say, sir. Some think h’it ain’t rightly a person a’tall, but some kind o’ demon.”

“I see. Then can you tell me for what purpose this demon wishes to acquire these infants?”

Mr. Prodger shook his head with a lugubrious expression. “Ah, now that I wouldn’t know, sir.”

Sergeant Murdoch had the distinct impression that Mr. Prodger was not revealing all he knew. “How have ye come by this information, Nick?”

If possible, Nicholas Prodger looked more miserable still. “I ‘ear things, same as anyone.”

“But ye wouldn’t be able to name a name, for instance?” The boardman hung his head but said nothing. Inspector Wise stirred impatiently.

“Well, Mr. Prodger, according to these anonymous rumors, have there been any takers?”

Mr. Prodger’s melancholy deepened. “The world h’is an evil place, sir,” he opined. “There hain’t no way t’ measure its sinfulness.” And he would say no more.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-FIVE

“So, Thomas, what was it you wished to discuss with me?” Inspector Wise asked his Sergeant later that day. They walked briskly along the muddy, puddled street, umbrellas unfurled. It was raining again, a fine misty rain comprised of dirt and particles of soot from the omnipresent discharge of the factories. Wise soon noticed that the stiff, glossy coating of his umbrella had begun to drip off, falling in sticky globs on his coat. He cursed inwardly and shut the useless contraption. He had bought it in a hurry a couple of days ago, when he could not locate his trusted favorite, probably snatched up by an observant dead lurker. Apparently the stoolman who sold it to him had been an unscrupulous wretch, successfully passing off a refurbished umbrella as new. Wise cursed again. Somehow it seemed particularly unjust to con an inspector of police. The dissolving umbrella added to his general sense of disorientation.

The Inspector did not feel hungry, but he knew that, as usual, Sergeant Murdoch would want a bite of food. They stepped through the doors of the Ten Bells.

“A welcome break from the weather, sir,” said Murdoch with satisfaction as he shut his umbrella and the close but somehow comforting atmosphere assailed them. As was their custom, they moved toward the back of the room, where they spotted a booth being vacated. A group of patrolmen moved toward it, laughing and jostling their mugs. Inspector Wise strode forward as well.

“Right you are, sir,” one of the constables mumbled, recognizing Wise.

Wise smiled thinly and shouldered his way into the booth, Murdoch following behind.

“I’m waiting, Thomas.”

Murdoch looked uncomfortable. “I’ve been thinkin’ about the dead babies, sir. This latest makes three.”

“I admit we haven’t made much headway.” Murdoch did not respond but stared glumly into his cider. Inspector Wise continued doggedly.

“Of these three, only the first was approved for an autopsy by the coroner. In the cases of all three, we can’t confidently even say which died as a result of their malformations, which died of exposure, and which might have been intentionally put to death. So are these murders or not? I’ve checked around with other precincts. Almost two weeks elapsed between the discovery of the first and second babies reported to Whitechapel. During this interval, six other infant bodies were also located in London. Possibly these numbers are somewhat higher than average, but the wide distribution and the unsurprising locations of these other corpses make it likely that they are simply cast-off or concealed illegitimates. Also, none of these other children were characterized by any noticeable physical defects.

“Therefore, what continues to bother me is that these three bodies were left in full view of the public – the church, the foundling hospital, now Traitor’s Gate! God knows it is easy enough to dispose of an unwanted child, especially soon after birth. If the birth is at home, there is no birth record. And it’s not that difficult for women to conceal a pregnancy, so perhaps no one is aware that she is with child. Then when it is born, a shawl or a blanket over the mouth, and the corpse disposed of down a sewer, in the middens, is easily enough done. But why leave the body to be discovered? One infant could have been a cry for help, but three? No, whoever it is wants to send some sort of message. Leaving infant corpses strewn about London is clearly unbalanced, but in a lunatic way it must have a logic behind it. So what is that logic?”

## CHAPTER SIXTY-SIX

Murdoch seemed uncharacteristically ill at ease as he fiddled with his meal.

“Suppose it is not the mothers, sir?”

“What are you saying, Thomas?”

“Ye have nae forgotten the baby farmin’ scandals of a few years ago?” Inwardly, Inspector Wise groaned. He remembered them all too well, especially Margaret Waters hanging from the end of a rope when to his mind it appeared she was, at worst, guilty of gross negligence.

In May of 1870, sixteen infant bodies had been found in the Brixton-Peckham area of south London. Sergeant Relf of the Camberwell station, a personal friend of Murdoch’s, had been assigned to trace the source of this “bitter harvest.” His

investigations led him to surveillance of the lying-in home of a Mrs. Castle, where he observed seventeen-year-old Jeanette Cowen arrive pregnant, the result of a rape by the husband of a friend with whom she had been staying, and leave several weeks later without a baby. Relf tracked down her father, who admitted placing the infant with a Mrs. Willis (really an alias for Margaret Waters), who had offered to adopt it. Mr. Cowen, who was sincerely concerned for the welfare of his grandson, agreed to help Relf trace Mrs. Willis, which they did by responding to an adoption advert in a Brixton paper. Relf located a starving, diseased baby Cowen in Mrs. Willis' possession, and five other infants severely malnourished, stinking, and stupefied with opiates, as well as five other older babies in better condition. Five of these little ones, including baby Cowen, died soon after being removed to the Lambeth workhouse.

Waters was charged with conspiracy to defraud and the murder of the Cowen baby. It was established that Waters was a "baby-farmer," advertising extensively as an adopter of unwanted children for a lump sum. She would then "refarm" the infants, default on the payments and disappear after a few weeks. At other times, she would simply abandon infants in her charge by handing them to street urchins to mind for a moment and giving them a haepenny to purchase sweets. When the child returned with the infant, Mrs. Waters would have vanished. There was also lurid testimony by servants of her and her sister leaving the house with infants under their cloaks and returning without them, but bringing back baby clothes, which were later pawned or sold.

A wicked, neglectful woman she may have been, but in the minds of many, including Simon Wise, it was far from clear she was a murderess. Two of her brothers, as well as several MPs in the House of Commons, fought hard to have her death penalty

conviction overturned, advancing evidence not heard at the trial that she sought medical attention for baby Cowen, that she acquired quantities of cow's milk in an apparent attempt to feed him, and that the child himself did not die until two weeks after he was delivered from her care. But the Home Secretary was determined to make an example of her, and so he did, from the end of a rope.

“Have you been talking to Relf again?” Inspector Wise demanded.

Murdoch assumed a somewhat hangdog expression. He knew the Inspector did not think much of Relf's investigative techniques. “I ran the case by him,” he admitted begrudgingly. “He did a fine job on the Waters case.”

“And a terrible job on the Hall case,” Inspector Wise reminded him, in which charges against another baby-minder and her husband had to be dropped for lack of evidence. And a bungled investigation. “The vast majority of baby farmers are not murderers, Thomas. Most of them are not lump sum adopters but depend on a weekly payment. It is not in their interest for the child to die.”

“Sir, ye know as well as I do that the demand for baby mindin', especially for illegitimates, far exceeds the supply of available women. It can become a profitable business to simply allow a nurse child to expire, even help it along, and obtain a payin' replacement the followin' week. Do you nae recall the expert testimony that Dr. Wiltshire gave? When he investigated baby farmers for the *British Medical Journal*, he concluded that many of these women accepted infants with the knowledge that they would die verra soon, and with the deliberate intention that they *should* die.” Sergeant Murdoch hunkered down in his seat, determined to use this opportunity to convince his

doubting superior. “When only a poor woman’s conscience stands between her and a tidy profit, those poor infants may be in great jeopardy.”

“Thomas, I think you are influenced by your friendship with Relf in this matter. We should not hyperbolize the problem beyond all reasonable bounds. On this issue, it is easy for people to become hysterical.”

Murdoch heaved another breath, as though to steel himself against the consequences of his next statement. “I’m thinkin’ this might be some sort of baby murdering ring, somethin’ organized that involves midwives or mothers turnin’ over these infants for a fee to someone willin’ to dispose of them, no questions asked. It could even be one of those railway adoption scams, where babies are brought from long distances and exchanged at the stations, makin’ them verra difficult to trace. And if that be the case, sir,” Murdoch continued, pressing his advantage, “we need to look for suspects. Now there’s Molly Reid, that poor consumptive Constable Brown and I interviewed as part of the Fairhaven case. She’s touched that world through her own experience, and right now she’s ill and poor and fearin’ the workhouse. She’s not a stupid girl. She must know there’s money to be made in helpin’ out lassies that have got themselves into the same predicament she was in.”

“Do you seriously think she could be a candidate for this highly speculative scenario, Thomas? From the way you described her, she sounded close to perishing.”

“While there’s breath, there’s life, if ye take my meaning, and people have a way of doin’ what they have to do.”

“Very well, we’ll put poor Molly at the top of our baby killer suspect list,” Inspector Wise said indulgently. “As though she didn’t have enough worries. Anyone else you’re considering for the position, Thomas?”

Sergeant Murdoch wavered, disliking the mildly derisive tone of his superior. Nevertheless, he felt strongly that his misgivings needed to be given voice. “I ’m thinkin’ we ought to look more closely at Oliver Brantley, that crippled assistant of Dr. Talbot’s over on Great Ormond Street. He works for a doctor who treats such children, so maybe he has knowledge of or access to the mothers, perhaps through a bent midwife. And Nick Prodger described a demon asking about such wee ones. Sir, Brantley might well fit the bill. I’ve had a bad feeling about him from the first.”

About to reprove Sergeant Murdoch for what he considered to be his irrational prejudices against the unfortunate Brantley, Inspector Wise cautioned himself to exercise restraint. Not only indifferently educated police sergeants, but the great intellects of the time endorsed much the same thinking. The fear of “those limp in body and mind,” as the famed educator and economist Alfred Marshall had described them, unfortunately was widespread. Wise admitted he himself was not immune to such associations, although the idea that little Emily could be evil was absurd.

“Being crippled doesn’t make Brantley a murderer, much less an unbalanced one. What’s your evidence, Thomas?”

“At the moment I’ve no real evidence.”

“You mean, no evidence at all,” Wise interrupted impatiently.

“Sir, I’m only sayin’ let’s take a closer look. I can place Brantley in the East End haunts where we suspect those infants came from. I’ve turned up a woman, works in one



of the local factories, says she's seen a man that fits Brantley's description – funny walk, hard to understand speech – askin' around about malformed babies.”

Wise gestured impatiently. “Use your head, Thomas. That's Brantley's job. That's what Dr. Talbot pays him to do. Naturally he might be seen approaching women about infants with congenital deformities. Dr. Talbot operates a free clinic on Friday afternoons, as you well know. It is Brantley's job to distribute the doctor's pamphlets to mothers, let them know that there may be help for their poor children.”

“Permanent help,” Murdoch mumbled darkly.

“Don't be ridiculous. What on earth could be his motive?”

Murdoch's face had turned sullen. He sensed he was not going to win this discussion. “The oldest motive in the world, sir. Money, same as would motivate any normal man.”

Inspector Wise shook his head. “Dr. Talbot appears to take care of Brantley well enough. The man does not seem to be in any need. Why should he wish to murder afflicted creatures like himself, then humiliate them further by dumping their bodies in public view? How can this not bring the very kind of attention such a “ring,” as you call it, would want very much to avoid because apprehension would obviously put an end to their business, not to mention their lives. Further, why should Brantley align himself against the very work to which his employer and mentor has devoted his life? You are allowing prejudice to overcome logic.”

“Maybe Brantley loathes himself, and any creature who might grow to become like him. Maybe he hates Dr. Talbot, and what the doctor has made of his life, catchin'

him between two worlds, so to speak. Maybe he just wants to earn a few extra pounds so he won't always have to depend on the doctor's generosity."

"If Brantley is attempting to dispose of the bodies, then why do we keep stumbling over them?"

"Who knows? The man is twisted, right enough. Does there have to be a logical explanation for everything he might do?"

The Inspector grimaced impatiently. "Thomas, you continue to make a completely unsubstantiated leap by concluding that a defective mind must accompany a defective body." Inspector Wise was irked and downed his remaining cider more rapidly than he had intended. He sputtered, then choked. When he had finally caught his breath, he added, "Besides, this is all pure speculation. You are an inventive man, but I believe you are pillorying this poor creature simply because you find him aesthetically objectionable." Sergeant Murdoch said nothing and scowled into his cups.

Inspector Wise motioned the serving girl for another drink. He felt Murdoch was grasping at straws, and grasping unfairly, but secretly he was sympathetic. Something was very wrong here, and he had not the faintest idea what it could be. He knew he should return to the Whitechapel station, but he wanted to linger a bit longer in the warmth and noisy camaraderie of the pub. Here he felt removed from all the ugliness of his job, able to sit back and contemplate it dispassionately, from a distance as it were.

"Find me a real witness, Thomas, not just these rumors and innuendos. Find me a midwife who is a link in the chain. Find me a woman willing to admit she's given up a crippled infant and paid for it. Check newspapers in surrounding areas for suspicious adverts offering to adopt infants for five or ten pounds, especially if they seem to rely a

bit too heavily on phrases like ‘good Christian family’ or ‘provides a mother’s care.’ Find me evidence of payment either by the baby’s mother or for the baby. Find me anything. Now go on. I’ll be back in a little while.”

Murdoch, with the righteous expression of someone who had done his duty, took a final bite of bread and cheese, and made his departure. The Inspector settled back into his seat, doing his best to shrug off his irritation. His greatest desire was to remain in this pleasant cocoon as long as possible.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-SEVEN

“Sarah, come talk with me for a moment.” Later that evening, Rebecca impulsively pulled her younger sister into the room they shared with Miriam. Sarah, carrying a thick book under her arm, agreed begrudgingly. To Sarah’s everlasting disappointment, reading in bed by candlelight was too great a combustion hazard, so that perusing a firelit tome, although infinitely less comfortable, became the next best alternative. She had been cautiously making her way downstairs, where a fire still blazed, knowing that if Miss Gelbstein caught her, she would scold her mercilessly for jeopardizing her sight in such a heedless and selfish manner. Nevertheless, despite the risk of damaged vision, Sarah wanted to read about Darwin’s exotic discoveries in the Galapagos, and she wanted to do so now, not listen to her sister who went on incessantly about the need to do good and benefit others. She hoped it wouldn’t be another moral lecture. She was convinced scientific progress could do a lot more good for the downtrodden than all Becca’s well-intentioned charitable schemes.

Yet once Sarah crossed the threshold and Rebecca pushed the door shut, the older sister seemed tongue-tied. Sarah stirred restlessly. At last, Rebecca blurted out, “What is your opinion of Dr. Talbot?”

Sarah, thinking about the unsettling conversation she had overheard at the dinner party, was unsure how to respond. “He is very intelligent,” she replied cautiously.

“Yes,” Rebecca agreed eagerly, “He is highly intelligent. And something more.” She struggled to find the right words. “It is strange indeed, something I hardly know how to describe. I scarcely know him, but there is a keen sympathy between us.” Rebecca, conscious that Sarah was looking at her intently, hurried on. “He is a complex man, sometimes all excitement, his thoughts racing so rapidly he can barely express them, sometimes discouraged and unhappy. He feels things deeply. It is obvious that he works too hard and is exhausting himself. I long to help him.”

“Help him? Do you mean, be his assistant?” Sarah felt impatient with her sister’s meanderings and besides, she had never known her to be scientifically inclined before. There was also something about Rebecca’s manner that made her feel inexplicably anxious.

“No, not exactly that. It is just that sometimes, occasionally, I imagine what it might be like to spend my life with Dr. Talbot.” Rebecca added hastily, “I know that is very silly.”

Sarah could not make sense of what Rebecca was telling her. “He seems very devoted to his work,” she objected. “Although he seems very devoted to you too,” she added quickly, not wishing to hurt her sister’s feelings. “Has he said anything to you?”

Sarah could not imagine how this was possible. Dr. Talbot had only known Rebecca a little more than a fortnight.

“Of course not, not directly,” Rebecca admitted. “He is very platonic, very poetical. Sometimes it is difficult for me to understand exactly what it is he does mean. But his language is always beautiful and intense. This afternoon, in the park, he called me his Galatea. Look, he gave me a note.” Carefully, Rebecca uncurled a small paper bordered with a tangle of intricately wrought flowers. Sarah read, “I will bring you toys, Small gifts that girls delight to wear, to gaze at, Pet birds and shells and semi-precious stones, White lilies, flowers of a thousand colours, And amber tears...” She knew the verse came from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and the revelation was somehow disquieting. She remembered the beginning of the poem: “Ingenious as he was, he made a creature, More beautiful than any girl on earth, A miracle of ivory in a statue, So charming that it made him fall in love.”

“But he’s not Jewish. What would Abba say?”

“I don’t know. I can’t imagine it either. All I know is that I’ve never met anyone like him.”

“Do you think you love him?” It seemed a very daring question to both girls.

“I don’t know. I’m not sure I know what love is.”

Knowing nothing herself of love, Sarah struggled mightily to recall something that might help her sister. Fortuitously, something her mother used to say unexpectedly came to mind. “Becca, do you remember how Ima always declared you’d recognize love when you felt it? If you don’t know, you’d better wait,” advised the younger girl soberly,

wondering if one day there might be discovered a proof for love as sound as a geometric theorem. It would make life so much easier.

## CHAPTER SIXTY-EIGHT

When Inspector Wise opened the station door, it was raining heavily. Blast this weather, he thought irritably. His head ached, his throat scratched, and he felt decidedly indisposed. Shivering, he wondered if he had a touch of fever as well. At home, Naomi, Deborah, and Miriam were all ill. Miss Gelbstein had firmly quarantined them in the back bedrooms. At her instruction, they were now bent over bowls of hot water with towels hanging about their heads, inhaling steam and complaining. Zadok had been banished to the home of Isaac Goodman, a friend from *shul*. Miss Gelbstein proceeded to fling open most of the house windows, ignoring the icy temperatures outside. She was determined that Emily avoid this latest ailment. “Fresh air is imperative,” Miss Gelbstein asserted, daring Simon to contradict her. He had tried, but only sneezed instead.

Now the Inspector flagged down a hansom, opened his umbrella, and made a dash down the stairs. At street level, he stumbled into a pothole, drenching his boots and splashing water in all directions. A passing couple, scurrying against the rain, glanced at him in annoyance. Ignoring them, he climbed into the cab, gave the driver the address, then thought longingly of his still-warm bed.

The rain did little to wash away the fog, which seemed to press on all sides. It was a typical yellow November miasma, so thick lamps had to be lit indoors in the daytime, so dense you could grasp a man’s hand and still not be able to see his face. Two years

ago the fog was blamed for the above average number of deaths in London, and Wise believed it. When he inhaled deeply, he felt a pain in his lungs and a dizziness in his head.

As soon as Amanda opened the door to Lady Penelope Abbott's townhouse, Inspector Wise was almost overcome by the welcoming warmth. He placed a card on the proffered salver.

'Just a moment, sir. I'll see if Lady Abbott is at home.' She bobbed slightly, determined this time to properly execute her duty, then turned toward the stairs. The Inspector contented himself with dripping voluminously in the entryway while he awaited her return. The house had an occupied feeling. Inspector Wise was fairly certain that Lady Abbott was at home, and he hoped fervently that she would be "at home" to him.

"Lady Abbott will see you in the parlor, sir. This way, please." After being helped off with his overcoat, the Inspector gratefully followed the maid into the small but cozy parlor, making his way through the comfortable clutter. A fire burned companionably in the hearth. The Inspector stripped off his gloves and held out his hands, hoping to regain a more normal body temperature. He studied the photographs on one of the end-tables again, his eyes resting on the stern unsmiling man, his gaze challenging the lens of the camera, the two small boys dressed in matching sailor suits at his side, an older tow-headed youth leaning protectively toward a younger Lady Abbott seated in front. He had pictures like that, too, capturing a vanished wholeness that would never be recreated.

“Inspector?” Lady Penelope held out her hand, which the Inspector took briefly. It felt cool and dry to his touch. “It is a pleasure to see you again. Was there something you wished to ask me about, perhaps say to me?”

The Inspector was conscious of the dampness of his clothes, the faint smell rising from the wool as they steamed in the fire’s heat. What had prompted him to come here? He looked at Lady Abbott and was struck again by the unusual color of her eyes.

What did he wish to say? That he had not felt anything for three years, not since Rachel died. That he had turned to stone, that he had become frozen to all human connection. That he liked it better that way, because frozen, he felt nothing at all. That he could not stop thinking of her, that despite his best efforts, some part of him was turning toward her, some part of him was yearning for... for what? He didn’t know.

“Inspector, are you quite well? You have turned pale.”

Inspector Wise collected himself. “I apologize, Lady Abbott. I am slightly out of sorts. It’s nothing.”

“Please sit down. Let me ring for some tea.” The Inspector sank thankfully into a spring sofa.

“Perhaps we should conduct this conversation at another time?”

“Not at all, I am perfectly recovered. I merely wanted to inquire whether you had the opportunity to consider further the questions I had posed regarding Lady Fairhaven’s other... associations.”

“I must admit, Inspector, that after our last conversation, I felt I had somehow been ‘deputized’ on your behalf,” Lady Penelope said with a quizzical, slightly embarrassed expression that Inspector Wise found quite charming. “After all, we were



discussing the death... the murder... of one of my dear acquaintances. And you asked me, indeed explicitly enjoined me, to make inquiries regarding her past relationships.”

“I know you are not a scandalmonger, Lady Abbott,” Inspector Wise said mildly.

“Well, then.” She took a deep breath. Her cup of tea sat forgotten in its saucer.

“Lady Alicia’s relationship with Professor Maximus appears to have been quite innocent, from what I can gather. An intellectual flirtation only, if you will. She called on him a few times at his rooms near London University, and once or twice he paid a visit to the townhouse. But the don is a confirmed bachelor... besides,” she looked away, “his tastes apparently run in a different direction, although only to look... only to look.”

Recollecting the semi-nude little girls giggling so prettily on the ottoman, Inspector Wise thought he understood her.

“So there is no reason to believe that anything transpired between the two of them that might have led to later conflict, or even some sort of murderous rage? Could there have been any unseemly incidents involving the professor and the young girls he seems to enjoy photographing that Lady Fairhaven might have threatened to expose?”

“Hardly likely. Alicia was intrigued by his political ideas and open-minded about his... desires, which as far as I can determine remain resolutely platonic, while the professor appeared to regard her simply as a precocious student.

“On the other hand,” Lady Penelope went on, “her affair with Frederick May did create more of a scandal than I realized at the time. Alicia was so eclectic, you see, she traveled in far wider social circles, far more *miscellaneous* circles, than I have occasion to frequent. Whether or not she and Mr. May found more than the acceptable amount of pleasure in each other’s company, I cannot say. In any event, Mrs. May was furious

merely at the perception of impropriety that was created and threatened to sue for divorce. Naturally, Alicia did not back down quietly, and there were some tense moments. However, in the end it was all a tempest in a teapot. Alicia became bored with Mr. May's talk of the perfect lucifer match, especially when she could not interest him in factory reform, and he returned disconsolately but meekly enough to his family."

"And the fact that Lady Fairhaven repulsed his fresh resurgence of interest? I formed the impression Mr. May is not a man who takes kindly to rejection."

"That may be, but Alicia was determined to have nothing to do with him. She was provoked that Gregory persisted in renewing the friendship, when it placed her in such an awkward position."

"Lady Fairhaven did not seem unduly alarmed by the effect her rebuff would have on Frederick May, or by her admonition that she might approach Mrs. May?"

"I cannot be sure, but I did not sense she was in any way frightened of him. Aggravated, perhaps, but frightened, no."

"What of the illustrious Rothsteins? Did Lady Fairhaven mingle with them in any untoward manner?"

Lady Penelope smoothed her skirts and did not meet the Inspector's eyes. "You have probably heard rumors yourself about the younger brother Alfred. He is known to be outrageous and to enjoy this reputation. His festivities are legendary, and shocking. At one entertainment, a young boy emerged from a seven-layered cake constructed around him. He... he was not clothed.

"Apparently, Alicia attended more than one of Alfred Rothstein's debaucheries. It is hard for me to credit, she was far from a wanton woman. I can only conclude it was

her endless curiosity that got the better of her and drove her to skirt the edges of an existence she must have known to be dangerous.”

“Was she Alfred’s lover?” Inspector Wise asked bluntly.

“I have heard stories to that effect. However, there are twists and turns. Nothing is ever as simple as one would like. The rumors are layered with still other rumors. For instance, one innuendo is that Alfred himself instigated the story of his involvement with Alicia to detract attention from the still more scandalous attentions he has been paying to certain young men. Yet the Rothsteins are so immensely powerful it is hard to imagine that they would stoop to murder if they needed to obtain someone’s silence. They have other equally persuasive, and less scurrilous, means at their disposal to compel cooperation should they wish it.”

The Inspector got to his feet, feeling lightheaded, and thought again that he should be home under his quilt. “Your information is thought-provoking on all fronts, but still inconclusive, Lady Abbott. Perhaps I have been looking in the wrong places.”

Lady Penelope inclined her head in a graceful show of regret. “I fear I have not been very helpful, Inspector. However, I am impressed by your dedication and confident that eventually you will discover the solution to this dreadful affair. For the moment, however, I implore you to get some rest. Surely the claims of the dead can wait a little longer.”

## CHAPTER SIXTY-NINE

The fever has made him restless and weak. Impatiently he tosses and turns under the eiderdown quilt he and Rachel once shared. After Rachel died, he did not want to return to this room – ever – but after sleeping for a month on the settee in the parlor, common sense made him realize that it would be a cruelty to move one of the children into their parents' bedroom. The logic of his situation forced him to reclaim his and Rachel's bed, alone, but still he sometimes senses her unseen presence. Of course, publicly he scoffs at the spiritualists, the absurd claims of the Church of New Jerusalem adherents that their precious Swedenborg had traversed the realms of heaven and hell, seen angels' thought become birds and other nonsense. He despises the mediums, the transparent fakery of the table rapping and passive writing. But tonight he feels her with him, and he is not sure whether he is dreaming or awake.

Like a passionate current, the fever grabs him and carries him. He leans back against the whiteness of the pillows, remembering Rachel beside him. He thinks he can recall her scent, the fine hairs on her arm, the curve of her breasts. He reaches toward her body, and it is substantial, no dream, he is as certain of this as he is of the rising sun. Rachel, he murmurs, and buries his face in her hair. But when he raises his eyes to gaze at her, to drink her in, to memorize all the vanished details he took for granted, he sees not her calm blue eyes, but the strange violet orbs of Penelope Abbott. She is staring at him with a kindly, vaguely mournful air, and he thinks of the noble, Homeric Penelope, enduring, awaiting the return of her hero. My lady, are you truly inconsolable, Simon Wise wonders. And wonders again, am I a shallow, vain suitor, greedy for her vast possessions, trying to woo her from her grief?

He trembles. The flush is gone, his nightclothes are damp, he is shivering. His bed is filled only with yearning.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY

The next day, Inspector Wise asked Dr. Talbot to examine the children after he completed his hospital rounds. Still feeling somewhat feverish himself, he wanted the doctor's opinion about their illness, although Hannah seemed to have the situation well in hand. Even more, he wanted to consult with Dr. Talbot about the accumulating dead babies exhibited so ostentatiously.

After a subdued but gratifying light supper, prepared by Martha at her diligent best, the Inspector and Dr. Talbot settled into the family's two upholstered armchairs, pulled close to the fire to ward off the outside chill. For once, the children, being mostly ill, were not pestering the doctor, who had diagnosed nothing worse than severe colds, but cautioned Miss Gelbstein to make sure they had plenty of rest and liquids. Even Sarah and David had gone to bed without a fuss. Zadok remained in exile at the home of his fellow *davener*. Rebecca was occupied putting Emily to sleep, and Miss Gelbstein was out, attending a meeting of her literary circle. The Inspector was glad because he wanted Michael Talbot to himself tonight.

For a while, the two men simply watched the fire burning. Inspector Wise, feeling chilled and not well, appreciated its warmth. Even more he appreciated its containment, the fact that man had mastered this force of nature and bent it to serve his own purposes. As there were no women present, Martha had placed a night commode unobtrusively behind a screen. Dr. Talbot stood to relieve himself, and for a time the

Inspector listened to the sound of liquid striking metal, mingling with the softer patter of rain outside. When the doctor returned, he pulled out his pipe and lit it. Puffing contentedly, he too seemed mesmerized by the flames.

“Michael, I would like your opinion on something.”

Dr. Talbot roused himself, and inclined companionably toward Inspector Wise, his eyes, however, remaining fixed on the fire.

“A police matter?”

“To be honest, I’m not quite sure. We have discovered the corpses of three infants, all with some sort of physical deformity, abandoned rather more conspicuously than is customary in cases of concealment —outside St. Botolph’s, the Foundling Hospital, Traitor’s Gate. There have been coroner’s inquests on two of the bodies, of course, - the third too far deteriorated - but as is usual in these cases, the causes of death are difficult to determine. The medical evidence was equivocal. The deaths could have been due to intentional neglect, exposure, or even natural causes, a result of the infants’ infirmities. It is not inconceivable that the babies were killed -- perhaps smothered -- prior to their being forsaken.”

As Dr. Talbot turned to respond, he fumbled his pipe, which dropped from his hands, spilling ashes over the carpet. He was on his knees in an instant, attempting to sweep up the offending mess.

“A thousand apologies, that was inexcusably clumsy of me. I don’t seem to be making much of a difference here.” With a regretful gesture, he abandoned the futile clean-up and sat back in the chair. “Your story is troubling, although, as we both know, all too common. But I fear the police must accept some responsibility regarding the

growing problem of infanticide, Simon. Your profession seems to exhibit a casual attitude toward these corpses.”

“You can hardly blame us, Michael. The police are hampered on all sides by difficulties in obtaining warrants to search suspicious premises, lack of willing witnesses, and scientifically disputable evidence. Furthermore, we must expend resources on men like that crackbrained Reverend Oscar Thorpe howling about the abuses of the lying-in houses. Thanks to the political pressures your Infant Protection Society has brought to bear, each one of his complaints must be investigated, although so far not a single case has resulted in a prosecution.” The Inspector ran a hand through his hair in frustration.

“I agree there has been extremism among some of my colleagues, and I also acknowledge the poor track record of my own medical profession in conducting meaningful autopsies. For example, a truly expert physician can make nonsense of a woman’s arguments that she confused labor pains with defecation so that the baby simply dropped into the privy and drowned. In fact, the reactivity of the umbilical cord would almost invariably prevent such a precipitous plunge.”

“Yet the privy defense is a traditional and almost invariably successful legal maneuver.”

“Precisely my point. It continues respectable because no one has the courage to confront it for the absurdity it is. Further, to the skilled eye, it is easy to distinguish between the diagonal ligatures left by an umbilical cord that has accidentally strangled an infant and the horizontal marks produced when a mother uses the cord as a garrote. A knowledgeable, intrepid physician also can be alert to a twisted neck, or the piercing of

vital organs such as the eye or the fontanel with a sharp needle, all of which result in death.”

Dr. Talbot took a few puffs on his pipe, then very carefully knocked the ashes into the grate. “But many physicians are inadequately trained or choose to shut their eyes to the reality of the matter. General practitioners in particular often choose to keep their silence regarding such suspicious deaths, as their trade depends on maintaining the trust and goodwill of their patients. The most they will do at times is to withhold a death certificate, thus forcing a coroner’s investigation.”

“But do you seriously believe we might be dealing with murder in the cases I described as opposed to gross incompetence?”

“Let me be perfectly frank, Simon. These abandoned babies are usually bastard children whose mothers do not want to care for them. Approximately five percent of all births in London are illegitimate. Quite a large pool to draw from when you think about it. When the infants have a congenital deformity, it only decreases anyone’s interest in their survival. Consider the reasons infanticide is practiced in primitive cultures: to eliminate illegitimates, motherless children, and defectives.”

“But surely in a civilized society, in England...” Wise began, then stopped, thinking of his own wishes early on that Emily might die.

“One could make the argument that it is precisely civilized societies that should consider the larger question of how such infants can ever be productive members of society.” Dr. Talbot turned toward the Inspector, who could see that his cheeks were flushed from the heat of the fire. “It is well-known in medical circles that defective infants are routinely given poorer care than “normal” babies. Most seriously impaired



infants die at an early age. Those that survive childhood lead very... limited lives, at best. At worst, especially among children of the poor, they are treated as little better than animals. When they die, there is generally more relief than sorrow. The child has 'returned home,' in the quaint language of the countryfolk, and the woman is freed of a terrible burden."

"But murder, Michael, murder?"

Dr. Talbot hesitated, then said, "Perhaps, in their eyes, death appears not as a penalty, but as a mercy, a sort of reckless remonstrance against their very existence."

"Are you suggesting that these poor little bodies are left in such public places as a form of protest?"

"I don't know, Simon. I can't enter the minds of such women. Maybe it is a warning, or a challenge? Who can say? Perhaps these mothers realize that given the current state of affairs, these unfortunates would be better off dead."

Talbot lit a match against his boot, for a moment seemingly mesmerized by its flame. Then he worked on his pipe until it was smoking again and spoke again. "The reform of the Poor Laws giving less support to unwed mothers, forcing them into workhouses, and making it much more difficult to prosecute presumed fathers for child support has shifted the weight of public opinion in favor of mothers. To many, the death of a bastard seems a far less cruel fate than 'coming on the parish.' In fact, it is not easy to disagree. It may be time to reevaluate our goals in this area. If public opinion favors turning a blind eye, police are reluctant to investigate, juries are unwilling to convict, doctors are disinclined to accuse, and most of these infants are destined to die anyway,

why are we expending so much effort to keep them alive?” Although Simon was familiar with his friend’s intense moods, Dr. Talbot seemed unusually low-spirited.

For a few moments, the two men shared an uncomfortable silence. Then Talbot spoke again. “It strikes me that society is fundamentally indifferent about whether such unlucky offspring live or die, only they are unwilling to own this position directly. I think this ambivalence explains the unwillingness of juries to convict women, even in the face of overwhelming evidence. Why, just this month Elizabeth Lewis was brought to trial on the lesser charge of concealment, despite the fact that her baby had been beheaded! Beheaded, Simon! People say mothers cannot really do such things, but in their hearts they may feel, what does it matter if they do? Perhaps it is all for the best.”

“The Elizabeth Lewis case is yet another example of a botched police investigation,” the Inspector admitted. “She maintains her innocence, you know.”

“Perhaps she suffered from a postpartum melancholia,” Dr. Talbot speculated begrudgingly. “But regardless of the explanation, if a civilized society believes such creatures are only examples of the increasing degeneracy of the residuum, then it should not be up to poor mothers to take matters into their own hands. As a country, we should be less hypocritical on the subject and formulate social policies that better reflect our true convictions.” Inspector Wise shook his head, completely at a loss. The conversation had taken a strange turn, one which in his fevered state he could not follow.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-ONE

Dr. Talbot stared for a while into the fire, seeming to derive a certain tranquility from its flickering motion. Then he bestirred himself.

“If I may, Simon, allow me to return for a moment to a discussion we commenced last week. “

“That new scientific theory you were telling me about? The idea that we can improve the human race through selective breeding, just as we can improve the hardiness of a type of corn or a species of sheep? What is the name of the scientist who has been working this up?”

“Francis Galton. He is a genius, someone who has made astonishing breakthroughs in many fields. His work explores human differences and why some individuals, and possibly some races, are more intelligent than others. Two years ago, he published a letter in the *Times* suggesting that, as part of our colonial expansion, we should encourage the settlement of Africa by the Chinese, whom he considers a superior race, so that eventually they would replace the more mediocre indigenous inhabitants.”

“I must admit, Michael, it sounds somewhat reckless to me. Can a whole race of people be condemned – or uplifted – so categorically?”

“Galton has all sorts of psychometric science which he claims points to such conclusions. I have been reading his publications and they are persuasive. I suspect it will not be too long before it is seriously debated in English scientific forums as well. And who knows where such ideas might go after that?”

Where indeed? Simon had the same uneasy feeling that arose during their earlier conversation. He had grasped immediately that this new concept might have very personal implications for his family.

“I am no scientist, Michael, although I respect the scientific method of generating hypotheses, collecting data and making rational deduction. It is something I try to employ in policing.” Simon shook his head. “But I still fail to grasp what Galton’s conjectures have to do with my dead infants.”

Talbot nodded. “Indeed, I only mentioned it because I considered there might conceivably be a connection to your case. Galton has not addressed the implications of his theory for the phenomenon of infanticide of unwanted offspring – such an examination would be unacceptably shocking to polite sensibilities. Even that letter in the *Times* stirred much controversy. Nevertheless, I believe his ideas may help explain, on a purely intellectual, academic level, the popular indifference to such infanticide that we have been talking about. If many perfectly civilized people hold the belief that other people should not live...” He left the sentence dangling. “Survival of the fittest and all that.”

Simon remembered hearing that Galton was Charles’ Darwin’s cousin. “Then perhaps I’d better hear more,” he said reluctantly. Dr. Talbot sat up in his chair and straightened his jacket, as though he were about to begin lecturing to a group of medical students.

“Basically, Galton’s ideas emphasize positive breeding, by encouraging couples of exceptional intelligence, beauty, and athleticism to reproduce. It also encompasses a concern with the consequences of negative breeding, or what has been referred to as racial degeneration. This fear starts from the simple premise that if the human race can evolve, it can also devolve, and that we must take steps to guard against such a possibility. Some scientists believe that racial decline has already set in and, at least in

their eyes, a simple stroll through St. Giles confirms their worst apprehensions. The concern, of course, is that the most rapid and haphazard reproduction is taking place among the classes least capable of producing a stalwart citizenry, so that within a few generations we will be a nation of cripples and half-wits, incapable of defending the Empire or of competing in the economic marketplace.”

Inspector Wise imagined a nation of Emilies, helpless, dependent, feeble. Had he and Rachel inadvertently contributed to the deterioration of England, he wondered, then felt ashamed for acquiescing so readily to such fearmongering. He reminded himself that, in his experience, there was as much if not more corruption and evil in the upper classes as in the lower ones. And at least as much intelligence, compassion, and hard work among the poor. Did Emily herself have no value? He thought of her affectionate nature, even when he did nothing to reciprocate, her tenacity in living. “Surely this is mere sensationalism.”

During this discussion, the front door had slammed, and they heard Miss Gelbstein in the hallway, shaking the water from her cloak and divesting herself of her wraps. Now she entered the parlor, and said waspishly, “This so-called science is only an excuse for narrowness and prejudice.”

“I think Hannah may well be right,” Simon added. “It seems to me such a view comes very close to playing God. Who is qualified to decide who should reproduce and who should be prevented?”

Miss Gelbstein swept on, her indignation washing over the doctor’s philosophizing. “So they think they can engineer a better race, do they, these distinguished men of science?”

“We can already breed a better type of flower, and cow,” Dr. Talbot offered.

“Only because we want them for specific purposes. What do we want humans for? Do you know, Dr. Talbot?”

“No, no, to be sure, I am merely explaining...”

“And where will it stop? Do you think they will be content to prevent the reproduction of cripples or the mentally deficient? Mark my words, once such ideas take hold, they will be followed in short order by deliberations about the need to eliminate “inferior specimens,” anyone who deviates from the purity of the race, for the good of the country. First it will be the halt, the lame, the infirm, then the aged, gypsies, negroes, the poor... even Jews. Do you deny it?”

“Miss Gelbstein, these are scientists, not fiends. Their discussions are theoretical, disinterested scholarship...” Dr. Talbot protested.

“Nothing that concerns the survival of the species is disinterested, Dr. Talbot. Not even science. As a scientist, you should know that.” The doctor nodded placatingly, and kept his silence. Miss Gelbstein unpinned her hat with a gesture that reminded Simon of a duelist pulling a rapier from its sheath.

“Simon,” she said accusingly, “how are you feeling?”

“Much better,” the Inspector lied.

“Very well,” Miss Gelbstein said dubiously. “Do not overtire yourself and do not overexert your mind with such foolishness.” She paused to emphasize her low opinion of the conversation. “And now, gentlemen, I intend to retire. Good night.”

For a moment Simon sat in dazed silence, contemplating the implications of Miss Gelbstein’s train of thought. He still questioned whether God existed at all, but he felt it

prudent, like Pascal, to take no chances. Talking about selective breeding when applied to the human race seemed to contravene the intentions of God, Who after all, for His mysterious reasons, had created people like Emily. The idea of some sort of organized program of eradication of certain kinds of people filled him with horror. He guiltily acknowledged that on more than one occasion, he had speculated about what life might be like if Emily were no longer among the living. Perhaps, he concluded with a shudder, the monster lay not only without, in the criminals he so assiduously pursued and brought to justice, but within his own heart.

At last Dr. Talbot said soberly, "Miss Gelbstein's ideas are, of course, misplaced. Galton has never suggested such things. She is an intelligent woman, but she is still merely a woman. She cannot possibly understand the complexity of the scientific doctrine involved here. I only mentioned it as a theoretical basis for the public indifference to the deaths of illegitimate children, who are generally more feeble. If our genetic purpose as our species is to continually evolve toward greater superiority, then it is logical, although deplorable, that we would expend less energy on the survival of our weakest and least fit members."

By this point, however, Simon found the whole issue too unsettling to explore further. He had a more pressing dilemma at hand.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-TWO

Clearing his throat, the inspector knew that the question he wanted to pose to Dr. Talbot would be most difficult, but one that he felt was owed Sergeant Murdoch.

“Be that as it may, Michael, I must still return to my very unphilosophical, concrete and immediate problem of the dead babies. I am reluctant to ask this, but is it possible that Oliver might somehow be involved in helping mothers dispose of unwanted infants? We have evidence that someone of a similar description has been seen in the rookeries making inquiries about deformed infants. Have you noticed anything furtive or odd in his behavior lately?”

“Oliver? My Oliver? What do you mean?”

“We have heard renewed rumors of baby-farming for illicit purposes, so I am asking whether you think it possible that he is in some way implicated.”

Dr. Talbot looked squarely into the Inspector’s eyes. “Now this, Simon, this truly is madness. I admit Oliver is often in St. Giles, but at my instruction, to distribute information about my charity clinic. It does not confound me in the least that he has been seen in that area. Oliver would never willingly harm another creature. Since becoming my assistant, he has put his faith in the power of science to cure, to heal... as have I.”

“You can think of nothing that would arouse your suspicions?”

“Nothing whatsoever. I am astonished you could ask such a question.”

Simon’s head ached. He could feel sweat beading his brow, but whether from fever, the fire, or embarrassment he was unable to discern. “My apologies, Michael. I hope you can understand that I had to ask. I am frightened that we may be looking at something more organized, more malevolent than simple random maternal anguish, and I must leave no stone unturned.”



Dr. Talbot seemed somewhat mollified. “Of course. But I assure you Oliver could have no possible connection to the sort of perfidious scheme you are contemplating.”

The two men continued to sit. Whether they were still completely at ease with each other was difficult to say. Oliver Brantley lay between them, arousing in both men a custodial protectiveness and perhaps a sense of guilt as well. Yet in one the instinct was first to shield, and in the other to expose, no matter what the cost. Dr. Talbot cautiously smoked his pipe, while Simon stirred the fire, which had died down into glowing embers. On many nights he had listened to Rebecca tell the children stories about a magical kingdom of heat and light that existed between the coals, inhabited by people with thick dragon skins, who lived in houses of fire and ate coal and ashes. He wondered what it would be like to live in such a world, a total absence of rain and fog, where unremitting torridity was the normal condition. The Inspector shivered and pulled his chair closer to the fire.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-THREE

Inspector Wise responded as quickly as possible to the unexpected but imperious summons from Baron Rothstein. He had wakened still feeling unwell, but he thought that perhaps at least the tide of the Fairhaven case was finally about to turn in his favor. He was not certain he had learned all there was to know about Lady Fairhaven’s involvement with the two brothers, but he did not anticipate any fresh revelations on this score from a talk with the wealthy financier. Lady Abbott had disclosed to him that, although Sir

Rothstein's marriage of eight years was generally considered one of mutual admiration and respect, recently his name had begun to be linked with a certain Lady Gosford. However, like the good banker he had been groomed to be, Abraham Rothstein was the soul of discretion. Further, although Lady Fairhaven and the baron had shared certain interests, notably in the improvement of estate working conditions, it was unclear whether their relationship went beyond an exchange of views on sewage arrangements and schools. As for Alfred, the acknowledged black sheep of the family, while Lady Fairhaven had put in an appearance at one or two of his lavish entertainments at Halton, it seemed he was more interested in shocking than in seducing. Yet it must be a development of some importance for the baron to have demanded his presence so emphatically.

“Still hard at work on the case, Inspector?” Rothstein inquired, as Inspector Wise was ushered into the library. “Work is a good thing. When someone once suggested to my grandfather that surely he would not want his children fixated on work to the exclusion of more important pursuits, he replied, ‘I am sure I should wish them to give mind, and soul, and body, and heart and everything to work.’ That is the Rothstein credo. Besides, hard work endears us to the English. It is a very English virtue, which visitors from across the Channel invariably comment on with equal amounts amazement and disdain.”

“Your message said you had information for me, sir.” The Rothsteins were famous for their messaging network extending throughout Europe, unrivaled in its speed and accuracy, so that even heads of state often learned of crucial political developments only after the Rothsteins obtained the information. Sometimes indeed their source was

the Rothsteins themselves. They were well-known for their distrust of standard mechanisms of communication, such as the telegraph. In this case, a special courier had arrived for the Inspector, creating a minor stir at the Whitechapel station.

“I like helping my friends with their work, Inspector, and I regard you as a friend,” Rothstein said expansively, but Wise knew he used the word only in its most distant sense. He had the distinct impression that whatever he was about to hear would be entirely to the banker’s advantage.

“As you may know, the House of Rothstein deals with investments and loans on a vast scale - railroads, steel foundries, textiles, sometimes even war and peace.” He smiled sardonically, a grin the Inspector thought somewhat ravening. “But we have connections in the world of finance at all levels. And because of these connections, I have heard something of interest to me... and, I think, of interest to you. It concerns the financial affairs of Sir Gregory Fairhaven.”

Inspector Wise felt his ears prick with curiosity but kept his expression neutral. “The baronet has the reputation of paying his debts.”

“So he does, so he does,” replied Rothstein with satisfaction, “but, until Lady Fairhaven’s convenient demise, that was all about to come to a rapid end. To speak bluntly, Sir Gregory was teetering on the verge of bankruptcy. A string of bad luck at cards and the races had demolished his resources. He had borrowed up to the hilt against his own property and had pretty much hocked everything of value that he controlled. As I am sure you are well aware, Inspector, although imprisonment for debt has been abolished, for a gentleman to be unable to honor his gambling debts is a horrifying social crime, while to formally declare insolvency invites scandal of irremediable proportions.

Because of a foresighted marriage contract, he could not get his hands on Lady Alicia's holdings... *until her death*, when her property and bequests would revert to him."

Abraham Rothstein's demeanor expressed the contempt of a cautious and intelligent money manager for the fiscally irresponsible.

The Inspector raised his eyebrows. This did indeed put a different light on the grieving, albeit philandering, husband. Sir Gregory must have perceived himself to be in grim straits indeed. "I have heard nothing of this... problem."

"Not surprising," Rothstein said complacently. "He has been very clever at juggling his assets to keep people quiet. Also, when there's money in the family, most creditors are inclined to be patient. They hope that, to avoid disgrace, they will be paid eventually, if not by their debtor then by someone interested in protecting the family's reputation. But I've seen the notes, I've reviewed the books. Sir Gregory was facing ruin. In fact, the 'business' he has alluded to that kept him in town the morning following the ball had the express purpose of staving off bankruptcy proceedings."

Inspector Wise thought about this for a moment. "And now, miraculously, he is saved."

"It is a rather Christ-like miracle," the Jewish banker said dryly. "Lady Fairhaven's death literally absolves Sir Gregory from his sins of profligacy."

Inspector Wise did not put much store in miracles, whether Jewish or Christian. However, he wished the banker good *shabbos* and took his leave. As he made his way down the broad steps, it occurred to him that, while the revelations regarding the baronet's recently averted financial catastrophe cast reasonable suspicion on Sir Gregory, they were also useful in directing official inquiry away from the House of Rothstein.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY--THREE

Constable William Benjamin Brown waited impatiently at Victoria Station. It was a surprisingly mild Sunday and the station was crowded with families off for a half-day in the country, clerks and gentlemen traveling on business, hawkers, costers, England on the move. A pair of determined lovers, picnic basket in hand, despite the glowering skies, lingered by the edge of the tracks, gazing discreetly but amorously into each other's eyes. As close as she apparently dared, the girl's chaperone hovered and fumed, casting furious glances down the tracks, as though the absence of the train which would carry them to the country and respectability had occurred purposely to humiliate her. Standing at a safer distance, a couple of black-suited gentlemen conferred in low but important voices. A country parson strode about, perhaps eager to be home and preparing his next Sunday's sermon. On one of the nearby benches, a grandmotherly figure snored softly, her hand tightly clutching a worn carpetbag. A sweeper made his way through the crowd, ineffectually moving dirt and debris from one place to another.

The young constable smiled slightly, recognizing a couple of pickpockets. He thought of the copy of the William Frith painting "The Railway Station" hanging in Inspector Wise's office, two detectives intercepting a thief in the act. William Benjamin Brown studied these two rascals carefully but could perceive no overt criminal activity. Never mind. He had bigger fish to fry today. He felt industrious among these pleasure-seekers. Working on one of his precious free Sundays, taking initiative, chasing after every clue, no matter how slight, was an image of himself he relished. Sergeant Murdoch

could not fail to be impressed. The constable was fairly certain that Sergeant Murdoch had forgotten about the missing Fairhaven gardenboy, but he, William Benjamin Brown, had not. Pursue every lead, the Sergeant often told him. Be diligent. Well, William Brown intended to make something of himself, and now was as good a time as any to begin.

Although not officially on duty, the constable was dressed in full regalia, which he trusted would give him the necessary authority he hoped he would need if his investigations ended up anywhere useful. He took special pride in the round, brimmed police helmet, the strap snug under his lower lip, the brass buttons down the front, and the braided sleeves of the uniform. Even though it was uncomfortable, dressed in this uniform he felt he was someone who mattered, and he cherished the extra authority it bestowed. He felt somehow diminished without it.

A great billow of steam, a sonorous whistle, and the tall smokestacks belching out spumes of smoke announced the arrival of the train, interrupting Brown's thoughts. He quickly bought three buns and *Punch* for reading matter. Clutching his second-class ticket, he thought ruefully that not only was he taking his own time, he was spending his own money on this little venture. However, with a salary higher than that of most other police forces in the country, he could afford it. And it would be well worth it to see the impressed astonishment on the Sergeant's face.

"Gardenboy? What gardenboy?" Brown could hear Sergeant Murdoch saying. He would reply patiently, not allowing even a hint of triumph into his voice.

"Lady Fairhaven's gardenboy, sir," he would explain. "The one that ran off." Brown permitted himself a vision of the dawning comprehension that would slowly

spread across the face of his superior. He nimbly boarded the green carriage, being sure to assist the old granny who had just managed to rouse herself at the shriek of the whistle. Heating had just been introduced into railway cars last year, and the interior of the carriage was steamy and humid. After the frigid cold of the station platform, it seemed to Constable Brown he had entered a semi-tropical paradise, a region as exotic as Africa and as full of as yet undiscovered promise. When the train started up again, Constable Brown was conscious of a rocking motion and a growing sense of speed. He handed his ticket to the blue-uniformed guard who walked briskly down the aisle.

The constable smiled contentedly. He loved the train. To him, it represented all that was best about England: progress, power, and promptness. He surveyed the shifting urban landscape with satisfaction, the factories, cathedrals, shops, and houses rolling by in quick succession. The day was his, the sun was shining, albeit damply, on the British Empire, Queen Victoria was about to become Empress of India, and Constable William Benjamin Brown was about to make something of himself.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-FIVE

Although the constable could not have known it, another interested party in the Fairhaven case was also aboard the very same train. Constable Brown had never met Arabella Bowdoin, but even if he had, he might not have recognized her. The demimonde wore a simple dress of light brown wool, a bonnet of black felt, and a tight-fitting jacket. Arabella's gloved hands were modestly concealed in a fur muff. Her hair

was pulled back in a sleek catagan at the nape of her neck. Free of makeup, her face looked younger, more vulnerable.

While for Constable Brown this railway expedition constituted a great adventure, Arabella had made this particular journey many times before. Two stops before the constable was to disembark, in a quaint Midlands hamlet, Arabella had stashed her treasure, little George, Georgie, as Arabella liked to call him, and she was conscientious about checking up on her flesh and blood surety at least once every month or so.

Arabella gazed at the window, but whereas Constable Brown contemplated the verdant meadows that reminded him of his childhood, Arabella smiled at the reflection of her own face. She decided she was looking well these days, that no one would take her for the mother of a young son. In point of fact, very few people knew about Georgie, who was now almost two years old, toddling about and learning to make funny little sentences. Even Kate, clever woman that she was, had not yet discovered the secret, although she found Arabella's regular protestations of visiting her sickly mother in the countryside suspect. But Georgie was Arabella's insurance policy, better than insurance really. She knew dreadful stories of people who took out insurance policies on their own children and then, in order to cash in, poisoned them off or did them in through other foul means. Arabella was fond of Georgie, who was a complaisant child, rarely bad-tempered, and she was quite content that his welfare meant her welfare.

Just as very few people knew about Georgie, few knew that Arabella's relationship with Sir Gregory had not begun in London, but in Aldershot, where he had traveled two years ago as part of a parliamentary commission investigating the effects of the Contagious Diseases Acts. A night of boredom flourished into a week of frolicsome



pleasure, at the end of which Sir Gregory returned regretfully, but carelessly, to London, never imagining he would see the lovely lady of the night again. A month later, Arabella discovered herself to be in a family way.

She bore the pregnancy patiently, and she bore the child patiently too, realizing he might represent more than a mouth to feed. Rather than a burden, if she handled things properly, he just might be a ticket to a better life. Arabella was fairly certain he was Sir Gregory's. A fair and large-boned baby, he was the spitting image of the baronet. And when she reached London, and managed to track down Sir Gregory in the process of fulfilling his elected responsibilities, she made certain he was in no doubt that the child was his.

“Meet yer son,” she'd said matter-of-factly, after arranging a clandestine meeting.

There ensued a delicate, though by no means unenjoyable, negotiation, once Sir Gregory determined that the girl was not out to ruin his life but would be content to have her infant well looked after, and for herself to be set up comfortably in a high-class establishment, where she would not work too hard, and could be considered his special plaything. Sir Gregory had liked Arabella from the start, and he was not displeased he had the opportunity to renew his acquaintance with her, so long as it was on terms he controlled.

At first Arabella was content to escape from whoring on the streets with filthy, uncouth soldiers and to have the resources to establish her son in a healthful, rural environment. But as time passed, she became shrewder. Kate's was all very well for the moment, it gave her something to do during the long periods while Sir Gregory and his family were at their country estate, but she wanted more for herself, and for her son. Sir

Gregory preferred to ignore the child's existence, and Arabella knew he already had two perfectly legitimate male offspring. Still, if she played her cards right, she thought Georgie could be taken into the baronet's fold, given assurance of assistance if not recognition of patrimony. Georgie's existence created an undercurrent of tension running beneath their fun and games, but in an odd way it gave added spice to their trysts. Both lovers knew, even as she pleased him in daring and original ways, that Arabella could make life very unpleasant for Sir Gregory.

Waiting at the station, a well-fed country housewife stood, little George in her arms, her two older children waving and smiling. And well they should, thought Arabella, as she certainly paid their mother well enough to keep Georgie fat and happy. It was true, he looked more like Sir Gregory every time she saw him. The guard courteously handed her down the carriage steps.

"Georgie," she said, holding out her arms. "My little man. Come to mama."

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

As the train approached Staffordshire, Constable Brown recognized the undulating hills and good farmland planted with hedgerows of hawthorn and dog roses. He was a country boy himself but had run away to London when he was eighteen, determined to have a life more adventurous than the hard-scrabble tenant farming of his father, who was saddled with the impossible task of providing for nine children and a sickly wife. He sent a few shillings to them every week when he could and swore that would never be his fate.

As the train pulled into the little station, William Brown fairly leaped off the bottom step. He felt in his bones that something important would happen today. Inspector Wise was a great believer in ratiocination, but he knew Sergeant Murdoch trusted his intuition as much as the painstakingly detailed process of scientific detection. And so did Constable Brown.

He caught a ride in a wagon laden with sacks of flour, a wheel of cheese, and a broken harrow, heading from the station toward the country. The winter work of the English countryside was in progress, with farm laborers, mostly adolescent boys, driving ploughs in long straight lines to break up the ground for the spring corn crop. The fields would then be harrowed to crush the remaining clumps of earth. Looking at them, Constable Brown felt a familiar surge of relief that he was where he was instead of where they were. He knew that this was also the time of year that lambs were born, and the winter corn threshed that had been harvested during the preceding summer and fall. Both jobs entailed backbreaking, endless effort and uncertain outcome, not unlike, he realized suddenly, police work. For a moment he worried that he had not so much broken free as exchanged one drudgery for another. Then he reminded himself that the monotony of farm labor paled in comparison to the momentous responsibilities of a policeman. Surely the life of a human being mattered more than the life of a lamb. Reassured, William Benjamin Brown turned to face his day with renewed enthusiasm.

The gardenboy for whom the constable was searching hailed from a typical little village, with one small thoroughfare, a gray, one-storied schoolhouse, a crumbling parish church, a blacksmith's forge, and a few shops. As he made his way down the dusty

street, Constable Brown heard a passing bell ringing the nine tailors. Somewhere a man was on his deathbed.

At first it appeared Constable Brown's efforts were doomed to failure. His initial inquiries were met with suspicious denials of any pertinent knowledge, no matter how tangential. The villagers whom he waylaid seemed never to have heard of a young lad called Joe who had been apprenticed to a London gardener at a fine house. Finally, an old crone took him aside.

"I m'oughtn't to be tellin' you this," she whispered, plucking at his arm, "but you seem a good enough lad yourself, tho' ye are the police, and I know ye only be doin' yer job. It's Joseph Winkeep ye be askin' after." Until that time Constable Brown had not had the benefit of a surname, as the servants at the Fairhaven home had known the boy only as Joe. "It's a sad enough story, and all of us hereabouts knows it, tho' we may pretend as we don't." Constable Brown waited expectantly, but the old woman seemed suddenly to have dried up.

"It's a mighty thirsty day," she suggested with a wink.

The constable was slightly shocked. The woman could be his grandmother.

"There's a fine little public house down the road."

Constable Brown, accompanied by his newfound friend, entered the dingy front room of The Cock and Bull, stumbling over a slumbering figure who apparently had not bothered to depart the previous night before commencing today's imbibing.

"Don't mind him," his companion said reassuringly. "It's only Timmy the Lame, what pretty much lives here waitin' on odd jobs and such." She found an out-of-the-way table and settled herself in the corner.

“Gin would suit me fine,” she prompted, “I’ll have the Real Knock-Me-Down, if it’s all the same to you, sir,” showing herself in Brown’s appalled eyes as a true connoisseur of cheap liquor.

“A Real Knock-Me-Down,” Brown said weakly to the publican, seeing his illustrious future career beginning to slip away from him.

“Two?” replied the barkeep.

“I’ll take tea,” Constable Brown answered, as the barkeep and the old woman exchanged pitying glances regarding the decline in intestinal fortitude of the British police force.

“Now, Joseph Winkeep,” Brown reminded his guest.

“As I said, it were a sorrowful situation. Anyone might well ha done th’ same thing under the circumstances. Mother dead these two years, a passle o’ little ‘uns, an’ Albert Winkeep thrown off the earl’s estate for poachin’. ‘E had no way t’ keep body and soul together, poor man, and he was facin’ prison for sure. Albert were a good man, that is when he warn’t in his cups. As th’ sayin’ is, ‘First, th’ man takes th’ drink, then th’ drink takes a drink, then th’ drink takes th’ man.’” The old woman paused meaningfully, seeming to feel she had said all that needed to be said. Then, glancing at Constable Brown’s face, she decided to help him a bit further. “That’s how it were wit’ Joseph’s father.”

“But what happened to the family?”

“Poor Albert parceled out his children as best he could, but Sam Endicott, the gardener, who is from this village and were visitin’ his old mother, allowed as how he needed a helper, an’ he took Joseph.”

“Took him?” William echoed stupidly.

“He were supposed to teach him his trade, like an apprentice, and turn him free after seven years or some such, but it were a scandal all the same. Ye see, poor Albert naturally couldn’t pay anything to Sam, and most people ‘round here knew Sam to be a strange fellow, some called him perverse. There was a feelin’ in the village that he didn’t care about the money because he intended to teach that poor lad more than gardenin’, if ye take my meanin’.” She paused, shooting Constable Brown a telling look. Brown blushed. He knew of course that such things went on, but he associated such moral laxity with the vicissitudes of London, not with the simpler and purer countryside.

“And now that Joseph is come home, his family is worrit that Sam Endicott will come after him, seein’ as how he didn’t likely get his money’s worth.”

“Where can I find Joseph?”

The old woman smiled craftily. “I’ve a powerful thirst.” Constable Brown motioned to the barkeep, wondering whether Inspector Wise might reimburse him expenses.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-SEVEN

Joseph had taken refuge in the cottage of an aunt, a harried woman who looked fifty but, Constable Brown guessed, was barely over thirty, her hair pulled back in a bun and sleeves pushed up exposing reddened, scrawny arms. A baby of about a year dressed in a dirty nightgown rested on her hip, while another slightly older child played in the dirt. Constable Brown noticed slates blown off the roof and the ill-fitting windows and

doors. Peering into the dim interior of the cottage, he could make out another two or three older children sitting together on a rumpled bed, and an old man in a smock rocking by the glowing coals of a tamped-down fire. A potato sack was spread out as a hearth rug. Cold ten-to-one pies in chipped bowls were laid out on a crude wooden table in the center of the room. In one of the windows, a single struggling geranium stood out brightly against the gloom.

“I don’ know who ye mean,” the woman said tiredly. It was the third time she had made this statement.

Constable Brown wasn’t sure of the ethics of the action he was about to take, but he casually held up a shilling. He wondered again if these lost shillings might be claimed as professional expenses. The woman delayed while she wiped the baby’s snotty nose with the hem of her skirt and quickly pocketed the shilling.

“Joseph!” she called, so loudly she startled both the constable and the baby, who started to cry.

Constable Brown could see right away that the boy was afraid. Of course, everyone was afraid of the police, everyone felt they had something to hide.

“I don’ know nuthin’,” Joseph volunteered truculently.

“Tell me about Lady Fairhaven’s garden,” Constable Brown encouraged gently. The question seemed to surprise Joseph, and he smiled a little.

“It were a beautiful garden. Cain’t say as I much liked Lunnun—too much noise an’ dirt fer me.” He took a breath, looking down at the floor. “An’ Mr. Endicott were a cruel man. But ‘er ladyship’s garden were lovely.”

“Roses, eh?”

“Well, it warn’t jus’ th’ roses, tho’ they was special enuff. She ‘ad primroses, an’ violets, lilacs, pansies, peonies, an’ great bunches of Queen Anne’s lace. It took me a long while to learn all them names. Even in winter, she wanted th’ garden well-kept. I were good at my work, I clipped th’ leaves an’ did th’ fertilizin’. It warn’t th’ work I minded, jus’ Mr. Endicott.”

“Did you run away because of Mr. Endicott, Joseph?” Brown asked. “You didn’t do anything wrong, you know,” he added, feeling immeasurably sorry for the boy, who had become very still.

“I were afraid,” he said at last.

“Of Mr. Endicott?”

Joseph looked up into Constable Brown’s open, guileless face. “I were afraid of him, and what he did with me. But it warn’t on ‘is account I left. I knew it might go bad fer my pa if I come back ‘ere. I ran away when I overheard th’ other servants talkin’ that her ladyship were murdered.”

“That was a terrible thing, Joseph, but it didn’t have anything to do with you.” Constable Brown allowed a slight interrogatory note into his voice, and thought proudly that he had been paying attention when Sergeant Murdoch and the Inspector put suspects through their paces.

“But she died th’ next day arter she give me th’ note.” Joseph stopped abruptly, as though wishing the words back into his mouth.

“Yes, the note,” Brown said equably, although up until this moment he had absolutely no knowledge of the existence of any note. Joseph scowled at him obstinately, his lips tightly compressed.



“Let’s walk a bit, Joseph,” Brown suggested. Reluctantly, the boy began to move away from the lopsided door frame of the cottage. Brown thrust his hands into his overcoat pocket and felt suddenly inspired.

“I’m sorry to have interrupted your meal, Joseph. I don’t suppose you are hungry.” Joseph said nothing but looked hopefully at the constable.

“Must be a lot of mouths to feed at your aunt’s.” Still the child made no response. “I happen to have a bun here, a real railroad bun straight from Victoria Station. I bought it before I left, but all that bumping about has taken my appetite. Here,” thrusting the slightly crushed roll toward Joseph, “eat it before it turns stale.” At last the boy’s mouth opened, and the bread went in.

“So now, Joseph, what happened to that note?” Brown pressed. The mouth, once having been opened, surrendered to its fate.

“I don’ know wot happened to it. She give it t’ me, secret-like, late that afternoon. She told me not to tell a soul, but to be a good boy, an’ run it t’ Doctor Talbot’s. She patted me arm, an’ she give me a shilling.”

“And then?”

“And then nuthin’. I run it to Doctor Talbot’s on Great Ormond Street, like she tol’ me. I rung th’ bell in th’ back, and th’ ‘ousekeeper answered. I asked to give th’ note to Dr. Talbot personal, like she tol’ me, but th’ ‘ousekeeper jus’ laughed in me face. Then she called th’ crooked man, so I give th’ note t’ him.”

“And you weren’t tempted to read whatever was inside this mysterious note? You didn’t open it?” Joseph turned bright red.

“I did open it, fer I were curious. ‘Oo wouldn’t be? Why were she usin’ me instead of a real messenger or sendin’ it by post? But it didn’t do me no good. I cain’t read.”

Constable Brown was disappointed, but still thought he might have stumbled on an important piece of information. He could see the tears welling in Joseph’s eyes and looked with pity on the boy.

“It wasn’t your fault, Joseph. You only did what your mistress asked you. As for Mr. Endicott, I shall talk to my superior and see that he doesn’t harm you again or make any kind of trouble for your father.” Constable Brown only hoped this would not be an idle boast. He knew that amendments to the Poor Laws had attempted to regulate the child apprenticeship system, and that masters could go to jail for up to three years for wilful neglect of or malicious assault on an indentured child. He made a fervent prayer that Sam Endicott could be found and prosecuted.

Joseph swallowed the last of the bun and sniffed. “She were a beautiful lady. Like a flower ‘erself she were.”

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-EIGHT

Under Miss Gelbstein’s supervision, those members of the Wise family deemed well enough to brave the chill outdoors embarked on their usual Sunday afternoon walk. This time, in deference to the family’s delicate health, Miss Gelbstein decreed that they venture closer to home and selected Victoria Park, only a few miles from the East End. Miss Gelbstein compelled the wearing of woolens, button-up boots, and overcoats for

David, Sarah, and Rebecca and hoped for the best. Inspector Wise insisted on accompanying them, although to Miss Gelbstein's practiced eye, he did not appear recovered, despite having taken a true *shabbat* rest the preceding day.

At this time of year, even the most sympathetic observer would have to conclude that Victoria Park was a dismal place. A gray miasma rose from the moist ground. The trees were denuded of their leaves, which instead carpeted the ground in a soggy russet blanket. Across the brackish lake, a solitary swan made its way, its dirty white wings mirroring the shapes of the clouds overhead.

Inspector Wise walked several paces ahead with David, engaged in some discussion that caused both to look intense. Rebecca was struck by how closely the two resembled each other, David seeming merely a softer, less formed version of his father. Sarah as usual straggled to the rear, on the lookout for any unusual species of insect that might have braved the winter cold. Rebecca, strolling under the watchful eye of Miss Gelbstein, suddenly noticed Dr. Talbot striding towards them. He glanced hopefully in her direction, and she bowed hastily, so that he would have the opportunity to acknowledge her. The doctor tipped his hat, and Rebecca said graciously, "Good afternoon, Dr. Talbot."

"Good afternoon, Miss Wise. It is a pleasure to encounter you here. I called at the house to see how the little ones were getting along – thankfully, all seem much improved – and Martha mentioned you were out for a quick turn in the park." He smiled disarmingly at the pair. Miss Gelbstein, unhappy with Dr. Talbot's persistent intrusions, as she chose to see them, on the Wise family, shifted her position only marginally on the path so that Dr. Talbot was forced to negotiate the border.

After an exchange of some pleasantries, he strode ahead, saying that he should greet her father. The position of the family changed again, with Miss Gelbstein turning back to scold Sarah about her laggardly pace and David running back as well, waving a stick he had found and shouting, “En garde! En garde!!”

Rebecca found herself directly behind the two men. Dr. Talbot’s head was bent in concentration toward the Inspector. Rebecca could imagine the brightness of his eyes, the way his expressive features became fully involved in the task of communication. His hands were clasped behind his back. With a start, she noticed his fingers were moving in a restless, yet purposive pattern. Left hand open, index finger of the right hand placed against it; left hand palm extended, fourth finger separated from the first three, pinkie bent, index finger of the right hand touching the fourth finger; left hand palm extended, right hand making a v with the index and third finger... Over and over, confident that at some point he would catch Rebecca’s attention, Dr. Talbot was fingerspelling I - LOVE - YOU - I - LOVE - YOU.

Rebecca watched the fingers, fascinated. She could scarcely believe the liberty he was taking, so much bolder than the lingering handshakes, teasing, or foot nudges she had heard about from slightly older girls. She looked around quickly, to see if anyone had noticed, but Miss Gelbstein was holding forth with Sarah, who appeared engrossed in a plant, and besides, Dr. Talbot was clever, no one else in the family knew fingerspelling anyway. Yes, Rebecca was shocked, but her heart beat faster as she looked at the busily twisting fingers in front of her. In that moment, she wanted nothing more than to continue to read their strange, private language.

## CHAPTER SEVENTY-NINE

When the Inspector and his family returned home, Martha anxiously gave him a message from Lady Abbott which had arrived soon after the family departed for Victoria Park. In a delicate script, she asked that Wise meet her at a West End chocolate shop at 4:00 that afternoon. Checking his pocket-watch, Inspector Wise decided he could just make the appointment. As he traveled across town, the Inspector meditated on the contrasts of rich and poor in London that could exist in such close proximity. Crowded slums and malodorous passageways quickly resolved into the prosperous shops and luxurious lifestyle of Mayfair. He also reflected on his pleasure at this unanticipated meeting. He was caught off guard by how hopeful he felt at this moment, despite the dreary weather. Whether this hope was in regard to moving forward on the Fairhaven case or something more personal he decided not to ponder.

He found Lady Abbott easily enough, already seated at the kind of table he always felt was too small for real eating. A hat, bedecked with a few tasteful flowers and bows, perched jauntily on her head. A fur-lined mantle and some sort of iridescent deep green woolen dress with lavender flounces completed the ensemble.

“Thank you for coming, Inspector.” Penelope Abbott held out her gloved hand as he seated himself. “I apologize for the lateness of my request. It would not be seemly for me to seek you out at the police station and...” she groped for the right words, “I did not want you to take the trouble of calling on me again.” She seemed flustered, uncertain, unlike her usual serene self, and the Inspector wondered with a sudden sinking in his gut whether this was an attempt at polite disengagement. Confronted with this possibility, he

dared to look directly into those arresting eyes. Lady Abbott quickly turned her glance aside, but Inspector Wise thought it possible that at least she was not entirely indifferent to him.

“How are you feeling, Inspector? You appear somewhat improved.”

Simon stifled his cough as best he could. “I am certainly better,” he agreed, reflecting that being an object of sympathy was not what he hoped for from this woman.

“I am glad to hear so. Well then, Inspector, I have learned something disturbing that I thought must come to your attention immediately.” She wavered once again, torn between her obligation to reveal her information and an urge to withdraw from the unpleasantness of the impending conversation. Inspector Wise merely regarded her in anticipative silence.

Lady Penelope took a sip of the chocolate, which was disagreeably cool, then carried on. “It is something about Sir Gregory. I still have difficulty imagining it. On the other hand, I did not feel it right to withhold what I had learned.” She shook her head with a small, determined motion. “Very well. I have heard it said, on good authority, that he actually boasted of encouraging his mistress, that appalling little trollop, to inflict some harm on Lady Alicia.”

“Can you be more precise, Lady Abbott?”

“An acquaintance of mine is married to Lord Ellingale. She recently passed along this story to me as a result of my continuing to pester everyone I know for more information about Lady Alicia. About six weeks ago, in late October, Lord Ellingale was having an after-dinner glass of port at his club. Sir Gregory was also there with several of his cronies, setting up a card game. Apparently, they were all rather drunk and

irritatingly boisterous. Lord Ellingale specifically overheard Sir Gregory declare that the girl he had taken up with had some silly idea that, if his wife were to die, she would have a more prominent place in his affections, and in his pocketbook. Far from discouraging such fantasies, Sir Gregory recounted to his assembled admirers that he had said to the woman: ‘It is true that without a wife to find out about it, to inconvenience and pester me, I might be more inclined to set you up in an apartment of your own. The philosophers say each man... or woman... must act according to his or her enlightened self-interest.’ Everyone laughed and thought this a great witticism, which is a commentary no doubt on their advanced state of inebriation.”

“I don’t know if I would consider that to be encouragement of a felonious act,” Inspector Wise said dubiously.

“But it might work mischief on the ignorant imagination of a young woman with no prospects and no hope other than the fluctuating generosity of an easily bored landed gentleman. Besides, there’s something else. Lord Ellingale also told his wife that later, when Sir Gregory was even more deeply in his cups, he confided that ‘it would be better if Lady Fairhaven were dead. Or if I were dead. One or the other of us must go.’ Lord Ellingale protested, and asked to know what he could possibly mean, but Sir Gregory just shrugged it off.”

“Thank you for your diligence, Lady Abbott,” the Inspector said sincerely. “This information is most beneficial. If I may say so, you would make a good detective.” Lady Penelope smiled into her chocolate before taking another sip.

Taken alone, such statements might have little meaning. Yet he knew what Lady Abbott could not, namely that Sir Gregory Fairhaven had been poised on the brink of

insolvency, and that his wife's death was an extremely fortuitous development. Knowing how rarely such fortunate coincidences occurred in life made Inspector Wise regard Sir Gregory with suspicion. Overshadowed by the shame of financial collapse, Sir Gregory might truly have felt that, unless he were somehow able to lay his hands on his wife's money, his own suicide might be the only acceptable way out of the dilemma.

"You have rendered me real assistance, Lady Abbott. I am grateful," he added, expecting her to stand and take her leave.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY

Lady Penelope picked up her cup, forgot to drink, and plunked it into the saucer with a nervous jolt. "There is something else as well." The Inspector waited patiently, not at all reluctant to remain in her presence a few moments longer. "You know, Inspector, it is a curious thing to pry into someone else's life, even the life of a friend, someone you thought you knew well. I discovered something else about Alicia through my meddlesome inquiries, something that is perhaps not really surprising when you think about it, but which startled me nonetheless, if only because I did not know it. I cannot see how it can help you in the investigation of her death, but it has troubled me."

"I will treat whatever it is you are about to reveal with the utmost delicacy," said Inspector Wise, hoping this was the right thing to say.

"Do you remember four or five years ago a series of articles published in *The Times*, an expose of unsavory lying-in houses? The articles all had a mystery by-line, a



woman who signed herself only A.B. A.B., Inspector. Alicia Broadmoor, Lady Fairhaven's maiden name. *She* was the undercover investigator."

Inspector Wise remembered the incident quite well. The series had been highly regarded, raising damning questions about abortions and baby-farming in several London lying-in establishments. A.B. had investigated homes with an unusual number of death certificate applications for infants and had revealed many questionable practices. That Lady Alicia Fairhaven was the mastermind behind this unmasking stunned him. Although the writings had garnered much praise, they undoubtedly antagonized those miscreants profiting from the unscrupulous baby-farming. Was it possible Lady Fairhaven's murder had nothing to do with her husband's gambling, but was related instead to something altogether different? He felt dizzy.

"She was quite clever about it all," Lady Penelope continued, oblivious to the Inspector's shocked expression. "She persuaded friends - *I* was not one of them - and servants to write replies to advertisements for infants in appropriate vocabulary with credible misspellings and even tear stains to avoid suspicion."

"Perhaps she worried you would not approve," the Inspector ventured, still not knowing what to make of this revelation.

"Possibly she thought I would view such an undertaking, with its potential to condemn poor and desolate women, as anti-feminist. But Alicia rarely was concerned with what other people thought of her. No, I am afraid she kept it from me because I could not sufficiently enter into the fun, the drama of it all. She knew I could not enjoy it as she did, and that knowledge would have dampened her pleasure."

It seemed entirely in character that the woman his inquiry had revealed would have delighted in such a surreptitious and thrilling adventure. However, on consideration, the Inspector doubted whether any information Lady Fairhaven had unearthed five years ago, no matter how incriminating, could be directly implicated in her death. If he remembered correctly, no prosecutions had resulted from A.B.'s allegations. Nevertheless, this information required further action.

“If you could provide me with the name of your source at the *Times*, I will investigate whether Lady Fairhaven might have threatened someone through her deception to such an extent that they would contemplate her murder.”

“Of course, Inspector. I'm glad to know this might be of some help to you. And now, if you will excuse me, I really must leave.” Lady Penelope rose, pulling up her mantle as protection against the weather outside. A sprinkle of snow was beginning to fall.

Inspector Wise suddenly realized he might never see her again. He wanted to say something more. Knowing the disparity in their social positions, he scarcely dared continue. Yet it was impossible for him to remain silent. He embarked on his final sally after recollecting a favorite saying of Zadok's: Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

“Lady Abbott,” he said stiffly. She stopped in some surprise and looked at him inquisitively. “Despite the dismal circumstances, the opportunity to meet you has been an unalloyed pleasure,” he blurted out, watching her face with the sense that some future aspect of his fate hung in the balance. Lady Penelope inclined her head, looking vaguely pleased, but said nothing in reply.

As he signaled a hansom and handed her in, the Inspector decided that the outcome of their encounter was ambiguous, both in terms of his case and his heart. The snow was falling more heavily now. He knew well enough that in the normal course of events their social circles would never intersect. The cab pulled away, splashing flecks of mud onto the Inspector's greatcoat. Watching as Lady Abbott's conveyance receded into the distance, he brooded about what excuse he could conjure up to see her again.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

Rebecca lay in bed, listening to the comforting sounds of the house shutting down beneath her room, and thought about Dr. Talbot. She appreciated the glimpses, admittedly few and far between, he allowed her of his childhood. For instance, this afternoon, while they were walking, he had let slip that when he was a boy of no more than eight or nine, he had been given the nickname of Disputax.

"And why was that?" asked Rebecca.

"Because I seldom accepted any fact unless it was supported by sound and convincing reasons," replied the doctor, smiling a little at the pomposity of his childish self.

"Even then the scientist!" Rebecca exclaimed.

Another time he had admitted to worrying his governess day in and day out with questions such as "Where does the wool go when there's a hole in the sock?" and "How do we make spittle?"

“Your poor governess!” Rebecca sympathized, but secretly she was charmed by these rare sightings of a vanished boy, in whom she recognized signs of the imaginative, inquisitive doctor she now knew.

Could the handsome and enigmatic Dr. Talbot be her “fate?” Rebecca cringed whenever she heard Miriam utter this expression, which sounded straight out of a penny dreadful novel, yet tonight its dark romance attracted her.

With the finger-spelling incident still as compelling in her mind as the performance of a virtuoso pianist, Rebecca dared to imagine a wedding night. She was in white, of course, simple lace with perhaps a few pearls, he was in... something else. It was thrilling enough to think of being alone, really alone, with Dr. Talbot, not even Emily anywhere in sight, but beyond the two of them standing breathlessly in close proximity, the pictures would not come. Although Miss Gelbstein was extremely forthcoming regarding the fundamentally inequitable economic basis of the institution of marriage, she had not really provided Rebecca with a clear understanding of what happened between men and women after marriage. When she had gotten up the courage to ask Miss Gelbstein directly, the latter had given her a hard look, then said sarcastically, “Have you never heard the expression, ‘Lie back and think of England?’ That is what all good English girls of proper breeding are supposed to do.” Miss Gelbstein could hardly contain her indignation. “But no woman should be forced to fulfill the sexual appetites of a man against her will, whether or not he is her husband. It is disgraceful and unjust.” Rebecca had been confused. What exactly did Miss Gelbstein mean by sexual appetites? And why would she want to think of England at a time like that? As it was, she could hardly stop thinking of Dr. Talbot.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

While Rebecca dreamed of Dr. Talbot, Sarah dreamed of insects. She felt vaguely ashamed of this fascination, it did not seem quite womanly. Still worse was the fact that an inevitable aspect of the study of insect life was, well, insect reproduction. Sarah, like her older sisters, knew very little about the sexual habits of humans. While both repulsed and intrigued, she felt it was time she learned. She knew that young women occasionally held hands with their beaux, even (daringly) exchanged a kiss if they were engaged, but there had to be more to it than that. She knew that babies were somehow part of the equation, and babies definitely didn't come from kissing. But after that it became unclear. Since Dr. Talbot's quasi-courtship of Rebecca, she returned again and again to the *Metamorphoses*, seeking the solution in ancient wisdom: "He kissed the sleeping lips, now soft, now warm, Then touched her breasts and cupped them in his hands; They were as though ivory had turned to wax, And wax to life, yielding, yet quick with breath." She thought that must be part of it.

The orderly world of insects was at once a solace and a worry. Were people like insects, only larger? Perhaps the one had nothing to do with the other. She read all she could, sneaking into obscure shelves of her father's library when he was too preoccupied and Miss Gelbstein too harried to notice the absence of books that might not be considered entirely appropriate for a young lady. In this manner, she had obtained a book by Dr. William Acton which told her that proper women have no sexual feelings. Only fallen women, loose women, and sometimes working women, which appeared to amount

to almost the same thing, were troubled by carnal urges much like those of men. She was not exactly sure what these cravings might be, but from the reference to them, their absence seemed a blessing.

With respect to her interest in the insect world, Sarah thought that Dr. Talbot had been a godsend. Somehow, with only the most delicate of hints dropped on her part, he seemed to intuit her passion for arthropods, and had the grace, at least outwardly, not to find it peculiar. Instead, on his frequent visits to the house, he surreptitiously brought her thin volumes with intriguing titles and meticulously drawn illustrations in colored India inks.

Sarah sometimes thought of herself as a human pupa, shaped like an adult, lying quietly, but with great changes about to occur within her. Some day she would emerge as a butterfly and astonish everyone.

After much begging, she had persuaded her father to permit the introduction of a glass-encased ant farm into the household on the grounds of its educational value for all the children. Sarah had carefully mounted a campaign of logical discourse to win her father's approval. Catching him in a rare relaxed mood one Sunday, reading the *Times* with his slippers up on a stool in front of the fire, Sarah marshaled her arguments. Ants were cleanly and industrious, she pointed out, emphasizing values she thought of importance to her father. Unlike cats, they were not selfish creatures that put their own needs first but labored tirelessly for the good of all. They were not lazy or playful, and their sole purpose in life was to create order for their community.

The Inspector had raised his head out of the newspaper at this last observation. “So you think I approve of an orderly community, do you, Sarah?” he asked, his severe tone belied by the smallest of grins.

“Yes, I do, Abba,” she answered. “You are not unlike an ant, you know. You scurry about all day and most of the night, doing your job, protecting the good citizens of London. You want an orderly world.” The Inspector gazed at her in mild surprise. At that moment, she knew she had won him over.

For several months the ant farm existed more in theory than reality. The two layers of glass had been carefully filled in with soil, and the entire contraption set on blocks of wood, which in turn rested in a shallow pan of water to keep the ants from straying. Conscientious expeditions to the countryside (Sarah felt sure country ants were healthier than city ants, the latter undoubtedly contaminated by the city’s filth and waste) resulted in the gathering of several ants. However, once transported to the Wises’ modest home, despite religious feeding with bits of bread soaked in honey and dead flies, they invariably died until Sarah realized that they were missing a queen. This discovery necessitated a further trip, the children equipped with glass jars, magnifying lens, trowels and tweezers. Despite the pacific (and damp) nature of the English landscape, Sarah, with David’s eager encouragement, imagined herself exploring Amazonian regions.

The successful identification and capture of a queen brought renewed activity to the ant colony. David wanted to name her Victoria, but Miss Gelbstein said this was disrespectful. Nevertheless, with the successful establishment of the ant colony, Sarah could not help noticing the many parallels between her ant queen and the illustrious ruler of the British Empire. For example, the ant queen, who was exceedingly fat and

relatively motionless, seemed to have no purpose in life other than the propagation of her species. Queen Victoria, who only recently had begun to break her self-imposed isolation since the Prince Consort's death, was also rotund. (Miriam had told her breathlessly once that the Queen's waist was only ten inches less than her entire height. Sarah wondered how Miriam learned such things).

And the Queen often complained of being overworked, yet it appeared she did very little, while her subjects scurried about, exploring Africa, winning India, claiming the Suez Canal, all to her greater glory. Father had recently read an announcement that a special Act of Parliament was planned to make her Empress of India.

As well, the Queen had had an awful lot of children, and they in turn had already begun to have a lot of children, so that sometimes it seemed that the doomsday prophecies of Malthus that Miss Gelbstein had warned them of might come true, if only for Victoria and her descendants, so that soon she would be able to populate an entire nation with her offspring's offspring. And it was also sadly true that, after mating with Victoria to provide all of these offspring, Prince Albert had died, just like a male ant. Sarah remembered that after a single mating flight, the queen can lay eggs for the rest of her life. She wondered if it had been like that for Albert and Victoria, and imagined them winged, flying in a swarm of European royalty, after which Victoria would chew off her wings, and settle down to a life of domestic tranquillity.

Sarah looked at her queen with renewed respect.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE



Initially Inspector Wise did not put much stock in Lady Fairhaven's undercover operation being connected with her death. It was years ago and, besides, nothing had come of it. A wealthy woman's amusement. But the news he and Sergeant Murdoch received Monday morning from an elated Constable Brown gave him pause. Probably this note that Brantley may – or may not – have read was completely innocent. Did Brantley even know how to read? Even if he had read it, what did that signify? Lady Fairhaven and Dr. Talbot shared many common interests, it was unsurprising that they should communicate in a variety of ways with each other. The Inspector recalled an argument between Miriam and David. Attempting to draw a train track in perspective Miriam insisted that, at the vanishing point, the parallel rails converged.

“Just look.” Miriam showed the sketch to her brother. “Where the train tracks are farther away, they start to come together.”

“No,” David corrected her in a superior tone, “it's an optical illusion. Our mathematics instructor explained it to us. The lines – or your train tracks - only *look like* they intersect. It is a postulate of Euclidean geometry that parallel lines will never meet.”

“That's a good word, David,” Simon praised the boy. David hesitated briefly, perhaps considering whether there might be value after all in studying all these tedious formulas and calculations. Finally, he shrugged.

“Sarah's not the only one who knows things,” he mumbled and to his father's fond eyes he seemed proud of himself.

Remembering this exchange, Inspector Wise made the determination that the current situation was most likely a case of parallel lines of inquiry seeming to converge, whereas the laws of nature guaranteed they would remain perpetually unconnected. The

evidence linking Brantley to either of the cases was circumstantial at best. An investigation discovered many different pieces, not all of them belonging to the same puzzle. He counseled himself toward patience.

Sergeant Murdoch, on the other hand, was positively salivating. Constable Brown's information cemented his conviction that Brantley was somehow involved in corrupt baby-farming, and perhaps something worse as well. Perhaps Lady Fairhaven had revived her nom de plume, discovered something about Brantley, wrote to Dr. Talbot to warn him about his protégé's reprehensible activities. Brantley not only could be responsible for the recent baby deaths, he could have cold-bloodedly murdered Lady Fairhaven to keep his secret from being discovered. Thomas Murdoch admitted to himself that his newly hatched theory was long on conjecture and innuendo and still somewhat short on hard evidence. Nevertheless, he knew in his heart he was right and it was only a matter of time before the truth came to light. He praised the constable lavishly, who blushed with pleasure and did not even mention the personal expenses he had incurred.

"Sir, we should speak with Dr. Talbot and Brantley to pursue these connections." Murdoch was reluctant to express his suspicions directly to his superior, anticipating the Inspector's scorn for the leaps it took to arrive at this conclusion.

"I don't disagree, Thomas, but let us first pay a visit to the *Times*. They may know whether A.B. had reactivated investigations that might have put a thriving if illegal baby-farming business in jeopardy." Murdoch assented with a faint shrug. He was certain the key lay with Brantley, not some self-important reporter. Still, the Inspector was the inspector and he had no choice but to follow his lead.

So it was that later that morning Inspector Wise and his sergeant paid a visit to the newspaper's offices on Queen Victoria Street. Only a few of the handful of reporters on the premises remembered the A.B. pieces and no one seemed to have much interest in talking to them about an old story. They confirmed that, as Inspector Wise recalled, no prosecutions had resulted and, after the initial morbid fascination, the public lost interest. The investigations, titillating though they had been, led nowhere. The policemen left, little wiser than when they arrived, but with the promise that the elderly editor John DeLane would contact the Inspector should he have any pertinent knowledge to relay. Nevertheless, although they learned nothing of great importance, Murdoch's devotion to his theory remained unshaken.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

The Inspector too was no longer completely persuaded by Dr. Talbot's faith in his assistant. Partly to assuage his own lingering doubts and partly to placate his sergeant, he agreed to re-interview both the doctor and Oliver Brantley and suggested they make their way directly to Gower Street. Wise and Murdoch found Dr. Talbot in his laboratory. What struck the Inspector first was the pungent chemical smell emanating from the room. He couldn't quite place the odor – ammonia, perhaps, or chloroform. Glass cabinets filled with instruments lined the far wall. A sharp light streamed from the gas jets used to illuminate the room even in the murky gray daylight. Attached to the left-hand wall was a stone-topped cabinet inset with iron sinks. A bookshelf crammed with what appeared

to be scientific journals and papers comprised the entire right wall. In the center of the room was an examining table, but it was small, properly apportioned to accommodate a child.

Inspector Wise wanted to ask both Michael Talbot and Oliver Brantley about the note that Constable Brown's rural adventures had discovered. What had it said? Did Brantley know how to read and had he read it? Had Dr. Talbot been aware of its existence? But in Murdoch's mind, the note was only an excuse to delve more deeply into the twisted mystery of Oliver Brantley. He did not like Brantley, he was suspicious of him, and it seemed to him the Inspector was treating the crippled man much too gently. Murdoch was certain there was something here he needed to learn more about, and he intended to do so.

"Michael," the Inspector began, realizing with a certain discomfiture that he was now interrogating a man who had been a guest in his home and with whom he had philosophized over a cozy fire the previous week. "You mentioned that your assistant Oliver often carried correspondence between you and Lady Fairhaven. We have only this morning learned that a note from Lady Fairhaven, meant for your eyes, was delivered to Brantley on the afternoon before her death. We would like to know whether you in fact received the note and, if so, what its contents were."

Dr. Talbot delayed momentarily but did not seem thrown off his stride. "Yes, there was a note," he replied thoughtfully. "I had forgotten about it. Oliver brought it to me shortly before supper, I believe. It was perfectly innocuous, I assure you. As I mentioned, Lady Fairhaven was assisting me in editing a manuscript. She simply

requested that I send Oliver to fetch it, along with the comments and corrections she had written out.”

“And did he fetch it?” interrupted Sergeant Murdoch, more curtly than Inspector Wise thought necessary.

“As a matter of fact, I delayed sending him, as I had another more important errand for him to perform the next day. By the time I remembered about the manuscript, the murder had already occurred.”

“Ye didn’t mention the note when we first interviewed you, sir,” Murdoch said.

“I did not think it necessary. It seemed, in fact still seems, unimportant.”

“And do ye still have the note?”

“Perhaps it is somewhere in my papers. I would be happy to search it out so that you can verify its contents.”

“Thank you, Michael,” the Inspector said. “At your convenience. It is purely protocol, but we would like to confirm what you have told us with Brantley himself.”

“Of course. Unfortunately, Oliver has left for a few days to visit his sick mother in Yorkshire, but I will make it a point to have him give you a statement regarding that note on his return. As a matter of fact, I have the manuscript right here. Sir Gregory returned it to me some days after Lady Alicia’s... death. You can see, it has comments in her handwriting in the margin.” Dr. Talbot handed the pages to Inspector Wise, who riffled quickly through its contents. He saw nothing of interest and decided to pose a different question.

“Michael, do you remember a series of articles about a nefarious baby-farming scheme that appeared in the *Times* several years back?”

“Of course,” the doctor responded, seemingly confused. “As a member of the Infant Protection Society, I always pay attention to any information about the mistreatment of children. Why do you ask?”

“If you recall, the pieces were written under a pseudonym, A.B. I wonder, because of your interest in infant welfare, whether you had knowledge about the identity of the author?”

Dr. Talbot shook his head. “Not at all. The revelations stirred interest, to be sure, but in the end they seemed more melodramatic than was warranted by the scanty evidence they turned up. The writer was never discovered, and the furor died down.”

Perhaps it was the chemical smells, or a resurgence of his fever, but Inspector Wise suddenly felt lightheaded. So many questions, but where did they lead? It seemed only dead end after dead end. He clutched the arm of his chair as the room receded for a moment, then came into focus.

“Simon, are you sure you are quite well? You look faint.”

“A touch of the children’s fever, that’s all.” Dr. Talbot looked slightly alarmed, and seemed about to say something further, when Sergeant Murdoch cleared his throat.

“Since we seem to have missed Mr. Brantley for the time being, maybe ye could be so kind as to tell us something more about the man. Ye know the saying, ‘Twisted body, twisted mind.’”

“That is a vile canard!” the doctor remonstrated. “Why are you interested in Oliver? Is it because of the baby deaths? I have already told the Inspector it is impossible that Oliver could be involved.”

“Let’s just say I’m a curious man, Dr. Talbot,” Sergeant Murdoch replied. If Inspector Wise felt bothered at his sergeant’s initiative, he did not have the strength to intervene.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE

Talbot turned toward the stone sinks and began washing his hands. “Oliver Brantley is twenty-four years old. He was born in the year of the Great Exposition, the height of scientific and technological achievement in this century. What irony! We are at once such an enlightened, such a progressive society... and such a polluted one.” The doctor turned to face them before continuing his story.

Brantley had been born in the wild, harsh moors of Yorkshire. His mother often told him the story of his difficult birth, his little blue face, the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck. By the age of three, his impairments were obvious – the spasticity of his muscles, the involuntary movements, the speech difficulties. The mother, an enterprising woman, had moved the family to London when he was about three, in the hopes of finding better treatment for his condition. Unfortunately, the doctors at the charity hospital were unable to provide the child with much relief. To complicate matters, around the age of ten, Oliver started to have seizures (“Not fits, Sergeant,” said Talbot, correcting Sergeant Murdoch’s interruption). Although his mother remained devoted to his interests, she had five other living children to clothe and feed. Oliver was left more and more to his own devices. When he was well enough, he earned small coins by begging.

Eight years ago, while Talbot was still in medical school, he had encountered Oliver being presented as a case study during a lecture by the distinguished orthopedic surgeon John Little, who had identified in the young man a cluster of symptoms he labeled cerebral paralysis. Talbot, a senior student, had gazed indifferently at the naked youth in the operating room pit, covered only by a kind of loincloth. He was quite familiar with the condition being discussed and had only attended at the invitation of his professor, whom he hoped would recommend him for a hospital appointment.

“I think you will enjoy young Oliver,” his professor had told him. “He is really quite an interesting specimen.”

Michael Talbot’s mind wandered as Mr. Little droned on about the scissor-like motion of the legs when walking, the involuntary facial and limb movements, the curvature of the spine. He held forth interminably about his theory that oxygen deprivation during birth was the cause of the subsequent dysfunction. Then Talbot thought he heard another voice. He realized the “specimen” was speaking. His speech was garbled and at first difficult to follow.

“It ain’t as tho’ I warn’t human, doc. I’m a man same as you.” Talbot jerked upright and peered more closely down into the auditorium. He noticed that Professor Little did not appear in the least perturbed.

“Quite right, Oliver. In a manner of speaking, you are a man. An ill-formed man, but a man nonetheless.” Talbot could see the boy shrink back and hang his head. Without his wishing it, Talbot’s mind jumped to his own sister’s damaged baby who had only lived a few weeks. This could have been that poor child’s future. Surely he deserved better than being treated as a kind of awful archetype for the examination of



bored and supercilious medical students. He had an impulse to speak with the creature shivering in the harsh glare from the skylight and tell him that, even if no one else did, he at least took seriously his claim to a common humanity.

Talbot hired Oliver as his “assistant” and general factotum that same day, although at the time his need for assistance was primarily in the nature of taking out his laundry, keeping the larder stocked, and searching out rare volumes at various booksellers’ establishments throughout London.

“A sad story, but I’m afraid not an uncommon one,” Dr. Talbot concluded, looking at his interlocutors inquiringly. “And nothing has happened over the years to arouse any suspicions in my mind regarding Oliver’s dedication to me and my work.”

“So ye trust him, do ye? Never known him to be unpredictable, violent? Think he’s as sane as you or I? He seems a strange one to me.”

Dr. Talbot considered the Sergeant’s words. “Oliver has had a difficult life, so perhaps he does seem strange. When one is avoided, even vilified, solely on account of one’s appearance, it tends to affect the personality. But he is not evil or malicious. And yes, I would trust him with my life.”

Sergeant Murdoch refused to relinquish his bone. “And ye have no knowledge of information that Lady Fairhaven may have discovered implicating Brantley in an illegal baby-farming business?”

“Knowledge that Lady Fairhaven discovered...?” Dr. Talbot almost sputtered in his indignation. “What are you saying? What could she have discovered? There was nothing for her to discover because Oliver has done nothing, nothing I repeat, except serve me faithfully and well in my work. It is an insult to suggest otherwise.” He glared

at the sergeant, who was at all embarrassed and indeed appeared ready to ask yet another question.

But Inspector Wise had heard enough. Suddenly he could not bear more conversation, more questions. His head throbbed and he noticed he was shivering. He no longer felt he could think clearly. With each statement of the doctor's, he saw Emily's strange, slanting eyes looking uncomprehendingly at the cruelty of the world. The links between Lady Fairhaven and Brantley seemed only to exist in Murdoch's fervid imagination. "We are finished here, Thomas. Good day, doctor and thank you for your time."

As they descended the stairs of Dr. Talbot's office, Wise turned angrily on his subordinate. "I will not permit you that kind of latitude again, Thomas, unless you bring me tangible evidence implicating Brantley in some crime. Your indulgence of what amounts to unfounded prejudice is unconscionable." Sergeant Murdoch scowled but kept his peace. He deeply valued the good opinion of the Inspector, which only made the latter's words more wounding. Yet he could not abandon his mistrust. He had a bad feeling about Brantley, and he did not think it was only the baseless bigotry of which Inspector Wise accused him. He would prove Inspector Wise had misjudged him.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX

It had been snowing sporadically for several days, but this evening offered a hiatus, the wind scudding clouds across a gloomy sky in which a few stars bravely shone through the miasma. Overhead, Simon noticed a dead, pale glow, light without warmth,

a residual illumination from the vanished sun. As he let himself into the house, Simon was greeted by a flurry of skirts and gyrating arms and legs as Sarah hurtled toward him. “Abba, I want to show you my bugs!” she said triumphantly, holding up for his inspection a glass jar in which two blue-winged dragonflies lay, for the moment quiescent. Simon felt tired and ill. In his head floated confused thoughts of Lady Fairhaven, interspersed with misshapen dead children. All he wanted to do was lie down. But he dutifully turned his attention to his daughter.

Ever since the family discussion about women in the police force, Sarah had vacillated between wanting to be a detective and wanting to be a naturalist. As she astutely observed to her father, the skills involved in each pursuit were similar: careful observation, attention to detail, deduction from observed phenomena, and above all patience. Although Sarah liked the puzzle aspect of police work, she was at times put off by the thought of unsavory criminals, quantities of blood and dead bodies. In these moments, the pursuit of butterflies and beetles seemed infinitely more appealing.

“By observing these dragonflies carefully at the pond in Victoria Park, I have deduced that when they mate, the male grasps the female behind the head with pincers that extend from his abdomen. They fly in tandem, not unlike ants.” When her father was silent, Sarah continued, “It is very intriguing.”

Simon Wise was divided between his desire to acknowledge his daughter’s diligence and perseverance, and his discomfort at the inappropriateness of the observation itself. Not for the first time, he wished Rachel were here to guide these girls. He worried constantly that, unwittingly, he was committing some irremediable error in their upbringing that would make them unfit to be wives and mothers. Conscientious though

she was, Miss Gelbstein's ideas of propriety were too peculiar to enlist Simon's full confidence. He was certain that Sarah's interest in the copulation of dragonflies could not be normal.

In an effort to win her father's praise, Sarah went on, "And I detected something else too. I detected that Dr. Talbot is Becca's lover." Simon, whose mind had wandered into the convoluted byways of child-rearing, felt pulled back to the present with an alarming jerk. Are we still discussing dragonflies, he thought confusedly.

"What are you saying, Sarah? Who is who's lover?"

Satisfied that at last she had her father's attention, Sarah said with the slightest hint of exasperation, as though speaking to a not very bright younger child, "I told you, Abba. Dr. Talbot is Becca's lover."

Simon entertained a fugitive image of the good doctor and his oldest daughter coupled dragonfly-fashion. His stomach lurched, and he grabbed Sarah's arm, turning her till she faced him squarely.

"What are you talking about, child?" he demanded roughly. Sarah was taken aback and not a little afraid. Her father's face glowered down at her, harsh and fierce. She inadvertently dropped the jar, which shattered. The dragonflies rose into the air, their silken wings glistening.

"It's obvious," she said defiantly. "Dr. Talbot sends her little notes almost every day in the ten o'clock post and," she added with some disgust, "Becca even sniffs them, and answers them right away. Then she puts them under her pillow at night. He has called here around tea-time two or three times each week since you invited him for *Shabbat* supper. He pretends he has had a thought about Emily, or wants to verify our

health, but it always ends up his taking tea with Becca. Of course, Miss Gelbstein is there, and she frowns as hard as she can, and I am there too, although I don't frown at all, and some of the younger" this said in a highly patronizing tone, "children are about, but it requires only the most obvious deductive reasoning to understand what is happening. He even squeezes her hand - fervently -when he thinks no one is looking." Into her head came a fragment of Ovid, "Pygmalion, half-dazed, lost in his raptures, And half in doubt, afraid his senses failed him, Touched her again and felt his hopes come true, The pulse-beat stirring where he moved his hands."

But she's a child, thought Simon, conveniently forgetting that he had married her mother when she was only a year older than Rebecca. Michael Talbot must be twice her age! Well, perhaps not twice, but considerably older. And not Jewish. He could not even imagine Rachel's horror at the thought of her daughter marrying outside the faith.

Of course, he had heard of "mixed" marriages, mostly among wealthy Jews, but occasionally as well among people like himself. He was also familiar with the still-rare practice, such as had happened in the Disraeli family, of parents baptizing Jewish children to further their social and professional advancement. Quickly he searched his mind. Talbot must be High Church. No, he thought angrily, it was not possible. His private doubts were one thing, but for his eldest daughter to turn her back on the faith of her forefathers was unimaginable. Rachel would rise from her grave.

"I must see your sister," Simon mumbled, striding quickly down the hallway.

"But my dragonflies. My dragonflies are flown away. Please help me find them, Abba." But Simon did not pause. He had more serious thoughts in his mind than copulating dragonflies.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN

The darkness of the night enveloped the house, like a shroud, the Inspector thought gloomily. The rain had commenced again, its persistent drumming muffling other sounds, but Simon Wise remained alert. To others, the evening hours might signal the end of the workday, the opportunity to retreat into the safety and sanctity of their homes. But Inspector Wise knew that his job intensified as the protective black mantle emboldened the criminal and the despairing. As he lay in bed, a chamomile poultice on his chest courtesy of Miss Gelbstein, rather than anticipating the welcome haven of sleep, he felt his thoughts racing.

His talk earlier that evening with Rebecca had been entirely unsatisfactory, in fact it had felt like a police interrogation in which Becca, like a cagey suspect, refused to deny or confirm, and skillfully tried to allay, or at least distract, his suspicions. Yet he knew Sarah had the makings of a good detective, and feared her observations were accurate and her conclusions, sound. Inspector Wise had no idea what to do about this situation, so he did his best to simply put his daughter and her phantasmagorical Gentile lover aside for the moment.

Instead, he tried to concentrate his thoughts on the Fairhaven case. Perhaps, after all, there was no scorned or embarrassed lover. Could money, not jealousy or bitterness, be the motivator? He thought of the suave, arrogant Lord Gregory and agreed with Lady Abbott that the man would probably not kill out of rage. But he might have been driven to eliminate his wife if he saw her death as the only escape from intolerable shame and

disgrace. Yet if that were the case, why that night, and why in that manner? If he wanted the police to accept the burglary theory, why hadn't he taken steps to make the evidence more convincing?

And what of the revelation that Lady Fairhaven was also A.B., the authoress of the daring expose of lying-in homes? Whose toes could she have stepped on to such an extent that they would rise up out of the night five years after the fact to murder her? He had difficulty imagining that, even if Lady Fairhaven's revelations had meant a drop in business for some wretched baby-minder, the woman would have both the intensity of feeling and fixity of purpose to kill her after so much time had elapsed. Still, he would check the police files first thing in the morning and prod DeLane at *The Times* for any recent developments.

Despite his efforts to focus on work, Simon noticed his thoughts drifting toward the purveyor of this newly acquired information about Lady Fairhaven. It was true that Lady Abbott did not seem especially fun-loving, as she had lamented, but then he did not think of himself in this way either. Certainly, she was intelligent and honest and kind. The egalitarian manner in which she related to him was something he had never experienced before from someone of her background. He was unsure of his feelings toward her, but he was quite sure that, whatever they were, they were ridiculously unsuitable.

Contemplating ridiculously unsuitable couplings, in a disquieting transition, he found himself ruminating about Queen Victoria. Only a few years ago, her subjects had become exasperated with her perpetual mourning for the Prince Consort, which they regarded as immoderate and foreign. But they grew equally incensed by rumors of an

affair of the heart with her Scots advisor, John Brown. A humorous pamphlet had been published called “Brown on the Throne.” Even *Punch* made jokes and patterers sang bawdy rhymes about the two of them.

Could he contemplate for an instant submitting himself and Lady Abbott to the same sort of ridicule, even assuming his nascent feelings were in some way reciprocated? He was making a complete fool of himself, and worse still, compromising, if only in his imaginings, a good and decent woman. And what arrogance to think she would look twice at him. Although quintessentially polite, he thought her surprise at his last visit unfeigned. How could he dare to imagine that she might ever regard him as anything more than a glorified servant? As a member of the ruling class, a congregant in the Church of England, she could never feel anything for a police inspector except possibly a strained tolerance. Her candor he could dismiss as simple loneliness. Sometimes people were more intimate with outsiders whom they were not likely to see again.

And, as if class differences were not enough, what of religion? What hypocrisy that he recoiled from the thought of a romance between Rebecca and Michael Talbot on religious grounds, when with practically the same breath he could lie in his bed – his and *Rachel's* bed -- and fantasize about a Gentile woman. He groaned, pulled the covers about his ears, and tried to fall asleep.

Yet he could not so easily banish her strange mauve eyes from his mind, and surely the look he had seen in them was something more than amiability. Experimentally he tried to say her name inside his head: Penelope. Penelope. It simply wasn't possible. She would never be anything other than Lady Abbott to him, and that, of course, was the problem.



## CHAPTER EIGHTY-EIGHT

After an unsettled night, Inspector Wise felt little better, but was determined to find some answers from Sir Gregory. When he arrived, an unfamiliar footman opened the door at the Fairhaven town house, and Mr. Creavey was no longer anywhere in evidence. The housekeeper Mrs. Shaw whispered that the pretty Mathilde had been dismissed, now that “there were no one to receive ‘er attentions, sir.” Inspector Wise speculated for a moment about the unintended consequences of one’s actions. Whoever it was that killed Lady Fairhaven, he was certain they had not given a moment’s thought to a flirtatious footman being sacked, a lady’s maid having no lady to serve, or a butler deciding it was beneath his dignity to remain in such a scandal-plagued household.

A bloody pebble drops into one family’s pond, the Inspector reflected, but the reverberations continue indefinitely. Without Lady Fairhaven’s death, the little garden boy whom Constable Brown had located might never have had the courage to flee his abusive master. Rebecca would never have met Michael Talbot, who might now never raise the funds to sustain his Institute. Simon himself would never have met Lady Abbott. Yet none of these consequences could have been an expression of the murderer’s intent. They were merely the random, inconsequential aftermath of a cataclysmic event propelled by its own inaccessible logic.

Sir Gregory received Inspector Wise with barely concealed anger. Such persecution from the police was intolerable, disgraceful! It was the job of the constabulary to apprehend criminals, not harass the grieving family. Yes, he admitted he

was experiencing some temporary financial difficulties. He had overspent on sporting expenditures at his country estate. Damnable how costly “rough shooting” had become! A gentleman and his friends could no longer simply stroll through the woods with a pair of dogs and take a civilized pop now and then. No, now one had to stock the preserve, hire troops of beaters. It was outrageous! People expected to shoot a thousand birds in an afternoon, and they weren’t happy with less!

Very well, since the Inspector had the indelicacy to refer to the matter, at the moment his betting debts had become something of a worry as well. He enjoyed the races, and a hand of cards now and then. But if the Inspector had done his homework, he would know that the baronet had a reputation for paying his bills. Before his wife’s regrettable death, how had he planned to pay them? Damned impertinent question! He had always conducted himself honorably in the past, no one had ever questioned his ability to pay up when the time came.

“But this time, Sir Gregory? We’ve done some checking. Your credit was exhausted, you couldn’t get additional extensions, even the moneylenders thought you were bad business. In fact, sir, you were on the verge of bankruptcy. No, Sir Gregory,” Inspector Wise held up his hand to forestall the baronet’s protest, “don’t bother to deny it, I’ve seen the bank records, the notes held, the whole sorry lot. And I also know that the only way you could get access to your wife’s considerable estate was upon her death. Convenient, I’d say. Isn’t it fair to conclude you were desperate?”

“You mean, desperate enough to kill my wife?”

“You were heard to say, in the presence of witnesses, that you wished your wife dead.”

“I was drunk. I scarcely remember. People say all sorts of things they don’t mean when they’ve had a few too many. Besides, I’ve told you I was with Arabella.”

“A somewhat flimsy alibi, I’m sure you’ll acknowledge, Sir Gregory. And, now that you mention Miss Bowdoin, it has also come to our attention that you may have encouraged her to contemplate violence toward your wife.”

“Contemplate violence? What are you talking about, man? This is an outrage.”

“Regardless,” Inspector Wise continued implacably, “it is hard to escape the fact that Lady Fairhaven’s death turned out to be financially extremely convenient for you.”

For the first time since the Inspector’s arrival, Sir Gregory’s composure wavered. He groaned and turned away.

“Do you think I don’t realize that? Do you think I don’t berate myself daily that a part of me is thankful that, out of this awful tragedy, some good has come? Lady Alicia’s death has given me the means to keep a roof over my children’s head, to prevent the sully of my family name. I am ashamed, yes, but I am also relieved beyond measure.”

“And is that not a credible motivation, Sir Gregory?”

“My God, man, do you think me such a brute? She was the mother of my children!”

Inspector Wise considered the question on the way out. He certainly did not think it impossible that Sir Gregory Fairhaven was in fact, as he phrased it, such a brute.

## CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE

In the middle of dinner that evening, the Wise family, including their guest Michael Talbot, were disturbed by a fierce banging on the door. The meal thus far had been strained. Despite his illness, Simon had invited Dr. Talbot with the express intention of confronting him about Rebecca. As her father, he felt resolution of this matter could not wait. However, Simon had failed to anticipate that, in the hustle-bustle of the meal preparations, such a conversation would be impossible. He contented himself with biding his time until after the meal had concluded.

The Inspector also intended to ask Michael Talbot whether he knew anything about Lady Fairhaven possibly renewing her activities as A.B. Perhaps this time she was willing to confide in him. When Inspector Wise had examined the official records, they told him little that was of interest. DeLane had finally gotten around to send him a message, but it was inconclusive. The editor confirmed he had indeed had a visit from Lady Fairhaven, promising a scandal that would dwarf A.B.'s earlier revelations. But she had been murdered before she could reveal any details.

Reluctantly, Inspector Wise puts these thoughts aside when Martha opened the door to a breathless and disheveled Constable Brown on the step outside, shifting from foot to foot to keep warm.

“There’s a fire, sir,” Constable Brown informed the Inspector, “over in the courts off Rosemary Lane. They’ve got the fire brigade down there, but they’ve called for police support. There are women and children trapped, you know how it is with all those warrens, and feelings are running high that the city authorities aren’t doing enough to get them out.”

Looking to the east, Wise detected a reddish glow in the night sky, likely an alcohol fire, the result of a drunken row. Two hundred years ago, London was constantly burning, but with the advent of better building codes, there had not been a major conflagration since the Great Fire. His mind turned uneasily to accounts still vivid in the collective mind of the city of wooden structures bursting into flame like kindling, the smell of roasting horseflesh, the screams of helpless inhabitants seeing their death roaring toward them in a wall of flames.

“Go back to the station immediately, William, and tell Sergeant Murdoch to take a contingent of the boys over to the Courts. The crowds need to be controlled if the firemen are to do their work.” Inspector Wise was remembering stories not only of burned horseflesh, but other flesh as well. He felt cold, although the room was warm. “I’ll be there as quickly as possible.”

## CHAPTER NINETY

Some twenty minutes later, the Inspector reached the outskirts of the conflagration, accompanied by Dr. Talbot who had suggested his medical skills might be needed. The hansom approached the perimeter of the area as closely as possible, until they were literally surrounded by the screaming, crazed denizens of the court, meddlesome spectators, struggling firemen, and an all too inadequate police presence. The unnatural illumination, the air thick with ashes, the crowd of human shapes distorted by darkness all made it seem to Inspector Wise as though he had stumbled into one of the circles of Dante’s inferno.

It was a working-class court crowded with wooden houses rising in anarchic competition toward the sky. In daylight, Inspector Wise guessed, their jutting abutments would almost extinguish the light. Backlit now by flames, they looked a grotesque assemblage, a flimsy matchstick construction ready to tumble down at a breath. Wise was not surprised at the milling crowd. He knew this area. There were at least thirty houses in the court, say eight rooms in every house, and give or take ten people squeezed in a room. He quickly calculated upwards of two thousand panicked residents who had a right to be there, not counting the gawkers.

The fire brigade was already at work, the horses restless in the face of fire, some firemen still unloading equipment from the wagons. A pump engine was providing a thick stream of water at one of the worst hot spots, two men exerting maximum effort to control the squirter, their shiny metal helmets reflecting the orange light of the flames. The fire seemed to be toying with them, first racing down, then up the pointed roofs, as though engaged in some crazy game of tag, daring the firemen to catch it.

Inspector Wise could see immediately that the idea of imposing control over the insanity about him had been a naïve hope. The few policemen who were visible struck him as ineffectual, small, overwhelmed by a calamity of such disproportion that it had earned their grudging respect. Tonight, fire was God, and all bowed before it, recognizing its awful power.

“I’ve got to find Murdoch,” the Inspector said hastily to Dr. Talbot, knowing that his Sergeant, good Calvinist that he was, would be one of the few whose theology remained undistorted by the crackling bursts of flame. If any poor soul lost their life

tonight, whether they found damnation or salvation had been settled for eternity through God's inscrutable will. Dr. Talbot nodded and moved off in another direction.

Inspector Wise made his way slowly through the crowd, a few people deferring to the obvious authority of his top-hat and frock coat, most paying no heed. Wise could discern no organized movement to the mass of humanity. To be sure, many were fleeing the fire, but others appeared wandering in circles, calling out the names of wives, husbands, mothers, children. He was struck by the democratic nature of the mob, noting well-dressed gentlemen who mingled in egalitarian horror with beggars and criminal riffraff. Not infrequently, he thought he recognized faces of pickpockets, street thieves, sneaks, the bughunters who specialized in robbing drunks, men he had arrested for petty thievery or counterfeiting. Perhaps it was the eerie light, or a recurrence of his fever, that transformed the faces, so that gentlemen blurred with convicts, and he could not distinguish saints from sinners.

He felt a tug at his arm. "Sir!" shouted Thomas Murdoch. "Look over there." Wise obediently turned in the direction to which his Sergeant was pointing. About fifty yards away, in a row of burning buildings, a woman was standing on a balcony high above the street. Half-clothed, her disheveled hair making a strange halo about her face, in her arms she held a child, not more than two or three. The woman was alternately shrieking and laughing, pacing back and forth. Drunk, thought Inspector Wise, or perhaps only mad with fear. Below, a crowd gathered, shouting encouragement and advice. From their midst, a well-dressed gentleman stepped forward, pushing aside bodies that would not move on their own. The Inspector recognized Dr. Talbot.

“What do ye suppose he’s doing here?” Sergeant Murdoch asked with a sneer. “Meaning no disrespect, but he’s not the only one of his class here tonight, sir, as I’m sure ye’ve noticed.”

“He is no mere gawping spectator, Thomas, He came with me. He thought he might be able to help,” said Inspector Wise in a hurried tone.

Talbot was calling something up to the woman. The Inspector strained to hear. All at once the crowd became still. Even the fire seemed muted, as though waiting to see which way this one small drama was to go.

“Jump, woman!” shouted Talbot, waving his umbrella as if to push her from the ledge.

“I cain’t, sir,” the woman wailed.

“Listen to me. You’ve no choice. The stairs are burned. The ladder is over on the south side and can’t be brought here in time. Jump, damnit!” Talbot sounded peeved, much as he might persuading a recalcitrant child in his office that a distasteful medicine was good for him or arguing with a stupidly slow servant that cleaning the dustbin was not something about which she had a choice.

“I cain’t, sir,” the woman cried again, the repetition of denial seeming to be her only strength, a sheltering rock in this incomprehensible hell.

“Then throw the child. Throw the child,” Talbot insisted. Inspector Wise began to move toward the scene, unsure of what he could do, but knowing he had to do something.

“Throw th’ child, throw th’ child.” The crowd picked up the chant, but the woman seemed to cling more tenaciously to the bundle in her arms.



At that moment the fire, like a ravenous beast, burst through the wall behind the woman. Fed on new wood, it momentarily burned brighter, so that Inspector Wise could see the woman very clearly, so clearly that she seemed in bas-relief, almost golden, standing out with unnatural clarity from the flaming background. Then he realized her back and hair were already burning.

Shrieking, the woman took a step toward the railing. The fire ran down her hair and along her arms so that she shone like an angel. With an agonized scream, she sank back into the flames, as if into a soft and welcoming bed. But as her body moved backward and down, her flaming arms rose up and outward, releasing the child she held. Mesmerized, Inspector Wise watched it defy gravity, sailing upward toward the smoky night, while the shawl that had wrapped it floated downward. Then Newton's law reclaimed the small form, and it arced abruptly toward earth.

The Inspector began running, feeling the heat of the fire on his cheeks, wanting passionately to save one thing, to have something good emerge from this bedlam. But it was Dr. Talbot who dropped his umbrella and stepped forward, scientifically positioning himself below the rapidly falling object. The crowd fell back expectantly, awaiting a miracle. Wise heard a thud, a sort of dull collision, mass impacting mass. "We are such earthbound creatures," he thought irrelevantly as he rushed to the doctor's side.

"It's all a matter of physics," Dr. Talbot commented, although his voice was unsteady. "The child is alive." Inspector Wise noticed that the doctor's face glistened, whether with sweat or tears he could not tell. He looked down into Michael Talbot's arms. A pair of dark eyes stared back impassively, perhaps too shocked to cry.

“The child is alive,” Wise repeated, and he grabbed Dr. Talbot awkwardly about the shoulder, feeling a fierce, defiant joy rising in his raw throat. He experienced a renewed admiration for the doctor. He was a fine, brave man. Perhaps after all there was a way for him and Rebecca to surmount their religious differences. Although all about them, the buildings continued to burn, for the first time in days, the Inspector felt a spark of hope.

## CHAPTER NINETY-ONE

Inspector Wise spent most of the next day writing reports of the previous night’s events. Possibly the anecdote that horrified him most was that of a woman who, for safety, had locked her three young children in the room they all occupied while she went to fetch milk for the fussy baby. When at last, after the ravages of the fire, she made her way home, she found the locked door miraculously still standing, but the walls on either side were completely destroyed. She stepped around the wreckage, calling her children’s names. Finally, she found them, hiding under the family’s one pathetic bed. When she touched them, they crumbled to dust.

Even if the story was apocryphal, one of those legends to which a flaming city seemed to enjoy giving birth, Inspector Wise wanted to leave it as far behind as possible. He wanted to bury the burned bodies, dismiss the ruined dwellings, avoid people’s grief. After working round the clock at the station, he managed to return home for the evening meal. And, he fervently hoped, to normalcy. Selfishly, he looked round the table at his

children's scrubbed faces and gave thanks to God that it was not they whom the fire had consumed.

The Wise family, however, was full of questions about the conflagration. Miss Gelbstein wanted to know how best to help the survivors and those made homeless. Rebecca joined in her concern, although in Simon's judgment, she was more enthralled by the account of Dr. Talbot's heroism. David was swept up in the excitement of the disaster. "When I am a man, I will be part of the London Fire Brigade!" he exclaimed enthusiastically. Deborah said nothing but looked frightened. Sarah contributed that the current hand pumps were a significant improvement over earlier models and could shoot 160 gallons of water per minute. Miriam assiduously applied herself to copying a sketch of an ancient castle, a ruin that seemed to her much more romantic to contemplate than a series of recently burned structures. Naomi raced around the room, periodically shouting "Fire, fire!"

Simon reassured them all as best he could. "Fortunately, while the fire is not completely subdued, it is well-contained. The rainfall that started late last night helped tremendously. There was almost no loss of life," he concluded, thinking of the flaming woman and her child descending into Talbot's waiting arms. "Please, let us talk about something less grim. We should all be thankful that it was not worse." He coughed, a reverberation deep in his chest, and wondered if he could retire to his bed.

Even Miss Gelbstein seemed sobered by his somber tone. Everyone looked at him expectantly. Simon decided he needed to make an effort to lighten the mood. What was "something less grim"?

It had been in his mind for some days to talk to Hannah about the copy of *Middlemarch* she had brought home from Mudie's, the lending library, for him to read aloud to the family during his rare Sundays off. Perhaps such a mundane discussion might be the diversion from the images of burning buildings and bodies he craved.

"I'm not certain I approve of reading George Eliot, Hannah," Simon began, instantly knowing from Miss Gelbstein's expression that he had essayed a position he would soon find indefensible. Too late he regretted his choice of topic, indeed he feared that in a few moments he would regret returning home at all.

"And pray tell, why not, Simon?" said Hannah in the dangerously English phrasing she adopted when preparing to do battle.

"For all her moral pretensions, she ran away with a married man twenty years ago and has been living in his company without the benefit of marriage ever since, not too far from here, as a matter of fact."

"His name is George, Abba. Why are you calling him a she?" asked David.

"*Her* name is Mary Anne Evans," explained Sarah, as ever scornful of her brother's bottomless ignorance about things other than fighting and adventuring. "George Eliot is a *nom de plume*, because no one would have taken her seriously as a novelist if they knew she was a woman."

"In any event, Simon, by all accounts Miss Eliot is a good and moral woman. You must admit her novels are among the most intelligent one can find these days. And if you are going to talk about the wages of sin," Miss Gelbstein's words dripped with sarcasm, "I'd have you remember that her paramour, George Lewes, is still received in

society, while George Eliot is not, although he is at least as guilty as she of any wrongdoing.”

“Well, Hannah,” the Inspector said helplessly, coughing again. He thought irritably that the smoke from the previous night had done his sickness no good.

“Precisely, Simon,” Miss Gelbstein agreed triumphantly. “Have some peas.” For a few moments nothing could be heard except the rattle of china and silverware, while Miss Gelbstein enjoyed her victory. Then she continued in a more critical tone, “I hear she is hard at work writing a book about Jews.” Miss Gelbstein’s expression said plainly that well-meaning and moral though Miss Eliot might be, she should leave the Jews to the Jews. “I am sure she will misunderstand us and portray us inaccurately.”

“Perhaps she merely wishes to portray us more sympathetically than is generally the case in literature,” offered Rebecca mildly.

“I don’t doubt she admires the Jewish race. A woman in my literary circle told us that she wants to do for the Jews what Harriet Beecher Stowe did for the Negro slaves.”

“What could be wrong with that?” Miriam wondered. “I thought *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* wonderfully exciting.”

Miss Gelbstein looked at the children severely. “We’ve already had our Moses. I should think that would be enough.” Simon ate his peas obediently and was grateful that sparring with Hannah had, for the moment at any rate, distracted his attention from the horrors of last night. Nevertheless, he reminded himself in the future to keep his literary opinions to himself.

## CHAPTER NINETY-TWO

“The baby was left where?” Inspector Wise exploded. The constable who had brought him the news looked helpless.

“Outside the consulting rooms of a Dr. Michael Talbot. On Ormand Street.”

“I know what street the office is on, damnit!”

“Right, sir.” ‘I’m only the messenger,’ the constable’s cornflower blue eyes seemed to be saying. “Nurse found the little thing this morning when she arrived at work. Very shaken up, she was. Sent round for Dr. Talbot immediately, but it was already dead. Had been for quite some time by the look of it.”

“Murdoch!” Inspector Wise shouted.

“Sorry, sir, he isn’t here.” Constable Brown, who had been going through some paperwork at a general-use desk, looked up somewhat anxiously. “He told me he was just going to pay a quick visit to Molly Reid, to see how she’s getting on.” The constable wanted to put his Sergeant’s absence in the best possible light. “I think he was touched by her plight, sir.” Another pause. “I’m available, sir, if you wish to be accompanied. I can do these reports later.”

“Very well,” the Inspector said impatiently, “come along. We are going to talk with Dr. Talbot – again. The city is being littered with these corpses. It is an insult and a scandal. Now this latest on the doctor’s doorstep. That cannot be coincidence. He must have an inkling about what it means.” He grabbed his hat hastily, then turned to the street constable who had reported the baby’s death. “By the way, Fields, was there anything amiss with the child?”

“You mean, in addition to being dead, sir?”

Wise contained himself with difficulty. “That’s right, Fields.”

“Well, that’s what I noticed first, it’s being dead an’ all. But after, when I looked more closely, it was a bit of a strange-lookin’ creature, misshapen-like. Big head and jaw, flat-lookin’ nose, short arms and legs. I couldn’t quite put my finger on it, but Dr. Talbot said it would have grown into a dwarf.”

Wise looked angrier than ever. “What are you waiting for, Brown?” he demanded, ignoring the fact that Brown was, in fact, waiting on him. “We haven’t got all day.”

### CHAPTER NINETY-THREE

“The baby probably died sometime last night.” Dr. Talbot looked pale but collected. They were sitting in his consulting office, where a cold, clean air blew in through a cracked-open window. Inspector Wise thought it might snow. Constable Brown hoped it would not, as he had planned on attending a revival rally at the Agricultural Hall later that evening featuring the American evangelist Dwight L. Moody and his famous vocalist partner Ira Sankey, whose book *Sacred Songs and Solos* was known and beloved throughout England. He thought his parents, staunch Wesleyan Methodists both, would approve, especially of the singing. Over fifteen thousand people were expected to attend.

Dr. Talbot nodded apologetically toward the door to his anteroom, from which emanated a series of muffled sobs. “Nurse Cunningham has taken this very hard. She is a tender soul. I’ve given her a little laudanum to calm her nerves.”

The Inspector was in no mood to be sympathetic. Somehow it was all too much. He still had too many suspects in Lady Fairhaven's death, but none of them were all that convincing, and he was no closer to making an arrest now than he'd been at the start of the investigation. Rumors of corruption in the Force, especially in the detective unit, were growing. Infant corpses were piling up, and he had already quarreled with his favorite sergeant over the case. His family was turning into a hotbed of feminist agitation. He had not yet worked up his courage to speak to Michael Talbot regarding his intentions toward his daughter. The horror, the absurdity, the scandal, the confusion -- he could contain none of it, but he was beginning to take it all very personally.

"What do you make of it, Michael?" Constable Brown was taken aback by the Inspector's use of the doctor's first name. He had not realized they knew each other well.

Dr. Talbot remained silent, seemingly bewildered, but Wise thought he detected another emotion as well, a carefully controlled rage mixed with the confusion.

"It's fairly obvious, isn't it? Think about what you've told me about the previous babies. Left at a church, a hospital, the Traitor's Gate, and now here. The common thread of abnormalities. It's well known the work I do with crippled children. I take this latest... deposit... as a direct affront. Someone is murdering these pathetic creatures, and this one has been left at my doorstep as a deliberate mockery."

Constable Brown was startled to realize that the doctor appeared to know a great deal about the dead babies. Inspector Wise regarded the doctor thoughtfully.

"Then you agree with Murdoch that this might be something more than desperate single mothers abandoning their deformed children?"

"Investigations have uncovered conspiracies in the past, Simon."



“Well, possibly, although I still believe these stories of baby murder rings are sensationalized.”

“Charlotte Winsor, the baby-farming wife of a West Country laborer, would kill an unwanted baby for as little as two pounds.”

“That was 10 years ago, Michael.”

“What about closer to home, then? Mrs. Chard, Caroline Jagers? I know the names.”

“Despite the furor, neither of those women were convicted of crimes. Their only punishment was censure for negligence.”

“Only because of the mealy-mouthed jury system we have created.”

Inspector Wise stood up, and restlessly began to pace about the room. He began to cough painfully.

“I have a restorative tonic somewhere here, Simon. It might help.”

The Inspector caught his breath, ignoring the offer. “Think a moment, Michael. Who might want to do something so vicious to you?”

“I cannot imagine. Of course, in my work for the Infant Life Protection Society I have made some enemies, but that is politics, it is nothing serious.”

“Could not the child have succumbed to hypothermia? Perhaps he was left here in the hopes that you might somehow be able to help him.” As Inspector Wise passed the window, he noticed that small flakes of snow had indeed begun falling outside.

“Without an autopsy, I have no way of knowing. On initial inspection, the infant appears to have been born live, but he could have been killed in any number of ways.” Dr. Talbot shook his head. “The body being left here is a gesture of contempt for my

work, indeed for the work of the entire Society. Whoever the perpetrator, for me it is a symbolic slap in the face, an accusation that I've failed. He's saying he despises us, Simon."

"Perhaps it is more than that. Consider the other three bodies. Perhaps this individual in a bizarre way is asking for our help, even our understanding." Wise could not discern Dr. Talbot's expression, but he looked with sympathy at the man, imagining he must be reevaluating everything he believed about Oliver Brantley. "Michael, help us talk with Oliver. We need to ascertain what he was doing last night. We must discover whether he knows something that might be relevant."

Dr. Talbot stared at the policemen, then stood abruptly. "Oliver is still away, but I expect him to come back in the next few days. I will be sure to contact you when he returns. Now I must see to my nurse."

Inspector Wise and Constable Brown also stood. The Inspector imagined the streets filled with dead misshapen babies, disappearing into progressively growing mounds of frost, an infant Crimea, occasional little arms or feet protruding from the powdery heaps. It seemed excessively convenient that Brantley's mother should have taken ill at just this time.

"Brown, see if you can discover whether Brantley is indeed in Yorkshire, and whether his mother is indeed sufficiently unwell to justify the long train trip." Constable Brown nodded his assent and then, remembering his meeting, realized he would have to make his way through the rapidly accumulating slush outside. Damn the snow, he thought.

## CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR

*In his mind, he spoke perfectly. The words formed themselves in limpid, elegant succession, and they flowed effortlessly. In his mind, he was articulate and well-spoken. He was surprisingly well-read, thanks to Dr. Talbot's tutelage, and the language he encountered in books imprinted itself in his brain, so that his fantasies were filled with sentences that soared like birds, looping, fluttering, dazzling. As he made his way through the narrow streets of St. Giles, he was aware that people stared and drew away. Even though this had been his experience all his conscious life, he still noticed. But in his mind, he walked fluidly, unhindered, with a manly bearing. In his mind, his face was comely, and his limbs gracefully controlled.*

*A ragged gang of young street arabs watched him trip over an uneven cobblestone. He heard their laughter and then, lazily, they heaved a decayed tomato in his direction. He barely bothered to evade the putrid missile, while they quickly lost interest in their prey.*

*In the perfection of his mind, he loved and was loved. Even in the reality of his flawed state, he knew himself to be capable of love, capable of a great and noble love. But, while his imagination ascended towering peaks of passion and emotion, he was a realist. He knew in the grim world of the present, he was unlovable, an object of contempt, curiosity, perhaps pity. Who could see him as a man?*

*True, some tried. Dr. Talbot, for one. Lady Alicia, for another. From the first moment he'd met Dr. Talbot, he knew the man was at war with himself. His initial impulse, his instinctive response was to withdraw in revulsion from the creature who was*

*Oliver Brantley. But instead, each time, each encounter activated a conscious choice in the doctor to approach him with an attempt at consideration. Brantley could not understand why the doctor spent so much energy overcoming his natural reactions, but he admired him for it, and was grateful beyond measure for the generosity the doctor had shown him.*

*Lady Alicia, on the other hand, had been one of the few persons, like his beloved mother, who seemed to take real pleasure in his company in a wholly natural and unforced manner. It hurt him to think of her. She had been so beautiful, an exquisite woman, perfectly formed in every way. She had a lovely voice too, low, but vibrant...*

*He caught himself up abruptly. Now everything was ruined. It could never be made right. In his mind, his world could still be perfect. But when he looked around him, he recognized it was in shambles, and only getting worse. Lady Alicia was dead. His mother was dead. The babies were dying, they could not be saved, they could not be loved. He felt a sense of despair grip him, but there was nothing he could do. Only in his mind could the people he cared for still be happy and blithe and love him in return. In the real world, it was far too late for love.*

## CHAPTER NINETY-FIVE

Although the Inspector had stopped at the station after his unsatisfactory interview with Michael Talbot, he felt muzzy-headed, weak and unable to do any work. Sitting at his desk, trying to organize his thoughts, outside he heard a sudden commotion, rising above the usual noises of horses' hooves clattering on granite, newsboys crying,

the shouts of itinerant vendors, the roll of a cat-meat purveyor's drum, the whistle of the chairmender, an out-of-tune barrel organ, the distant bell of a fire brigade. Screams and curses drifted up to Inspector Wise, the whinny of a horse, a loud crashing noise, the rasping cries of a cabman. He looked out the window and saw there had been an accident.

Quickly the Inspector dispatched Sergeant Collins to the scene and then continued to watch the chaos unfold. He took some pride in the fact that only eighty-seven people had been killed in the streets this year as the result of traffic mishaps, while the average for the previous six years was one hundred twenty-three deaths. His satisfaction was mitigated to some degree by the knowledge that the number of maimed and injured was on the rise. Nevertheless, he foresaw a new role emerging for the Metropolitan Police, that of traffic controllers, and thought they might make a much-needed contribution, if only the department could acquire adequate funds to support this responsibility.

Apparently a coster's cart had collided with a hansom. Fried fish, pickled whelks, hot eels, sheep's trotters were scattered all over the street. The cabman was shouting and gesticulating wildly. Somehow an old woman had been knocked down and was trapped by the overturned carriage. Passersby stepped back as the constable appeared on the scene and attempted to assist her.

The coster, however, ignored the human victim. Instead, Wise saw him on his knees beside his donkey, his long hair hanging out from his jauntily poised cap, his chest heaving in silent sobs. The force of the impact had caused the beast to collapse and, from his vantage point, the Inspector thought it likely that one if not both of the creature's forelegs were broken. That meant certain death for the animal.

Costers were a rough lot. They loved gambling, dancing, penny concerts, dog fights, and cardgames. They hated the police and were not above throwing bricks at the constable on the beat if they thought they could get away with it. Indeed, it was said that the secret language they spoke to each other, crammed with cryptic words and backward talk, had been invented to prevent the rozzers from learning the secrets of their trade. But they were devoted to their animals, making sure they had sufficient food even when their families went hungry.

The coster had taken off his overcoat and flung it over the donkey. Inspector Wise could see the brass buttons of his long corduroy waistcoat glinting in the fitful sunlight and the mysterious tattoos covering his forearms. Then he untied the brightly patterned silk handkerchief which was every coster's pride and joy from around his neck and bent over the donkey, wiping its face gently. Wise felt an almost nauseating wrench of pity and turned away hastily.

Incongruously, he suddenly wished it were spring, that the cold and sleet and rain would vanish, that trees would bud and flowers open. He would take the children to the beach, Brighton perhaps, or Ramsgate Sands. Hannah would sit on a folding chair in the sand and try to look severe, but secretly she would be happy. Naomi would hunt out sand crabs and show them to Emily. Miriam would flirt with a handsome young man, whose parents would cast disapproving glances from their spot on the strand. And he, he would go bathing in the sea, the water cold and salty on his bare skin, washing away all thought, all memory, all pain, and swim until he could go no farther.

## **CHAPTER NINETY-SIX**

“Sir.” Inspector Wise looked up from his desk to see Sergeant Murdoch, a look of bulldog determination on his face.

“Yes, Murdoch,” he said impatiently. It was only Monday morning, but already he dreaded the week. At home, the children were well again, thanks to Miss Gelbstein’s ministrations. He had thought himself on the mend as well, but since the night of the fire he felt a relapse of his symptoms. Too much smoke and wet and chill, he thought disgruntledly. The Inspector gave a cough and glanced at his desk in despair, wondering how he would ever get through his reports. When he reflected on it, most police work was a dreary affair indeed, casual pickpockets and drunken brawlers, each and every one of them requiring tedious documentation. He was midway into an investigation of the fire near Rosemary Lane that might turn out to be arson, and a possible racetrack scam. There were disturbing rumors in relation to this last case, about Metropolitan detectives associating too closely with the confidence trickster, Harry Benson. He would have to ask Murdoch, who always kept an ear close to the ground, what he knew of the matter. And then of course there was the seemingly unresolvable Fairhaven case as well as the mysterious baby deaths. Meanwhile, the mounds of paper connected with each investigation continued to mount.

“Thomas, what are these stories about Sergeant Druscovitch and Inspector Clarke being involved in this horseracing con? Any truth to them? It won’t help the image of the Force if they were to get about.”

“I don’t really know, sir. Druscovitch is in debt, not his fault, he guaranteed a note for his brother-in-law, who welshed on the debt. But he’s a good man, I’m sure he

can work it out. As for the detective inspector, ye know how it is, sir, ye rub shoulders long enough with the criminal element, and somehow things get confused, if ye know what I mean. He's been injudicious, I hear, puttin' in writing things that he shouldn't have to people he shouldn't be in communication with. But he's a good man too. I hope he'll set it right." For a moment, Inspector Wise pondered exactly how one was to determine who the good men were, how they got to be that way, and what could be done to keep them good.

"I certainly hope so. The Commissioner will be livid if anyone brings more bad publicity down on our heads."

"Right ye are, sir. That's why cracking this present baby murderin' case is going to reflect verra well – on you, and on me."

The Inspector breathed deeply, then started to cough again. It hurt to take in air. He knew Murdoch was fixated on Dr. Talbot's assistant. Since talking with Dr. Talbot last Friday, he told himself no suspect, including Brantley, could be eliminated. It was important to proceed logically, methodically, and slowly. "What have you got for me then, Thomas?"

"I've located adverts in two outlying papers. Listen to this, sir. 'Treatment for crippled and defective children; remuneration not required; doing the Lord's work.'"

Inspector Wise thought he knew what was coming next. "And have you discovered who placed the advertisement?"

Sergeant Murdoch could not prevent a self-satisfied grin from crossing his face. "The 'crooked man,' that's who. It was Brantley, sir. And ye'll be interested to know that the contact address was not Dr. Talbot's Institute, but a letter-drop. It's clear to me



the scoundrel is up to no good. I'm off to have a bit of a chat with the creature now, if you've no objections, sir."

Despite the fact he himself wanted to talk with Brantley about the baby deaths, Inspector Wise felt annoyed with the sergeant. There could be many plausible explanations for the placement of such a notice, including offering the assistance of Dr. Talbot's clinic to mothers of children with deformities living outside London. Inspector Wise still felt that his sergeant was persecuting the man prematurely, jumping to insupportable conclusions simply because he wanted Oliver to be the wrongdoer.

Murdoch, however, took the Inspector's silence for tacit encouragement. "What's more, I'll bet ye buttons to bows, sir, that the good doctor knew nothing about the newspaper listings. That must be why the contact address is not the Talbot Institute at all."

"Thomas, I agree there may be some grounds for suspicion. I myself called on Dr. Talbot last Friday, and he told me Brantley was temporarily in Yorkshire, visiting his ill mother. Constable Brown is looking into the veracity of this claim. Still, I feel you are blowing this new information out of proportion. The most likely explanation is that Dr. Talbot is simply bringing his clinic to the attention of those who might benefit. Perhaps the address is a postal box where the doctor receives his mail. Also, take into account the phrase 'no remuneration required.' That does not match well with your theory that Brantley is out to turn a profit."

"I'm not sayin' I can explain every little detail at the moment, sir. But maybe it's just an enticement, same as that poppycock about 'doin' the Lord's work.' I doubt that's the kind of self-satisfied, sanctimonious phrase Dr. Talbot would choose to describe his

clinic. Brantley could use the ad to lure his victims, who would be desperate enough to begin with, then enter into some sort of financial negotiation once he was able to dangle a ready solution in front of them.”

“You’re just guessing, Thomas.”

“There’s more, sir.”

“Thomas,” the Inspector said resignedly, coughing into his hand, “with you, there’s always more.”

Murdoch gave his superior a hurt glance, but said, “I thought when I brought Nick Prodger in that he was not bein’ completely forthcomin’ with us. So I went back and leaned on him a little harder. This time he gave up the name of a midwife who is fencin’ babies, defective babies, in some sort of baby-farmin’ operation. Accordin’ to Prodger, she described the receiver as a ‘peculiar little man.’ It could be Brantley.”

“And it could be the Archbishop of Canterbury. How much did this information cost you, Thomas? And did the highly principled Mr. Prodger know just how badly you wanted it? For God’s sake, Thomas. Have you actually found this woman? Questioned her?”

“I haven’t located her yet, sir, but I...”

“Then all of this is mere foolishness.”

“I know you think I’m being hasty, sir,” the sergeant responded with a touch of wounded pride, at the same time thinking that perhaps the Inspector was so resistant to contemplating Brantley’s possible involvement because of his own feeble daughter. “I’m not sayin’ yet he’s guilty of anythin’, sir, only that we need to find out more.” In response to the Inspector’s unstated skepticism, Murdoch continued hurriedly, “You’ll

have to admit, sir, he's a strange one. And cold-hearted, too though I don't wonder he has cause to be. Then too he's been educated past what he was ever meant to be by Dr. Talbot, who is well-meaning, but a bit of an innocent, if you ask me, so that maybe he has expectations above his station. Ye know, life dealt him a bitter hand, and he thinks he deserves to make it up, any way he can. To my way of thinking, it's a dangerous combination. Just one little match, and it could ignite faster than fast."

Inspector Wise continued to look dubiously at Sergeant Murdoch. "But what is the match, Thomas?"

Murdoch said uncomfortably, "We've got smoke sir, to my way of thinking, and where there's smoke, there's fire. We've got dead babies, likely murdered babies according to Dr. Talbot, we've got street rumors of a new baby-farming business, and we've got someone who has access. But as to the match, of course I can't say for sairtain that we've found it yet. Maybe money, like I said before. Maybe just plain spite."

Inspector Wise disliked what he felt he needed to say next but could see no way to avoid it. Thomas would have to learn not to let his prejudices race ahead of the evidence. "Close the door, Thomas," he said quietly.

## CHAPTER NINETY-SEVEN

In the outer office, Constable Brown could hear the raised voices of his superiors escalating in anger, seeping through the flimsy door. He pretended to attend to his reports, but to his embarrassment he felt much the same distress he had experienced as a boy when his parents quarreled.

“What more do you want, sir?” he heard Murdoch say, almost begging. “I’ve given you evidence that Brantley may be acquiring babies from the countryside under false pretenses. I’ve told you the word in the street is that a peculiar person is desirous to obtain unwanted infants. A body is left outside Dr. Talbot’s consultation...” Something more was said, but Brown could not distinguish the words. Brown heard a dry, painful coughing, and then the Inspector spoke.

“...circumstantial, Thomas. You have balanced a great mountainous mass of conjecture on inferences and assumptions. You are prejudiced and narrow-minded, and you are not acting like a good policeman or a good detective.” Brown winced. He knew this would insult the Sergeant, who prided himself on his detecting skills. The Inspector’s voice fell and he had trouble making out what was said next. His curiosity getting the better of him, Constable Brown moved closer to the closed door. Murdoch seemed to be protesting, defending himself, then once again he heard Inspector Wise.

“What you’ve done, Thomas, is reach a conclusion with limited information, and now you are trying to squeeze the rest of the information to fit your preconceived notions. That is not the scientific process we follow in detection.”

“I’ve had a feeling about Brantley from the start. I know he’s hiding something.”

“But why would he leave the baby’s body at Dr. Talbot’s? Doesn’t that point a finger at himself?”

“Just the contrary, sir. I think he feels invincible. We’ve been over there enough so he knows we have no solid evidence. It’s a dare, a provocation. I don’t claim to have proven my case, sir. But that will come. I say we arrest him – now - or at least interrogate him.”

Inspector Wise had a sudden vision of Rebecca's shining face, of Michael Talbot signing hello to Emily and pulling a coin out of an amazed Naomi's ear. I must show I respect the doctor's judgment in this matter, even if I do not entirely trust it, he decided. "And I say I am handling this in my own way and you are not to go off half-cocked. I do not claim Brantley is innocent, nor do I assume he is guilty of anything more than being a cripple, but I intend to proceed based on evidence, not innuendo."

Again, the words fell to an uncomfortable murmur. Suddenly, the door flung open. Guiltily, Constable Brown scampered back to his desk and made a show of sorting through his papers.

"Hard at work, are ye, laddie?" said the Sergeant, in a tone that made the constable instantaneously aware that his eavesdropping was completely obvious to the higher-ranking officer. Inspector Wise followed, then stopped, his lanky frame filling up the doorway. Constable Brown thought he looked sick and feverish. Placing his arms against the doorframe, as though he could no longer stand upright unaided, he called after Murdoch's retreating back, "Sergeant, I am giving you a direct order not to harass Oliver Brantley further until you have spoken with me. That is a direct order. Do you hear me, Thomas?"

Sergeant Murdoch gave no sign of acknowledgment as he lumbered down the stairs. Constable Brown was acutely conscious that he had just witnessed an act of insubordination. The Inspector struggled to regain command of himself. To Brown, his face seemed filled not with anger, but with despair.

"He is going about this all wrong, William. He thinks he has solved these baby deaths, but I am not convinced. Now he has forced my hand by his defiance, and I will

be constrained to act against him.” Inspector Wise turned back into his office. “Perhaps I am not the right man for this job.” The door closed behind him with an awful finality. Constable Brown felt a wave of pity for the Inspector. Embarrassed by his own emotion, the constable painstakingly continued his incident report of the vagrant pot-mender whose donkey had eaten a peggy’s flowers, and the ruckus that had ensued. As he listened to the Inspector coughing inside his office, he believed he had the means at his disposal to introduce a note of optimism into the general malaise.

## CHAPTER NINETY-EIGHT

Constable Brown had acted with alacrity on the Inspector’s directive to confirm Oliver Brantley’s whereabouts. The next day, he managed to learn from Dr. Talbot’s anxious nurse that Brantley’s mother currently resided in Leeds. He purchased a ticket for the long ride without a second thought. Rail journeys seemed to bring him luck. Once arrived, with the help of the local constable, he was able to track down an address for Brantley’s mother.

After knocking on the doors of several small, back-to-back poorly built houses crammed into a small courtyard, Constable Brown found one that opened an unwilling crack. “Get gone,” came the less than inviting greeting.

“I am looking for Mrs. Brantley, if you please, ma’am,” replied Brown, hoping that politeness would carry the day.

“Ha ha, tha’ just missed her,” cackled his informant, as though she had relieved herself of a great witticism.

“And do you know when she might return?” persisted Brown.

“Not this side of Judgment Day. She wa’ buried two days ago. Gone t’ be with the angels,” the woman added sanctimoniously.

“I’m truly sorry to hear that, mother. I’m sure she was a fine woman.”

“She were a cranky curmudgeon,” her neighbor said with satisfaction.

Constable Brown, who had always been taught not to speak ill of the dead, no matter how unpleasant they were during life, was temporarily at a loss for words. At last he ventured, “And her son? Oliver? Is he still in town?”

“Aye, that one! A miserable mess of ‘umanity, if ever there wa’ one. Always got face on, ‘e did. But Mrs. Brantley wa’ that chuffed whenever Oliver visited, which wa’nt that often. Wouldn’t bide a word against th’ man. ‘E left for London before ‘is mum wa’ barely cold in th’ ground, not even botherin’ t’ take a brew with those as cared for the poor woman in her last sickness,” the old woman grumbled. “Did ‘e even try t’ compensate us for th’ time, broth, teas, and med’cines we gave t’ her? Not a bit of it. Not,” she added virtuously, “mine’st you, that we would have taken any remuneration of course.”

Brown made his escape as quickly as he could, declining the woman’s begrudging offer to “mash” some tea. It was already Sunday evening and it would take him late into the night to return to London. He wanted to be able to report to his superiors first thing Monday morning. Despite being unable to bring Oliver Brantley back with him, Brown felt the trip had not been wasted. Brantley was already in London. He would be found and interrogated. True enough, Brantley’s mother had indeed been ill, but it was also true that he had arrived in the City in time to place the dead baby at Dr. Talbot’s offices.

Brown was glad he did not yet have the responsibility to make all the pieces fit. One way or another, the Inspector would sort it all out. In the meantime, he could not fail to appreciate his constable's dedication to duty. This time Brown was sure he would get his reimbursements.

The constable had not been idle in other respects as well. While everyone else involved in the Fairhaven case had forgotten about the plaster of Paris casts sitting in the storage room of the police station, he, William Benjamin Brown, rookie constable, had not. Several casts had been made, but none had been deemed of sufficient quality to warrant a potential match. Sergeant Murdoch, who had little patience for what he called "sculptural evidence," had nodded with grim satisfaction upon hearing the inconclusive results. "Don't mess around with that stuff, laddie," he advised Brown, "unless ye think you're some kind of Michelangelo instead of a policeman."

But the analogy had started an obsessive chain of thought in the young constable's mind. A story about the great Italian sculptor, told him by a village schoolmaster with pretensions to culture, had long stuck in his mind. Michelangelo, the teacher informed the rowdy farm boys impatiently awaiting the end of winter so they could be freed from the drudgery of school, believed that every sculpture he created already lay within the marble stone, waiting only to be uncovered by genius.

As Brown looked at the haphazard collection of molds, he had wondered whether it might not be his own simple genius to uncover the solution to the riddle contained in these plaster castings. Patiently, he had begun to make sketches and tracings of shoes and boots - Lady Fairhaven's, Sir Gregory's, male and female servants, and wherever possible, those of interviewed suspects. This latter had proved a particular challenge,



since he had not exactly obtained explicit instruction from either Inspector Wise or Sergeant Murdoch to follow this course of action, and the doors of such notables as the Rothsteins and the industrialist Frederick May had remained closed to him. Indeed, it had taken him this long to screw up his courage and brave the formidable Kate Hamilton in her lair.

But he had done so last week, and his efforts had paid off handsomely. Mrs. Hamilton, as he persisted in calling her, had not been the dragon of his nightmares. On the contrary, she had shown herself to be surprisingly cooperative. With no fuss and bother, she had let him into Arabella's room, and he had faithfully made copies on foolscap of the soles of her few boots and slippers. Upon his departure, he received a pinch on his rosy cheek and an invitation to come back any time, on official business or not.

To his own surprise, sifting through the dusty casts later that day, he thought he might have a match, the drawing made from a fetching outdoor cloth boot with a leather galosh, astrachan trimming, cord fastenings, and a sole with a unique striated pattern. True, he did not have much experience in this sort of thing, but the size was right, and it was one of the most intact prints they'd found. In growing excitement, he thought to himself, "Cinderella's slipper! Well, miss, if the shoe fits, wear it!"

Brown had intended to bring this discovery to Sergeant Murdoch's attention when the unpleasantness with the Inspector intervened. Now he thought was the perfect time to reveal all his accomplishments directly to Inspector Wise. As he considered the matter carefully, dwelling on his initiative, his thoroughness, his perseverance, he thought that

his rapid advancement through the ranks was all but guaranteed. He knocked on the office door, then turned the knob timidly but determinedly.

Inspector Wise swiveled round in his chair to regard the intruder. He really does look unwell, thought Brown.

“What, Brown, what?” the Inspector said peevishly.

“I have some information that might cheer you up, sir,” Brown said happily.

## CHAPTER NINETY-NINE

Murdoch left the police station in a kind of stolid fury. He had been insulted, belittled by his commander, ordered not to pursue a line of inquiry he was sure would produce a conviction. So furious was he that he was barely conscious of his surroundings, the dust of snowflakes falling about his head and shoulders, the people scurrying out of his way as he strode down the middle of the street.

But he felt luck was still with him. He had the name of the midwife, Mrs. Catherine Martin, and just as he left Inspector Wise’s office, Constable Fields had come up with an address for the woman: 33a Dean Street, in Soho. Maybe she wouldn’t be there, maybe she had moved, but Sergeant Murdoch intended to find out. According to Prodger, with whom she apparently had shared a pint, and perhaps something more, every once in a while for the past few months she had procured unwanted babies at no cost to their grateful mothers, and then passed them, for a fee, on to a third party, the identity of which she had unfortunately not revealed to her erstwhile lover, other than to say, as he had reported to the Inspector, he was “peculiar.” What had especially

interested Murdoch in this information, although Inspector Wise had chosen to pay no attention, was the fact that, as Nick Prodger delicately phrased it, “ill health of the infant were no obstacle. In fact, it were desirable.”

Six years ago, Sergeant Murdoch remembered, this same Mrs. Martin had been the object of an anonymous letter-writing campaign, improbably alleging that she had murdered five hundred and fifty five babies in a year and a half period, charging between ten and fifty pounds per child. Although she was under surveillance for some time, ultimately there had been no prosecution, as none of her clients were willing to give evidence. Now, since Inspector Wise had forbidden him to pursue Brantley directly, he thought Catherine Martin might be an informative way to spend his afternoon.

If Mrs. Martin was pleased at a call from the police, she took great care not to show it. “I h’ain’t done nuthin’ wrong, an’ youse can’t prove th’ contrary,” she offered by way of greeting. Thomas Murdoch smiled what his Nancy referred to as his Cheshire Cat grin.

“Far be it for me to contradict ye, Mrs. Martin,” said Sergeant Murdoch in his best Detective Bucket imitation. “Officially speaking, ye don’t even see me here today. This is more in the nature of a social visit.”

“Ah, a social visit, is it?” the midwife replied sarcastically. “Are youse expectin’ me t’ offer youse tea an’ crumpets then?” Murdoch laughed appreciatively. He could afford to be generous.

“Only a wee bit of information, Mrs. Martin. Ye see, I hope that, after our little palaver, not only will ye consider yourself to be a true friend of mine, but ye’ll appreciate that Mr. Nicholas Prodger is already a man I count among my most captivatin’

acquaintances. A great storyteller, Mr. Prodger.” At the mention of the boardman, Mrs. Martin’s manner became even more hostile, if such a thing were possible.

“That fool? Wot garbage ‘as ‘e bin feedin’ you?”

“Only the choicest morsels,” Sergeant Murdoch replied soothingly. Mrs. Martin looked at him warily, her face creased with fear. “For instance, he mentioned your name in connection with a suspected baby murderin’ gang.”

“Baby murderin’... Wot are youse accusin’ me of? You can’t bring that up again. Your kind watched me ‘ouse fer months a few years back, an’ nivver came up with nuffin’. I don’t know nuffin’ about any gang.”

“Maybe not,” the sergeant said congenially, as though he could allow her this concession. “What about your sudden interest in defective babies? Humanitarian impulse, I suppose. It’s rumored ye are willin’ to take the poor creatures off the hands of mothers who can’t manage them, no questions asked. Any truth in that?”

Catherine Martin actually looked relieved.

“Nicky mentioned that little h’arrangement, did ‘e? Well, it’s not like wot you’re h’implyin’. Mebbe it is ‘umanitarian, jis’ like you say.”

It was Murdoch’s turn to be thrown off balance. “What are you talking about, Mrs. Martin? I warn you, this is no time for riddles.”

The midwife smiled in a gloating sort of way. “Youse might a’ tol’ me that’s why you was ‘ere, right from the start. Would a’ saved us both a bit o’ time an’ trouble. Now it h’ain’t a crime to adopt a baby, an’ it h’ain’t a crime if money changes ‘ands, neither. Upkeep’s expensive fer a damaged little ‘un same as a normal one, mebbe more so. An’ I got to live, too, don’t I?”

“I don’t see any little ones about here. What are ye doin’ with them, Mrs. Martin?”

“Well then, that there’s th’ beauty of the whole h’arrangement. I gets the babies from the poor mothers wot cain’t manage wit’ them. No wrong there. But now I’ve adopted them like, you see, so it’s like I’m responsible fer them. An’ o’ course I wants only th’ best fer the poor li’l dears. So I turn ‘em over to a gentleman wot pays me a few pounds fer the expenses I’ve had and takes ‘em to a doctor ‘oo cares for them as long as they need it, forever if that’s wot it takes. Or somefin’ like that. Arter I pass ‘em along, th’ details o’ wot ‘appens to ‘em is a bit ‘azy in me mind,” Mrs. Martin said with dignity. “But I’ve only their best welfare at ‘eart.”

“And who is the ‘gentleman’ to whom ye deliver these infants?” Sergeant Murdoch’s heart was beating fast, and there was a tightness in his chest. He wished the Inspector could be in the room to hear the answer.

“I couldn’t give youse a name,” Mrs. Martin said cagily. “But I can give youse a description. He’d be ‘ard to miss. ‘E’s a little crooked man, ‘e is, w’ a bit of a twisty walk. Moves like a crab, ‘e does. Talks funny too.” Murdoch smirked triumphantly, savoring the moment. It was definitely not the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Vindicated though he felt himself to be, there was one aspect of Mrs. Martin’s story that puzzled the Sergeant just a bit. He had assumed that Brantley’s involvement in the baby farming would be motivated by profit, the universal incentive in this age of capital. Now he wondered where the man could find thirty pounds to pay Mrs. Martin for the children. Probably he was robbing Dr. Talbot blind, and the poor gullible doctor wasn’t even aware. Yet, if Brantley did not dispose of the infants for cash, but even

expended funds on their acquisition, then was it simply out of some perverse gratification that he was driven to destroy them? No matter, he would soon be at the bottom of the maze.

“You say this crooked man paid ye for these babies to take care of them ‘forever,’ as you put it?” he asked, to make sure he’d understood her correctly.

“That’s th’ beautiful part. ‘E pays me thirty pounds a head, a baby that is. Tells me I must give over twenty pounds o’ that to the poor mother... which, o’ course I do,” Mrs. Martin added virtuously.

Sergeant Murdoch thanked the midwife profusely, leaving the woman flabbergasted. But the sergeant was a happy man. He’d learned everything he needed to know. Brantley, he was sure, must be keeping some of the money he received from Dr. Talbot to pay Mrs. Martin and other procurers. The crippled creature likely brought some of the babies to Dr. Talbot’s Institute for treatment, while coldly murdering others and leaving their wee bodies on display in a bizarre mockery of his employer’s work. Poor Dr. Talbot, immersed in his good intentions and naïve to the ways of the dirty world, would be none the wiser.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED

After praising Constable Brown’s investigatory initiative so lavishly that even the young man himself felt satisfied, Inspector Wise decided his first priority was to confront Sir Gregory and then Arabella Bowdoin. To his way of thinking, Brown’s information regarding Brantley’s mother justified only further sympathy for the unlucky creature, not

additional persecution. He would follow up with Brantley himself, to be sure, but first things first. He was convinced that the plaster of Paris print was the piece of incriminating evidence he had been seeking since the beginning of the Fairhaven case.

Inspector Wise was shown into the baronet's library with only a modicum of respect by the new butler. It was clear that this retainer was taking the aspersions cast on his master as personally as had Mr. Creavey. As for the master, he showed an icy contempt toward the Inspector.

"I have been waiting for results, Inspector, and I am still waiting. In the process, I have been humiliated, my personal life invaded, scandal spread about me. I require immediate and conclusive action."

"That is why I have come, Sir Gregory. Even as we speak, I am taking action. There are a few small points on which we need further elucidation, which I hope you can provide."

"Just get on with your questions, man."

Sir Gregory had not invited the Inspector to be seated, so he remained standing. Debilitated by sickness and worry, he wondered how long he could do so without keeling over completely. "First, a question about Mr. Frederick May. Are you aware that he had attempted to resume his liaison with Lady Fairhaven, and that she had threatened to enlighten his wife?"

The baronet started angrily, and the Inspector saw the color rising in his cheeks. "The man sat at my table," he sputtered. "He and I talked matters of business that very evening, like two gentlemen. I had approached him regarding my... my pecuniary predicament, and I was more than willing to overlook the differences in our standing in

society, our background. I was even willing to overlook his past coquetry with Lady Alicia. And now to hear this! The insolence... the presumption..."

"Do you think Mr. May might have been so disturbed by the possibility of such a confrontation between Lady Fairhaven and his wife that he would have been moved to violence?"

"I have no idea. Certainly, he was upset enough the first time around. The man must be mad. What can he have been thinking?"

Inspector Wise did not answer directly, but only said, "A further question, if I may, Sir Gregory."

"Yes, yes..." the baronet agreed abstractedly.

"Alfred Rothstein. Did your wife know he engaged in acts of inversion?"

"What are you saying? What sort of accusation is this? If you repeat such an allegation, the Rothsteins will have you drawn and quartered."

"I won't have to repeat it, Sir Gregory, if you will just answer the question."

"Did Lady Alicia have knowledge that he... Good God. This is appalling."

"Precisely what Mr. Rothstein might have thought if such a rumor about him were widely circulated."

"By Lady Alicia? Are you suggesting that Rothstein might have... murdered her to keep her silent? It is hardly credible."

"I agree, sir, it seems unlikely. At the moment, we do not even have circumstantial evidence establishing Mr. Rothstein at the scene of the crime, but anything is possible. And humiliation, not to mention prison, is a powerful motivator. Perhaps the murderer was hired by Mr. Rothstein, but again we have no leads."



“Rothstein, Rothstein,” murmured the baronet. “I can hardly credit such an idea...” But to the Inspector’s practiced eye, his face betrayed more relief than incredulity. Inspector Wise knew now was the time to press forward.

“Another loose end has to do with Miss Arabella.” Sir Gregory tensed but waited in silence.

“You see, we’ve matched a footprint found outside the morning room to one of her boots. No more lies, Sir Gregory. Tell me what really happened that night.”

The baronet flung himself onto a sofa and gazed into the fire. “Stupid girl,” he said at last. “I have tried to protect her, but in the back of my mind I wondered... As you know, she had some foolish notion that if Lady Alicia were no longer a factor so to speak in my life, she might profit by her absence. I didn’t take her seriously, to be honest I found the fantasy endearing.” He paused, as though considering. “Yes, she did leave that night, although I had no idea where she went of course.” He rubbed his hands, then held them out to the cheerfully crackling fire.

“Yet you never mentioned this crucial fact to the police.”

“I had no idea it could be important, Inspector. I don’t know how to phrase this, frankly it is an embarrassment to me.” He glanced hopefully at the Inspector as if he might be able to rescue him from his dilemma, but Inspector Wise waited stoically. “Well then... By the time I arrived at Arabella’s, I’d had quite a bit to drink, too much so to be able to... do my duty. I assumed Arabella had simply taken advantage of my intoxicated state to go out and ply her trade. She was obsessed with money, you know.” Inspector Wise refrained from observing that, so far as he could divine, Sir Gregory appeared to share fully in this obsession.

The baronet seemed to take some consolation in the Inspector's silence and rubbed his hands together again. "So," he ventured with considerably more congeniality than he had exhibited when Inspector Wise first put in an appearance, "your suspects are that fool May, the Rothsteins, and poor Arabella? Well, at any rate, I'm glad to see you are making some headway."

"My suspects are numerous unfortunately, Sir Gregory. Mr. May, Sir Rothstein, Professor Maximus, perhaps even Molly Reid, although since leaving your employ seems to have arrived nowhere other than at death's door, James the former footman, poor Arabella, as you say... and of course you, Sir Gregory. Let us not forget your own compelling motive, the mountainous debt of which your wife's death so opportunely relieved you." The baronet turned pale and became very still.

Inspector Wise continued imperturbably, "Conspiracy is a nasty word, Sir Gregory, but sometimes it must be used. And sometimes it must be used in connection with murder. I have not forgotten the encouragement you gave to Arabella's hostile fantasies toward Lady Fairhaven. Knowing that Arabella was actually on the premises near the time of your wife's death only heightens my suspicions. As I said, conspiracy to murder is an ugly concept, and it carries an ugly penalty."

Sir Gregory Fairhaven rose from the couch with the kind of instinct for dominance that reminded the Inspector he was an aristocrat. "I wish to consult my barrister, Inspector. At the moment I have nothing further to say, sir. Good day." He strode from the room, his handsome fair head held high. Inspector Wise, drained but encouraged, made his own way out.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-ONE

Making his way the next day to Kate Hamilton's flash house, Inspector Wise felt the excitement of the chase, a familiar sense that the pieces were beginning to align at last. After Brown's disclosure, he had gone to examine the cast and the tracing himself, and certainly there were similarities, although the crudity of execution in both cases left much to be desired. Nevertheless, this was a definite lead, a material piece of information that both he and his staff had neglected. Now, with confirmation from Sir Gregory that Arabella had indeed been absent in a timeframe coinciding with Lady Fairhaven's death, it was crucial that he see her. From the reports he'd received, Arabella sounded like a woman who would do whatever was necessary to ensure her survival. He could believe that, with Sir Gregory's encouragement, she might have taken this drastic step. He also knew that the arduous and degrading life she had led had helped shape her into the person she was. Still, the law was the law and the only anchor he had left.

The sun, a poor, pallid thing, was already low in the sky, and a biting wind was beginning to rise. Inspector Wise quickened his pace, then broke down and hailed a cab. In his present condition, he doubted whether he had the strength to make the journey on foot. Still, he thought he might be able to demonstrate convincingly that Arabella Bowdoin, acting either singly or, as he suspected, as the unwitting instrument of Sir Gregory's plotting, was responsible for Lady Fairhaven's death, and the possibility of at last reaching resolution on this case buoyed his spirits. As for Murdoch's insubordination, on further consideration it could be swept under the rug, it was understandable really, given the frustrating nature of that case. He would talk to Talbot

again, find out whether poor Oliver could really be a plausible suspect, follow all the leads systematically, and reach a conclusion about the dead babies as well. Perhaps, after all, things were working out.

The Inspector's thoughts were interrupted by the hansom coming to a stop in front of Kate's establishment. He gave the driver his fare and tipped him generously, which did not prevent the man from giving him a knowing wink.

Kate herself put in a brief appearance, saying only with a simper that the police seemed to be becoming regular guests of hers, then summoned Arabella. Dressed for work, she looked shocking, but stunning, in the Inspector's opinion. Cheeks heavily rouged, eyes mascaraed, breast powdered, she wore an off-the-shoulder gown, covered with bows and ruffles and boasting a provocative bustle and train, that might have been modified from some earlier ballroom use. Her hands were gloved, and imitation diamond teardrops hung from her ears. A sparkling necklace emphasized the delicious cleavage of the dress. Inspector Wise stifled the impulse to bow and offer her his arm to escort her into supper. It struck him forcibly that, under other circumstances, Arabella would have made a beautiful Lady Fairhaven.

But the illusion of elegance was marred by Arabella's agitated demeanor. She remained standing and wrung her hands nervously.

"Are youse th' rozzer wot don't b'lieve in th' Contagious Diseases Act?" she asked curiously, the cockney accent spoiling her attempt at upper-crust sophistication.

"It is true I do not believe that is a good law," Inspector Wise answered, wondering how she could possibly be familiar with his views on the bill. "But that is not why I am here now."

“Din’t think so,” Arabella said abruptly. “Wot then? Wot do you want from me?”

“Miss Bowdoin,” Inspector Wise began carefully, “a shoe print found outside the Fairhaven’s morning room the day of Lady Fairhaven’s murder has been matched to one of your boots. Do you deny that you were there?” Not wanting to distract her from this crucial question, he stifled a cough.

“Oh God, oh God, oh God,” Arabella bleated, beginning to pace. The Inspector unexpectedly felt sorry for her. He interrupted her frantic meandering by gently grabbing her gloved arms.

“Sit down, Miss Bowdoin, and answer my question,” he said, not unkindly.

Arabella abruptly placed herself on a brocade divan, then put her face in her hands and wailed. The Inspector let her cry, but he also knew she was gaining additional time to compose a convincing story.

At last she dried her eyes. “All right. You’ve found out this much, youse might as well know th’ rest o’ it. I *was* there in th’ early morning hours, it’s true, I were in th’ garden outside that room where she wrote ‘er papers an’ sich.”

“Why did you go? What happened?”

Arabella took advantage of this line of questioning to burst into renewed tears. “It’s not loik you think.”

“Then for God’s sake tell me what it was like.”

“I did go to see ‘er, I admit it, but jus’ to see ‘er, maybe to talk with ‘er, let ‘er know I existed, I were a ‘uman bein’ jus’ loik ‘er. Lately, Greggie often chatted me up about ‘ow much nicer it was bein’ with me then with ‘er. Tol’ me ‘e felt powerful an’

manly with me, an' 'ow 'appy we could be if only she warn't around. 'Ow 'e might even set me up with a nice place o' me own. But wot could I do about sich things? I mean, arter all, 'e'd married 'er, 'adn't 'e? Still, I thought I might explain 'ow things was to 'er. I rightly don' know wot I wanted to say to 'er, only make 'er see I warn't a bad sort." Arabella heaved a sigh, and Inspector Wise noticed with fascination how her breasts swelled like waves cresting over a breakwater, only to recede modestly back into the confines of her tightly fitted bodice.

"In th' end, it din't make no diff'rence wot I wanted to say, coz I din't say nothin' at all to 'er. Greggie 'ad often tol' me 'bout th' mornin' room, where she worked when she couldn't sleep. An it jus' struck me, when Greggie fell into bed, overcome wit' drink 'e was, why not go an' see wot th' grand lady were up to. So I took a cab to Mayfair, then walked a bit of th' way to th' house, so as no one'd notice me. I found my way into th' garden and, sure enough, I could see 'er through the glass doors.

"But she warn't alone."

"Not alone?" The Inspector found it difficult to breathe. The cough he had suppressed broke through with renewed strength. Arabella stared at him in alarm, but he forced himself to continue. "Who was with her?"

"I cain't rightly say. It were a man, that I know. But th' light were poor, I were far off, an I couldn't rightly see. After that, I lost me nerve, turned right around, and went back th' way I come."

"And when you returned home, was Sir Gregory still in your bed?"

Arabella faltered for a fraction of a second, then looked Inspector Wise full in the face. "No, 'e warn't. 'E were gone. Told me later 'e'd gone back to 'is club."

“And why did you not mention any of this information earlier, Miss Bowdoin?”

“Greggie tol’ me not to. Said it were better fer all concerned if I didn’ say nuthin’ ‘bout me bein’ there, an’ him *not* bein’ ‘ere. An’, as far as I kin tell, ‘e were right.”

And that was all the Inspector could wrest from Arabella, although he interrogated her repeatedly as to whether, in fact, she had not invented the man in the morning room; whether, in fact, she had not entered the room and first confronted, then stabbed Lady Fairhaven; whether, in fact, the man in the morning room could not have been an acquaintance of Lady Fairhaven’s whom she recognized, perhaps even Sir Gregory Fairhaven himself? Arabella cried, Arabella dried her tears, Arabella called on God as her witness, Arabella railed against the police, but she could not be shaken from her uncertainty.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-TWO

Under normal circumstances, Sergeant Murdoch would have returned immediately to the Whitechapel station to report his findings to Inspector Wise. Now, however, he had no intention of revealing anything to that arrogant Jew. He would wrap matters up himself, arrest the suspect, and earn Superintendent Walker’s commendation. Wise be hanged! He’d soon learn not to dismiss Thomas Murdoch so lightly.

“I’m here to talk to Oliver Brantley, Dr. Talbot.” Sergeant Murdoch stood at the doorway of Dr. Talbot’s office, his husky body almost filling the frame. It was close to seven o’clock in the evening. Fussing behind him was Talbot’s servant, protesting that the sergeant had not permitted her to announce him.

“Never mind, Fanny. You’ve done well,” Dr. Talbot reassured her. Appeased, Fanny bobbed and left.

“Come in then, Sergeant. Please, take a seat. You don’t mind if I smoke?” Talbot seemed unruffled by the unexpected intrusion and the lateness of the hour. He wore an elegant silk smoking jacket. “Now, my good man, what is all this about?”

“I must speak with Brantley, sir.”

“Very well, sergeant, I will summon him. He retired early tonight, he has just recently returned from his mother’s funeral and has been in a good deal of pain all day, but I will send for him immediately.” He rang a small porcelain bell, and the diminutive maid instantly appeared, as if she had been waiting by the door for a signal. The doctor spoke softly to her, and she glided out as magically as she had materialized.

“While we are waiting, would you mind telling me why you are here?”

“We have acquired information about a new baby-farming operation. The infants are secured directly from mothers in outlying areas or fenced by a midwife to a receiver. The ring seems to have a special interest in infants with some sort of abnormality. As of now, we are not quite sure what happens to these infants, but we suspect some of them may be the dead babies discovered recently in and about the London area.”

“A tragedy, to be sure, but one that is quite familiar to me. What does all this have to do with Oliver?”

“I have reason to believe Brantley is the receiver for the operation.”

“The receiver? But good heavens,” and here Michael Talbot noticeably paled, “Inspector Wise has already questioned me about Oliver. I have reassured him there is no possibility he could have any association whatsoever with such activities. Yet here



you are, suggesting that Oliver... that he might be responsible... It is insupportable!”

With a brusque gesture, Dr. Talbot pushed away from his desk and began an agitated pacing, his hands clasped behind his back.

“There is evidence to suggest he could be the culprit,” Murdoch continued stubbornly.

“I don’t believe it for an instant. Oliver is a devoted, simple soul. What possible motive could he have for harming these infants, infants in some way like himself? Such an act goes against everything we have worked so hard for here at the Institute. Why would he do something so heinous?”

“Maybe money, sir,” the sergeant replied, although this explanation no longer made as much sense to him. After all, Mrs. Martin had complacently remarked that *he* was paying *her*. Perhaps a third party was remunerating Brantley, who like the midwife, had decided to pocket a percentage for himself. Ah well, he’d work out the details in time. “Or maybe just viciousness.” He wondered what was keeping Brantley.

Dr. Talbot turned to face the accuser, and he appeared to have regained some of his assurance. “What is happening is a witch-hunt. Typical of the London constabulary - a lazy, overpaid bunch of good-for-nothings, pardon my bluntness, Sergeant, who routinely bungle even the simplest investigations. Do you realize how often you are a laughingstock among the citizenry? And with good cause!

“This whole absurdity has become clear to me. A series of horrific infanticides occur. As usual, the police make no progress, likely have no real interest in a painstaking investigation that would take time and energy and critical reasoning. Pressure is brought to bear from influential sources, members of Parliament, the Infant Life Protection

Society. Then suddenly, a miracle! A poor, deformed cripple conveniently becomes the target of the investigation. Evil will out! If twisted on the outside, then of course it follows one must be vile on the inside! Oh, I've heard it all, and he has heard a thousand times worse! Why bother with evidence? Why bother with a trial? Why not just hang the poor devil and be done with it!"

During this speech, the doctor had become progressively more agitated. His face flushed, he paced up and down the small room, forcing Sergeant Murdoch to move backward slightly to avoid colliding with him.

"Where is Brantley, Dr. Talbot?"

"First thing in the morning, I am taking up this matter with Inspector Wise, Perhaps he can help us untangle this mess." Dr. Talbot drew himself up solemnly, and placed an authoritative hand on Murdoch's shoulder. "On my word as a gentleman, I swear to you I am as certain of Oliver's innocence in this matter as I am of..." he wavered imperceptibly, "of anything in this world."

"Where is Brantley?" Murdoch repeated.

"I have no wish to lie to you. Oliver is no longer here. He is on his way to a safe haven, where I hope he will remain until we can clarify matters." Sergeant Murdoch uttered an oath and, with an utter disregard for the conventions of civility, rushed from the room. Dr. Talbot looked after him for a moment, then turned toward the window and gazed outside at the falling snow. He thought it looked very cold.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-THREE

By the time he reached home, Inspector Wise felt too ill for supper. Instead, he stumbled up the stairs, asking Hannah to send Martha up with some broth from the stew they had had for the evening meal. But it was Miss Gelbstein herself who appeared, carrying a tray with a glass of port, as well as a loathsome mixture of onion soup and milk. He drank the port and pushed the steaming concoction as far away as possible.

“Simon,” she said firmly, “you are destroying yourself over this case.” He sat hunched in a chair, his clothes still damp from the snow outside, waiting for her to leave. Hannah was right, he thought. He was exhausted, suffering mentally and physically. After his interview with Arabella, his earlier hopefulness had vanished, and he felt more than ever confused about the Fairhaven case. His encounter with Arabella Bowdoin had only served to raise more questions in his mind. Of course, she could be lying but for some reason he believed her. And if she were telling the truth, then whatever man she had peeked at through the garden was likely Lady Fairhaven’s killer. It still could be one of his original suspects, except of course Molly Reid who for all he knew might have passed away by now. He favored Sir Gregory himself, but it could have been almost anyone, the ardent Mr. May, the disappointed James, a hireling of the powerful Rothsteins. He would try again in the morning. For the time being, he wanted only to lie down, to forget the miseries of his body in sleep, to leave the vast disorder of the world behind. But he did not want to compromise his dignity in front of his cousin.

“I am calling Dr. Baumgarten, Simon. You are sick, you are exhausted, you have expended all your energy, and you must rest. If I cannot make you see reason, then perhaps he can.”

“You are too good to me, Hannah,” he managed to croak, and to his delight he was rewarded by seeing the backside of her severe stuff dress departing the room. He flung himself on the bed, without bothering to remove his clothes. Rest, he thought. Better yet, oblivion.

\* \* \* \*

It was not to be. One commodity difficult in the extreme for a sick individual to obtain is rest. Sure enough, within the hour Dr. Baumgarten bustled in. He insisted Simon change into nightclothes and listened to his chest with a stethoscope.

“An inflammation of the lungs,” he informed Hannah and Rebecca, who hovered anxiously outside the door. “Not,” he hastily reassured them, “a consumption, merely an infection, bronchitis or perhaps pneumonia. But it is clear he has overexerted himself. The man is worn out. Keep him at home and keep him in bed.”

Next Naomi sneaked in and asked him to fix her spinning top which had stopped spinning. Before Miss Gelbstein shooed her out, he had managed to rethread the winding mechanism. Then Sarah stuck her head in to inform him that quinine was an excellent remedy for fevers, especially if he had contracted a tropical one. Miriam pranced by the doorway, not wanting to become disease-ridden, as she phrased it, but eager to show off a new dress she had recently completed. Rebecca hovered over her father, trying to nurse him but also desperate to ask why they had not seen Dr. Talbot since the night of the fire. The Inspector had begun to think that staying at home was infinitely more exhausting than being at work when he started to nod off.

But his dreams were not peaceful. A confusion of starving horses, bleeding soldiers, and crippled children filled his mind. Strange, half-human figures crawled

through the mud of the Crimea, calling for help. Lady Abbott passed by on the arm of an officer with a suppurating leg wound and gave him an impenetrable stare from her violet eyes. Lady Fairhaven danced daintily across the surface of an inland lake, but when she turned toward him, he saw that her ballgown was ripped down the middle, and her internal organs exposed. He dreaded seeing Rachel, whom he knew was somewhere in that suffering mob, waiting meekly for him to help her. Wise tossed and turned, suddenly sitting bolt upright. Miss Gelbstein was tapping at the door.

“I am so sorry to disturb you, Simon. I told this young man to go away,” she said, pointing at an agitated Constable Brown, whom Inspector Wise glimpsed hovering by her side, “but he insisted he could not delay. He has been most persistent,” she concluded, giving William Benjamin Brown a critical scowl.

Brown, however, was not to be deterred. “Sir,” he exclaimed, bursting into the sickroom, “I’ve got an eyewitness.”

Inspector Wise felt his head was filled with cotton. “The arson? That burglary at St. James? What are you talking about, William?”

“A laundry woman, sir,” Brown rushed on. “She works in one of the fine houses in Mayfair. She was taking a cut-through, so as to save time, that took her right past the mews behind the Fairhaven town house. That’s when she saw him, sir.”

The Inspector shook his head. Was this as confusing as it seemed? “Who, William, who?” he said sharply.

“The crooked man, that’s who. Brantley, sir.”

Inspector Wise sat up in bed, suddenly alert, although his head continued to throb. “When did she see him?”

“Well, naturally, she can’t place it exactly, but she’d heard Big Ben a bit later, so she guesses about quarter till six. Not long after the medical examiner estimates Lady Fairhaven was murdered,” William Benjamin Brown reminded his superior.

“How can you be sure she saw Brantley? She doesn’t know him, does she?”

“Well no, sir.” The constable appeared slightly crestfallen. “But she described him exactly. She said she halfway bumped into him, he was crabbing along - that’s how she described it, sir - so fast. And instead of apologizing to the woman, as any decent fellow would, he didn’t so much as pause, but started to curse. Only you see, sir,” said Brown seriously, thinking that Sergeant Murdoch would be very proud of him at this moment, “the laundry woman could barely understand him, seeing as how his speech was garbled. She said she could hardly make out the words, but of course, when she did, she was very much shocked.”

Sharp as a photograph, without warning Inspector Wise saw Oliver Brantley standing in the Fairhaven morning room, a dagger in his upraised hand, Lady Fairhaven cowering against his rage. He realized he had never told Sergeant Murdoch about Lady Fairhaven’s secret identity. Suddenly, despite his fever, he saw it all clearly, Lady Fairhaven renewing her investigative role, stumbling on the baby farming scheme, Brantley needing to silence her. Lingered in his mind were Thomas Murdoch’s words: “What more do you want from me? What more do you want?”

Inspector Wise hastily began pulling on his clothes.

“What are you doing, Simon?” Miss Gelbstein protested, but the Inspector ignored her.

“Why did you come to me, William? Where is Sergeant Murdoch? Why didn’t you report this to him?”

“That’s just it, sir. I would have, of course, seeing as how you haven’t been feeling your best lately. But I couldn’t find him anywhere.”

The Inspector was filled with dread, a premonition of tragedy. He thought of the hurt and determination on his Sergeant’s face as he stormed from the office, of the man’s courage, and his pig-headed tenacity.

“Constable Brown, go immediately to the station house and pick up Sergeant Collins, who is on night duty. Then proceed to Dr. Talbot’s Institute on Goshen Street. If you find Oliver Brantley there, place him under arrest.”

William Benjamin Brown saluted smartly, and turned on his heel, hopeful that his big moment had arrived at last. Let me find Brantley, he prayed silently. Let me be the one.

Simon Wise had a prayer of his own as he slipped into his greatcoat. “Let me not be too late,” he prayed.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-FOUR

“For God’s sake, hurry, man!” Inspector Wise said to the cabby, who had pulled a shabby greatcoat about his shoulders and flung a sack over his legs to ward off the snow. It was past eleven, and the streets were deserted, save for the occasional straggler scurrying toward shelter. The horse’s shod hoofs clicked on the cobblestones, and the

cabby obediently applied the whip. The narrow lanes looped and twisted so that the Inspector felt dizzy. His head still ached and each breath rattled in his chest.

Settled in the cab, he had had a chance to think more logically about his uncharacteristically impulsive behavior. Sir Gregory, or Arabella, or the two of them in concert, were still logical suspects. They had motive, means and opportunity. He was not wrong to have focused his attention in this direction. Neither had he been able to definitively rule out May, or Rothstein, or even James, all of whom had dubious alibis. But no matter how much he reasoned out the situation, his sense of foreboding grew. Suppose Murdoch had been right about Brantley, even if for the wrong reasons? Suppose Arabella were telling the truth, and the man she claimed to have seen in the Fairhaven morning room was not Sir Gregory, but Oliver Brantley. Inspector Wise cursed himself for his devotion to logic. At the least, he had been too slow to back up his Sergeant's instincts, right or wrong, and the result was that Murdoch had bent all the rules and was stalking Oliver Brantley on his own, with unpredictable consequences.

After what seemed an eternity, they reached the street at the end of which was housed the Talbot Institute for Research Into the Deformities of Children. As if in a dream, he saw two figures, one standing in the street, the other, familiar in its misshapen shape, on the second-floor balcony of the building. A light from the interior of the structure added illumination to the dim glow of the moon.

When the shot rang out in the crisp night air, Wise, for all his experience, did not recognize it as such. Even to his well-trained and much-tested ear, the noise did not sound so much like a gunshot as the explosion of a firecracker. Indeed, the Inspector automatically looked skyward, half-expecting to see a starburst of light, although he



knew well enough it was not the Queen's birthday and Guy Faulkes' Day had already passed. It must have been some trick of the atmosphere that distorted the sound, for in the next moment he knew it precisely for what it was.

Looking up, he saw no Roman candles, no pinwheels, but something actually more remarkable, if not more beautiful. It was a human form and for an instant it seemed to be flying, until it began its descent toward earth. Inspector Wise remembered the soaring infant the night of the fire, and in a dazed fashion wondered momentarily whether he should attempt to run forward and catch this falling object, likewise captured by gravity. He was close enough to see that the figure was Oliver Brantley, and he even thought he could detect an expression of triumph on his face, although of course that was impossible, since Brantley was a good fifty meters away. He also thought he heard Brantley cry out, although perhaps it was he himself who shouted. In fact, at that moment it could have been any number of people, since suddenly there seemed to be a great deal of yelling and tumult.

The Inspector leaped down from the hansom seat and ran through the fast-gathering crowd, people hanging out of newly opened windows, and exiting from hastily unbolted doorways. A moment before the street had been virtually deserted, but now people appeared from nowhere, shouting, gesticulating, eager and expectant, almost as though this were a carnival, as if they knew that the festival had just begun.

"What is going on here?" Wise barked angrily and had a vision of Sir Gregory asking a similar question with similarly muted rage. At the memory, Wise felt a tremor throughout his body and pushed harder. He was met by a constable whom he vaguely recognized.

“Fields, sir,” the constable said helpfully.

“What’s going on here?” Inspector Wise demanded again.

“I’m afraid there’s been a bit of a ruckus, sir. We have a man down. I believe he was from your station, a sergeant...” Wise roughly elbowed Constable Fields to one side, and for the first time saw Sergeant Murdoch lying on the ground, his chest heaving in excruciating spasms that were difficult to watch. Another patrolman crouched beside him.

“Thomas.” Inspector Wise knelt down, and with some idea of easing his breathing, lifted the Sergeant to a half-sitting position. He could feel Murdoch’s heartbeat through his uniform and perceived idly that with each beat, blood oozed through the blue woolen material.

“What have you done, Thomas?” the Inspector said in an anguished voice.

“I’m sorry, sir,” Murdoch managed to gasp out. It was obviously painful for him to speak. As he did so, a blood-tinged phlegm trickled from his mouth. “I was wrong, sir.”

“Ssh, Thomas. Don’t talk. Constable, get the surgeon. Now!” Simon Wise grasped his Sergeant more tightly, ignoring the impropriety of a superior officer crouching in the mud. Not again, he prayed. Almighty God, I beg you, not again.

Thomas lay in his arms, gasping and twitching. His eyes fluttered closed.

“Yes, you damn fool, you were wrong to come here, without reinforcement, trying to be a hero, damn you, Thomas. But you were right, only I was too pigheaded, too stubborn to see it. It was I who was wrong, and now I have made you pay for my blindness.”

Thomas clutched his hand, and Simon Wise marveled at the suddenness with which the two of them, who had always meticulously obeyed every propriety and social convention in their interactions, had become so intimately, so messily entwined by the presence of death.

“I’ve let you down, sir,” Murdoch whispered. In the moonlight, his face looked waxen.

“Damn it, Thomas, don’t leave me too,” Inspector Wise pleaded. He was vaguely aware of the police surgeon bending down beside him.

“I’m afraid he’s gone, sir,” the surgeon said.

“Blessed be the true Judge,” said the Inspector over the Calvinist Thomas Murdoch. Taking his own coat in his hands, he methodically tore it on the seam. Then, under the compassionate and embarrassed eyes of his officers, Inspector Simon Wise cradled the body of his sergeant and wept.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-FIVE

The time following Murdoch’s murder and Brantley’s suicide was a nightmare for the Inspector, even as he reminded himself that he should be used to nightmares, both waking and sleeping. Although coughing, alternately sweating and shivering, the following morning he appeared at headquarters, and it was not until he noticed the startled glances and pitying whispers that he realized he was dressed in the soggy, bloodstained clothes of the night before. Even then, instead of returning home to change, he had sought out Constable Fields and interrogated him as though he were the guilty

party. Well, Inspector Wise thought savagely, someone must pay. Only at a calmer moment, later in the day, did it occur to him that his was the responsibility, his the guilt, and that the payment would be his as well.

Constable Fields did not seem unduly abashed by the Inspector's harsh tone. Perhaps he was used to being unfairly abused at the hands of his superiors. He told his story simply and with dignity, until Inspector Wise was shamed into adopting a gentler manner.

Constable Fields had been on his usual foot patrol. He normally passed by the Talbot Institute around eleven p.m., although that evening he had been slightly delayed by assisting a drunken reveler in the direction of his home. As he approached the Institute, he heard voices and shouting, very unusual for that time of night and that location. Before approaching closer, he paused, and overheard the following exchange.

The man whom Fields only later recognized as Sergeant Murdoch called out, "Ye'll never get away with it, Brantley."

The figure referred to as Brantley, standing two stories above Murdoch on the balcony of the Institute, shouted down something like, "You're a fool. I've already gotten away with it." The Constable noted that the man's speech was hard to understand, so that he had to guess at the exact words spoken.

"Ye think I don't see what's goin' on here, Brantley? Ye think I'm so thickheaded I wouldn't figure it out in the end?" At that moment, according to Constable Fields, Oliver Brantley seemed uncertain. Appearing to reach a determination, he pulled something from the folds of his cloak, in a gesture that the Constable described as convoluted and spasmodic. In the moonlight, Constable Fields thought he saw the glint

of metal and started to move forward. It was at that moment that he glimpsed the silver braid of Sergeant Murdoch's uniform and realized he was in the presence of a superior officer. He pulled out the truncheon from his belt and blew his police whistle, something he had never done in his four years on the Force. As he advanced, he heard Sergeant Murdoch continue to talk.

“Brantley, don't be more of a half-wit than ye already are. Ye can still save yourself. For yer own sake, put down that gun.”

“One death more won't make any difference.”

At this point, Constable Field's narrative became more imprecise, because of the rapidity with which events occurred, such that the human mind could not reasonably be expected to record them all with complete and total accuracy. Perhaps he heard the gun fire, and subsequently dove toward the Sergeant. Or perhaps he charged the Sergeant, anticipating the assault. In any case, he clearly remembered hurtling into Sergeant Murdoch, knocking him to the ground and hearing him cry out. Or perhaps he cried out. Or there may have been several cries, he couldn't really say. But he was fairly certain that he heard one voice above the death rattle in Murdoch's throat, above the shouting of the Inspector, and above the murmurs and exclamations of curious onlookers.

“I am free!” he thought the voice said in the garbled language of Oliver Brantley. And he clearly recalled looking upward, in response to the strained words, in time to see Brantley flying from the second story balcony, his cloak ballooning out around him like the wings of some malignant rook, until he landed on the cobblestones below.

Although the initial medical attention had been directed toward Sergeant Murdoch, as the upholder of law and order, eventually the police surgeon did make his

way over to Brantley. He was disconcerted to find the man still alive, although just barely. Remembering his Hippocratic oath, the surgeon bent dutifully over Brantley's body, quickly determining that his neck was broken, and that he was fast losing his capacity to breathe. Looking into the man's anguished eyes, he realized he was trying to say something. The police surgeon bent closer.

"Tell the doctor not to trouble about me," was what he thought he heard. For someone who had just become a murderer, perhaps a multiple murderer from what he could gather, the surgeon thought it a strangely solicitous request.

"I did not intend to," he replied, and straightening up, waited for the miscreant to die. It was only a matter of minutes.

At the end of this tale, Simon Wise could think of nothing to say. He could not excuse himself for missing the signs that led to his sergeant's death. He felt an overwhelming despair. When he finally closed the door to his office behind him, he staggered so that he would have fallen had not Constable Brown grabbed his arm and insisted that he escort the Inspector home. Wise did not protest. He wanted only to hide from the accumulation of his mistakes for which Thomas, not he, paid the ultimate price.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-SIX

After a brief consultation with Inspector Wise, Superintendent Walker summarily declared both the Fairhaven and the baby-farming cases closed. Oliver Brantley, now conveniently deceased, was identified as the linchpin in a depraved but all too common scheme to dispose of illegitimate unwanted and defective babies, as well as the dastardly

assassin of Lady Alicia Fairhaven. To the press, the Superintendent speculated that Brantley, while conducting his work for Dr. Talbot among the downtrodden of the Holy Land, had been unable to resist the monetary lure of baby farming. (This, despite the Inspector's patiently explaining that, as yet, they had not been able to establish any financial gain for Brantley and Wise's inopportune suspicion that there may have been an as-yet-unidentified third party overseeing the entire operation).

The scoundrel avoided even the pretense of establishing the rejected children in a salubrious country establishment as he basely implied to credulous mothers and midwives, and instead brutally put them to death. As more thorough autopsies indicated, which the authorities spared no expense to perform once the venal plot was exposed, the four infants had been pierced in the heart with a fine needle, inducing a rapid and painless death. He assumed Brantley had acquired this skill through his work in the laboratory of his generous, but naïve employer, Dr. Michael Talbot.

In addition to Catherine Martin, two other midwives had come forward, protesting their innocence, and claiming that while they had turned over a child to Brantley that the mother had been unable to care for, he had assured them that the babies would be well looked after. Superintendent Walker pledged that these women would be thoroughly investigated and that, although at the moment he could not establish exactly how funds had changed hands, these and other details would be forthcoming.

As far as Lady Fairhaven's connection with the whole sordid affair was concerned, he inferred that the key determinant in her death was ironically the lady's generous and altruistic nature. Although all the links were not completely clear, he presumed that, reprising her role as the mysterious A.B., through her brilliant

investigative inquiries she had, unaided, uncovered the entire cabal and was about to reveal it to the authorities.

Brantley must somehow have learned of her intentions, perhaps as a result of reading a note the lady had written to his employer likely detailing her suspicions. (Again, Wise protested in vain that Dr. Talbot had never produced the note, so its contents were still a mystery). Perhaps, Walker went on blithely, encouraged by the rapt attention of the reporters, given their personal acquaintance Lady Fairhaven had actually confronted Brantley, and he had basely murdered her to protect himself. An eyewitness positively identified a man meeting Brantley's description lurking in the vicinity of the Mayfield home at an unusually early hour that coincided with the coroner's estimate of the time of Lady Fairhaven's demise.

If Superintendent Walker felt less than confident about this scenario, he did not let a modicum of doubt invade his presentation to the press. They in turn were suitably impressed by the alacrity with which the police had identified such a satisfactory culprit. Brantley was the stuff of which headlines were made. Newsboys had a field day.

However, Inspector Wise experienced none of his usual relief at reaching the end of a difficult investigation. Instead, although the authorities assured the populace that they could now go about their business free from fear, he awoke each morning feeling oppressed and desolate. Partly he attributed these emotions to the devastating loss of Thomas Murdoch. Over and over in his mind he replayed those last days, looking for ways he might have intervened to save Thomas' life. No matter how he imagined the situation, he could not make the ending come out right.



Partly, too, he found the evidence against Brantley in the Fairhaven death remarkably circumstantial. True, Arabella insisted she had seen the figure of a man with Lady Fairhaven in her sitting room around the time the coroner estimated she was killed. But, despite the Inspector sending Constable Brown back to press her further, she insisted she could see nothing further through the glass and the dark. Was there anything odd about the man's appearance? She couldn't say. Did she notice anything about his speech? She couldn't hear. No matter how the Constable asked the question, Arabella would say only, "Are youse deaf? It were a man. Now that I mind, he looked sumpin' like you," which caused William Benjamin Brown to quickly take his leave. Privately Inspector Wise continued to regard Sir Gregory and the lovely Arabella as the most likely suspects in the death of Lady Alicia Fairhaven, and he was determined to bring them to justice.

As for the baby murdering ring, it seemed more wishful thinking than reality. In the emotion of the moment, with Sergeant Murdoch's dying body cradled in his arms, all Simon Wise could feel was guilt and repentance. His sergeant had been right, and he had been obstinate, blind, and unforgivably wrong. Now however he was not sure any of it hung together and could not help thinking that Brantley was a convenient scapegoat. Nothing about the supposedly culpable midwives had come to much, and his half-hearted efforts to identify a mastermind puppeteer led nowhere. Invalided at home when Superintendent Walker issued his pronouncement, he could only fume in impotent rage. As a theory, it had too many holes. In fact, it seemed to be all holes.

Then, five days after the deaths of Oliver Brantley and police sergeant Thomas Murdoch, a fifth baby murder occurred. The small body was laid out almost

ceremoniously on the steps of the Whitechapel police station. It being Christmas Day, only he and Brown were in the building, all other good Christian police at home celebrating the birth of Christ the Savior with their families.

Perhaps as a way of punishing himself, despite his illness, Inspector Wise had persisted in showing up first thing in the morning and not leaving his office until late at night every day since Thomas Murdoch's death, although no one could say what he did behind the closed door other than occasionally cough. When he departed that evening accompanied by Constable Brown, who appeared to have appointed himself the Inspector's official guardian, they literally stumbled across the corpse, which was notable for the scaly appearance of its skin, the complete absence of hair, the flattened ears and nose. Most shocking of all to Constable Brown were the infant's lips that seemed transfixed in the O-shape of a permanent scream. Constable Brown felt like screaming himself.

"My God!" cried Brown, horrified that this insanity was invading his personal bastion of law and order. "Another dead baby!" Inspector Wise knelt down and was inspecting the child closely.

"Yes, Constable Brown, another dead baby. But do you not notice anything? What strikes you about this child?" Inspector Wise asked, the fixity of his gaze belying the apparent casualness of the question. In a fog of sickness and guilt, he functioned like an automaton, repeating reflexively the same questions he would have asked Thomas Murdoch.

For a moment Brown said nothing. He wanted to say that what struck him was that the child was a monster, not human at all, but somehow he sensed instinctively this

was not the answer the Inspector was looking for. He inhaled deeply once, then nodded. “I see, sir. Sorry I didn’t notice right away.” He had caught a whiff of the faintly sweetish, pleasant smell of chloroform. “It’s not just a dead baby, it’s a murdered baby.”

Simon Wise was not really staggered by this development, although his feelings had become so numb over the last few days that he doubted at times whether he would ever experience any emotion again.

He stared at the pathetic creature in silence, deeply moved, reminding himself it had been a living thing, it had had a soul. He wanted to cry out to God against the injustices of the world. Then he recollected he no longer believed with any certainty that a God existed Who would hear his lamentation.

“Inform the coroner, William, and then go home. I will handle the paperwork.”

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-SEVEN

During the Fenian alarms of the late sixties, Wise, along with other inspectors, had been issued an Adam’s breech-loading revolver. After the panic had died down, it had never been requisitioned, and now lay in a locked drawer in his desk. It being Christmas, no one else was at the station. Everyone who could possibly be at home was home, with a Christmas tree if they could afford it adorned with decorations and crowned with an angel. It was a time to celebrate family, consume a feast, play parlor games and pop crackers to see what jokes and silly hats could be found inside.

Nevertheless, Wise made certain that the door to his office was closed. He knew he had forms to complete for the coroner about this latest dead baby, but he had no

intention of doing that now. Instead, he carefully placed the key in the desk lock and turned it. He remembered he lost the key a couple of years ago and had to get a replacement from one of the locksmiths in Whitechapel Road. There were plenty of laws restricting the duplication or copying of keys, to discourage burglaries, and it had helped that he was a police officer. Still, inviting the locksmith up to his office had been an embarrassment.

The Inspector noticed with a ridiculous sense of gratification that the key turned smoothly. He pulled the drawer open. The revolver lay there, a dull, inert thing, passive and quiet. He picked it up and felt the weight in his hand. The chambers were still fully loaded.

Simon called to mind the smooth-bore musket he had used for a time during the Crimean War, after he'd lost his cherished Minie in a rout. It took a great deal of courage even to load that weapon as, unlike the breech-loading revolver he now held, the bullet had to be placed in the muzzle-end, which meant that it could only be primed from a standing, or at best a kneeling, position, making the soldier dedicated enough to prepare his next shot a very attractive target.

The bullet of a smooth-bore musket proceeded through the barrel in ricocheting pandemonium, bouncing from side to side like a demented caged rat, so that when it exited it rarely advanced in a straight line. That was the reason, he learned, that eighteenth century gentlemen could risk dueling with pistols at such close range. Given the etiquette of turning sideways, thus considerably reducing the width of the target presented, there was in reality little likelihood that either opponent would be struck at all, much less mortally wounded. Still, he reflected, when it found its mark, the bullets of

those old guns were remarkably effective, spreading as they struck, and leaving a crater of mashed tissue and organs in their wake. Bullets these days were more efficient, less messy.

Simon Wise felt very calm, but he cursed himself for his stupidity with a deliberate, punishing resignation. What a fool I've been, what an arrogant, stupid fool, he kept repeating to himself. He had been so slow to see what was right in front of his face, probably because he didn't want to, couldn't bear it, really. Blind John Fielding, that famed eighteenth century magistrate of Bow Street, had been possessed of an uncanny capacity to see deep into the heart of crime. Simon, on the other hand, had eyes to see, but apparently not the mind to make any sense of what he saw. And because of his indefensible foolhardiness, Thomas Murdoch was dead.

He perceived how cold, how firm, how reliable the metal felt in his hand. He was not really all that familiar with firearms, they were not standard issue, and he had not fired one since Inkerman, but he liked the sensation of the revolver. Somehow it comforted him. He liked its power. With one small bullet, he could eliminate it all - the disgrace, the dishonor, the unbearable guilt from which, he knew, there would be no other escape. He tried to remember how loud the crack of the retort would be.

Then he thought of the bullet ending Thomas Murdoch's life, and he remembered the hysterical screams of rage from Nancy, his wife, when he had gone personally to inform her. The sound was so enveloping he felt he could not rid himself of it until he washed that night. He thought of Lady Fairhaven's four children growing up without a mother, of Lady Abbott's three sons growing up without a father. He thought of Rachel dying in blood, and of the eyes of his children. With a groan, he shoved the pistol back

into the desk drawer. Much as he might long to escape into an eternal void, he could not avail himself of the help it offered.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-EIGHT

The next day was Boxing Day as well as Sunday, when the rich folk gave the poor their unwanted presents and servants like Amanda and James could at last have a day of rest. But in Inspector Wise's mind, all distinctions were blurred, work and rest, celebration and despair, good and evil, all swallowed up in the menacing yellow of the London fog. With a start, he realized that his family, along with all other Jewish families, was in the midst of the celebration of Chanukah, the eight-day festival commemorating the triumph of the Maccabees over Greek soldiers two hundred years before the birth of Christ. The Inspector could not even have said which day it was, although he was vaguely aware of the children kindling lights on the menorah each evening.

Chanukah was a minor holiday, but Simon Wise had always appreciated its symbolism. When the Maccabees had recaptured the holy temple in Jerusalem, they found it desecrated and profaned, with only enough oil to keep the Ner Tamid, the Eternal Lamp, burning for a single day. Through some miracle, the light continued to glow day after day. Trapped in his own personal darkness, Simon Wise begged the God he doubted for enough oil to sustain him through what he needed to do. Surely it would require a miracle.

The Inspector reached the station early and was surprised by his happiness at seeing Constable Brown buried beneath a stack of paperwork. Even at the nadir of

things, when redemption no longer seemed a possibility, it amused Inspector Wise how comforting the mere presence of another human being could be. He was glad that over the next few hours he would not be alone. Nevertheless, when he spoke his tone was brusque.

“Come with me, Brown.”

“Now, sir? On the Lord’s Day, sir?”

“Immediately.”

Leaving Constable Brown to trail behind as best he might, Inspector Wise headed in the direction of Ormand Street. Once there, he unceremoniously pushed past Nurse Cunningham, who hovered like a guardian angel in the anteroom outside Dr. Talbot’s office.

“I’m afraid I need a word with you rather urgently, Michael,” the Inspector said even as he opened the door. Yet when he saw the doctor, he was loath to carry on. Once again, the man’s intensity, his radiance as it were, struck Simon Wise. With a pang, he thought of Rebecca.

Dr. Talbot sat behind his desk. He looked paler, thinner, more careworn than the last time the Inspector had seen him in this same office only a week and a half ago, but he was remarkably serene. He did not appear dismayed to see the policemen, and half-rose from his seat, as if to compensate by his own impeccable attention to the social niceties for the Inspector’s lapse.

“Please have a seat, Inspector Wise, Constable,” he said graciously, indicating a Queen Anne chair placed catty-corner to his desk and a wicker upright. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

Noting the formality of Dr. Talbot's address, the Inspector thought, perhaps he is trying to make this easier for me. Perhaps in the end we will handle this like gentlemen. But he knew that if what he suspected was true, there would be no gentlemanly solution.

"How is Rebecca? How is Emily?" Dr. Talbot inquired. Simple questions, but when Inspector Wise looked at the doctor, he was struck by the expression of ineffable loss that transfigured his countenance, the recognition that the objects of these mundane inquiries had somehow receded forever from his grasp.

"I am not here to discuss my family," the Inspector replied, more harshly than he intended.

"Of course not. I apologize." The doctor accepted the rebuff politely.

Perhaps he is ready now, the Inspector thought. For almost every transgressor, there came a time when enough was enough. They were at last ready to relinquish the trappings of normalcy, ready to cross over the inevitable demarcation into full admission of depravity and criminality. They were tired of the constant balancing act, the push and pull of good and evil. They simply surrendered.

The Inspector glanced at Constable Brown, searching for recognition of this critical moment. The Constable sat at the edge of his chair, nervous and alert. The boy had been distraught at Sergeant Murdoch's death, and in the intervals when his own grief subsided, the Inspector felt sorry for him. Yet he felt himself to be incapable of assuming a mentor role. William Benjamin Brown would have to learn as best he could.

Dr. Talbot sat quietly, apparently content to await further developments. With a sudden flash of intuition, Inspector Wise realized that Michael Talbot wanted his understanding, perhaps even his forgiveness. He knew he should approach him



cautiously, respectfully, tease him with what he knew, dangle what he suspected, tantalize, and finally trap him. But if the good doctor was not yet tired of the game, he, Simon Wise, certainly was, more tired than he had ever been.

“What made you do it, Michael?” he asked more in sorrow than in anger. Waiting for a reply, Inspector Wise began to cough. His chest still ached and his head throbbed unmercifully. In that moment the Inspector was not completely certain what he was asking the doctor. Why did you murder Lady Fairhaven? Why did you kill those innocent creatures? Why did you kill some and save others? Why were you so eager to play God? Why did you make my daughter fall in love with you?

With a start, Constable Brown grasped that the Inspector was accusing Dr. Talbot of some crime. What crime was he talking about? The babies? Could he be referring to Lady Fairhaven? Some other malfeasance entirely? The Constable felt dazed, as though he had picked up the wrong book, thinking he understood the plot and the characters, only to discover he was immersed in an entirely different story. He glanced diffidently at the doctor.

Dr. Talbot wore an intensely concentrated expression, as if he were contemplating the most profound question of his life. Perhaps he was.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-NINE

“I knew you would ask me,” said Dr. Talbot, and his manner was eager, even enthusiastic. “I admit I thought you would catch on more quickly. That last little one, right outside the station... a bit like breadcrumbs, didn’t you think? Well, you know, it

all got incredibly byzantine. I never intended it to be this... complicated.” He stopped, seemingly uninterested in continuing.

“What happened to Lady Fairhaven?” demanded Inspector Wise.

Dr. Talbot contemplated the Inspector for a moment, then smiled as though he were conceding a point in tennis. “She summoned me, with the note, as you no doubt have surmised. In fact, Oliver, ever faithful, simply handed it over to me, as he had done many times in the past. She asked me to come to her, and I went. We had met in that way before... not often but satisfying for both of us. I would like to think she found me exciting, someone of her class, with a reasonably agreeable veneer of culture, but also a sense of purpose, of mission much stronger than most of the men she knew.

“Have you noticed? The women of the aristocracy are little more than baby machines. Once the spigot’s been turned off, there’s not much more for them to do – there’s the wet-nurse to feed the little things, the nanny to tend them, later the governess to educate them, and finally proper boarding schools. The domicile is governed by the butler and the housekeeper. The ‘real’ world, the world outside, looks very alluring... dangerous, but alluring.”

Listening to this narration, Constable Brown could scarcely believe credit what he was hearing. “Are you saying you were lovers?” he blurted out. The crudity of the question hung in the air, but William Benjamin Brown didn’t care. He couldn’t endure the sarcastic, cynical tone the doctor had adopted.

“Ah, Inspector, discretion’s the thing.” Dr. Talbot continued to direct his remarks toward Inspector Wise, as though the constable were not present. “Of course, a man must be prudent. He cannot flaunt his mistress, or mistresses, or one-night adventures. He

cannot be found in the wrong places, or, shall we say, in compromising positions. Above all, he must not welsh on his debts. But within these boundaries, he is certainly entitled to a bit of fun. For a woman, it's more difficult, but with subtlety and cleverness, she can find amusement as well. And that's all it is, a game, something to relieve the boredom."

"So you were lovers?" Constable Brown persisted doggedly, a small corner of his mind amazed that he was speaking so bluntly to a well-respected physician like Dr. Talbot. He was no longer sure why this point seemed to matter so much to him. Perhaps it was one thing he could wrap his mind around.

"When it suited us, yes. As I say, she was intrigued by me, and I appreciated her... intelligence."

Constable Brown appeared prepared to continue in this vein, to reiterate yet again his question, but Inspector Wise raised his hand gently. "All right, Constable. Very good. Thank you." He turned toward the doctor.

"And that night, Michael? What happened that night... that morning, actually?" Constable Brown glanced quickly at Inspector Wise. He thought the Inspector looked wretched.

"I thought she had beckoned me for one of our little trysts. The morning-room, with its own entrance, made these rendezvous possible, although of course risky, which in a way only added to their allure. When I arrived, she was dressed beautifully as usual, in some sort of brocaded velvet garment. She liked to dress resplendently for our encounters. But this time there was a problem. She wanted to ask me about something I'd said to her earlier, something I'd expressed in an unguarded moment, something she had been worrying about, and looking into, all week. She had a whole network of

informants of which I, lamentably, was unaware.” Talbot paused, and started riffling through some papers on his desk, as if he had misplaced something that was urgently needed.

“What had you said?”

Dr. Talbot did not answer directly. “I thought she understood me, my work, my vision, what I was trying to accomplish. She did not have a small mind, you know. I merely let slip something about acquiring abnormal infants for research purposes. Up to that point, I believe she understood my investigations to be more... theoretical. Lady Fairhaven uncovered confirmations from various sources that malformed babies were indeed disappearing and nothing more known about them. I tried to explain to her that I had reached the unfortunate but necessary conclusion that it was better to simply terminate these pathetic creatures than to pursue useless research to rehabilitate them. But she completely missed the point, told me that what I was doing was criminal, that I was no better than one of those baby murderers she had discovered a few years ago. I was aghast, she hadn’t understood anything.”

“Perhaps we can understand, Michael,” Inspector Wise said. Constable Brown, paying close attention to the Inspector’s interrogation technique, was jarred by the kindness in his voice. He wished that, just once, Inspector Wise would use such a sympathetic tone with him.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-TEN

“I thought science held the key,” Talbot continued. “If we could just study these poor defective creatures, we could unlock the secrets to make them whole.” He paused

again, his fingers momentarily drumming on his desk. Abruptly they stopped, and the doctor continued.

“I wasn’t trained as a surgeon, you know. No matter how many Royal Colleges they establish, they are still a little too close to butchers for my taste. All that hacking and chopping. Not an elegant profession. But I realized that to do what I intended, I would have to delve inside these misshapen little bodies. Literally, delve. Dig. And delve.” The line from the nursery rhyme rolled liltily off the doctor’s tongue. He gave a little laugh.

“So I studied secretly. At night. And I began to do what many other men of science have done... I hired a modern-day ‘resurrection man.’ Do you recall the term? Physicians used to use them to study the anatomy of the human form. Now I would study the ‘imperfect’ form.

“Of course, we’ve had no need of resurrection men for forty years, not since the Anatomy Act allowed the lawful acquisition of bodies for dissection. But for my purposes, a reversion to the old style was necessary. I had no license, you see, and little interest in justifying to the Home Department why one should be given me.

“Oliver used his connections in Devil’s Acre and St. Giles to track down recent burials of infants born with congenital anomalies, and then we borrowed their little bodies. Admittedly illegal, but really... where was the harm?” The two policemen exchanged glances. Talbot moved uneasily behind his desk, his eyes flitting about the room as if unwilling to meet their gaze.

“But it wasn’t enough. I intended to build on the work of Broca, who has been able to identify specific areas of the brain associated with speech, and Jackson, whose

research has discovered motor and sensory regions of the brain. I thought I had made interesting discoveries, uncovered neural connections, specific brain lesions, but how could I be sure? And if they were already dead, what did it matter? On the other hand, if I could restore a spastic gait to normalcy, alter a limited brain...

“You see, of course, why I needed living children. I had to test the correctness of my ideas. So, through Oliver, I began to procure viable infants. He put out the word, contacted a few midwives, placed commercial announcements, let it be known that we had an interest in such children.”

“Procure, Michael?” Simon Wise asked.

“I thought it best to establish a sort of quid pro quo. Perhaps I could help these unfortunates... most of them were going to die anyway. And those that weren’t... well, their lives would be a living hell. Just look at Oliver. But I was asking a woman to give up her child, with no guarantee that it would be returned to her. So yes, some money changed hands. We paid these mothers well,” he hastened to reassure his listeners.

“You bought them?” Constable Brown strode around the desk, grabbing Dr. Talbot by the shoulder. The doctor looked startled and tried to shrug off the younger man’s grasp.

“Get hold of yourself, William. We aren’t finished here yet.” Inspector Wise had also moved quickly to separate the two. “Sit down, Michael. Please explain yourself.”

The doctor docilely complied with the Inspector’s order. “Yes, of course, we bought the babies. We paid the midwife, and she turned over a part of the money to the mother. To start a new life, you see. I thought that touch in particular would have

pleased Alicia - a practical way to redeem young women 'fallen for the first time,' as she so quaintly put it."

"What did you say you were going to do with the infants?"

Talbot nodded. "We were somewhat vague on that point. I saw no reason to burden these women with details of science they could not possibly comprehend. We said we would try to help the infants. And I did. I tried to help. If any had lived, I would have found suitable homes for them. As it was, none did."

As though by common consent, the three men avoided each other's gaze. For a few interminable minutes, no one spoke. Finally, reluctantly, the Inspector broke the silence.

"Is this what Lady Fairhaven discovered?"

"I'd mentioned my experiments, my quest. Only indirectly, only in passing. I thought she would be inspired, caught up in the remarkable possibilities. But she proved too conventional. She acted shocked – perhaps she was. She told me I was unbalanced, that she was going to stop me, that she had turned up independent confirmatory evidence. She was quite proud of that subterranean sleuthing and talked of going to the *Times*. I knew I couldn't let that happen."

"So you killed her."

"There was a little Chinese dagger – rather decorative – on one of her pedestal end tables. I'd noticed it before, on my earlier visits. It was lovely. Somehow, I found myself plunging it... I don't know actually how I came to be holding it. I didn't want to kill her, only to silence her... her disbelief."

“And then?” Inspector Wise thought it strange that he felt nothing, absolutely nothing at all. Indeed, he seemed to himself not unlike Miriam’s sewing machine, the needle of his questions would continue up and down, up and down, until someone removed a foot from the pedal and he would stop. And then, of course, if no one activated the presser foot, he could stop forever.

“After I realized what had happened, I cleaned up as best I could. Something disordered and violent had entered into my aspirations, almost without my conscious awareness, had contaminated my future and destroyed Alicia. It was too late to do much for her, but I attempted to return some dignity to the body. After all, except for that small lapse, I had found her to be quite an admirable woman. Then I hid the dagger in my overcoat and left. It was not an immaculate burial, although I did feel back in control again, even happy. It was very odd. I actually kept the dagger, as a sort of memento, a reminder. I have it here.” Abruptly, he opened the desk drawer and pulled out a red and blue patterned dagger with a steel blade. The blade appeared discolored, as if with dried blood. Constable Brown lurched toward the weapon, but Inspector Wise motioned him to remain in his seat.

“I let myself out the same way I had entered. I had not been well, you know. Too much work, forgetting to eat, too little sleep. So much seemed to depend on me. And I was racked with doubts. I couldn’t concentrate, I would forget my thoughts from moment to moment, I was plagued by agonizing headaches. I felt useless, empty, hopeless. Without my willing it, my mind was filled to overflowing with the images of dead babies, mutilated babies. Their blood was on my hands.” The doctor took up his pipe and attempted to light it, but his hands shook. Beads of sweat lined his upper lip.



He took a deep breath and let it out carefully. “Altogether, gentlemen, I was in a bad way.

“But when I left the house, after Alicia’s death, I began to feel a certain euphoria, very difficult to explain. I wanted to walk, even run, skip. I didn’t want to return home, so I wandered about most of the night. That’s actually what Oliver was doing, skulking about the Fairhaven townhouse. When I didn’t return home, he became worried, and spent most of the early morning hours searching the streets for me. Eventually he found me and brought me back. He was devoted to me, you know.

“But before that, sometime during those predawn hours, it happened, some kind of epiphany.”

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-ELEVEN

“Some kind of what?” Constable Brown exclaimed with a fierce, frenzied inflection.

“I had a flash of insight,” the doctor explained, affably enough. “I realized I was going about it all wrong. I’d been a positivist, thought science could overcome nature, answer all questions, solve all problems. Only I didn’t understand the way at first. I thought I could cure. I didn’t realize it was more in line with the natural order of things simply to... eliminate.

“You see, I’d had it backwards. It became clear to me as I walked those streets that I should be an instrument of nature, not its enemy. The Darwinian dictum, you know - survival of the fittest. After all, Darwin himself expressed concern that our civilized

sympathetic impulses to help the weak might actually interfere with the natural selection process, to the perhaps irreversible detriment of the species.

“After our discussions, Simon, you are familiar with my interest in possible characteristics of superior and inferior races. The Scottish psychiatrist and neurologist Sir Crichton-Browne and others have sounded similar alarms about degenerative tendencies among the lower classes. The French alienist Morel raised the possibility that, as a species, we might actually backslide down the scale of animal life unless something is done. I claim no credit from my own failed scientific experimentation, only that I finally saw the light. Finally, I realized I need not be afraid to do something...else.

“Don’t you see, Simon? These children that I gathered up were not meant to live, they were meant to die. Though some perversion of the life force kept them alive, *they were meant to die.*” Dr. Talbot repeated this phrase with special force, as though to imprint its obviousness on Inspector Wise. “So many of them did die, even when I tried my best to save them. As my botched efforts demonstrated, science could not restore them to wholeness, could not keep them alive, could not prevent their suffering. But it could give them a dignified, painless death, a release from future pain and humiliation. In medical school we learned, ‘Cure when possible, alleviate suffering often, comfort always.’ Those infants did not die in pain. They did not die alone.” Dr. Talbot smiled sadly. “I was much more successful at killing them than at curing them.”

Again he stopped and looked at the policemen expectantly. All the men in the room sensed that an intractable line had been crossed. The Inspector, however, could not think what to say. He felt dizzy, disoriented. His head throbbed. Somewhere at the core

of himself, he felt a mounting anguish. Yet Dr. Talbot appeared tranquil, at peace, even happy.

“Did you know, Simon, that four years ago archeologists found a cave of bones at Monte Circeo on the coast of the Tyrrhenian Sea? Inside, they dug up the skull of a Neanderthal man. Don’t you understand? We are much closer to monkeys than we are to gods, gentlemen. And if we are ever to evolve beyond our sordid beginnings, we must assist natural selection in its sometimes harsh, but necessary work.” He looked at Inspector Wise for understanding. The Inspector could only stare at him in horror. Indeed, he was almost mesmerized by the doctor’s flow of words, while dreading where each new revelation would lead.

It was Constable Brown who continued the interrogation. “Why did you stop disposing of the bodies in secret and instead had Brantley dispose of them in places where they would easily be found? Did you not realize this brazen action put both Oliver – and you – at greater risk of discovery?”

“After my painful confrontation with Lady Alicia, I realized I could not do this work alone. Society itself would need to change. Instead of pious lamentations about the suffering of the deformities of this world, they would have to be confronted directly. You see, most of these children are hidden away until they die, so that the upper classes’ facile sympathy is purely hypothetical. If they had to literally encounter such inadequate life forms, I thought they might realize the absurdity of their well-intentioned efforts and adopt a more realistic and enlightened policy.”

Dr. Talbot glanced at the Inspector, perhaps seeking approbation. What he saw in Simon Wise’s eyes caused him to focus in a different direction.

“Simon, this was a hard truth for me to come to, a brutal truth. You must not think it was a decision I reached lightly. On the contrary, it has cost me a great deal in personal anguish.” Dr. Talbot stressed the adjective, as though it had immense explanatory power. “You see, Simon, I had just made my first public statement by depositing that misshapen infant at St. Botolph’s when I met your family. I must admit I was captivated by the lot of you. You yourself were clever, interesting enough to engage in a little verbal jousting. Your children were charming. As for Rebecca...” Talbot closed his eyes, as though conjuring up an image ineffably sweet yet unattainable.

“When I met Rebecca, I dared hope that I could be happy, that I could lead a normal life with a biddable wife, a house full of children. I thought perhaps if I could convert her to Christianity, somehow it might work. After all, I came from a wealthy, distinguished family. I was a professional man. Much can be forgiven those with power. Of course, I soon realized it was all foolish fancy. The night of the fire, holding that child in my arms, I realized that I was deceiving myself. I could not have both things, a personal connection to your family – to Emily – and spark a social movement toward racial improvement. I could not save babies like the one I held, or the ones my clinic and my research tried to assist, knowing they would only grow up to a life of degradation and degeneration, who would inevitably add to the collapse of our Western civilization. Frankly, I should have dashed that child to the pavement, crushed its fragile skull, but I lacked the nerve.”

Talbot seemed to weigh what he was about to say, then continued, as though he wanted to make public his private ruminations while he had such an intent audience. “I do not wish to offend you, Simon, on a personal level I remain fond of both you and your

family, but surely you must see that I could not marry a Jewess and try to redeem her, knowing as I do that the Jews, while a clever race, to be sure, are also a corrupt, impure, conniving and money-grubbing people. There was no getting around it. I had to choose. I came to understand that a normal existence was not my lot. I had to give up my futile experiments as well as my fantasy of a happy private life. Instead, my only mission was to show the world what must be done, not in hatred, but in reason. The way forward for our species is Darwinian, but forward we will march.”

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-TWELVE

“Michael.” Inspector Wise struggled to formulate a coherent thought. “Do you realize where these ideas will lead?”

“Evolution. We will become the race that we are intended to be,” responded Talbot, his eyes shining.

The Inspector sat completely still. Listening as Dr. Talbot described what to Inspector Wise was a descent into abomination, he felt stricken, each further revelation a blow. His distress seemed to be coming from so many directions he could no longer identify the primary source. A thick, heavy silence filled the room.

“How did you kill the babies?” asked Constable Brown at last with a certain morbid fascination. Dr. Talbot seemed reluctant to return to these pedestrian details.

“Of course, you know about the chloroform, with the last. The others I injected with a small quantity of air into the heart. Death was virtually instantaneous. I switched to chloroform only because everyone persisted in misunderstanding... so much talk about

having left them exposed to die, horrible ideas really. I wanted people, lay persons, my colleagues in the scientific community, to understand that there was... a better way, the application of science to the problem of racial collapse. That, of course, is why the bodies had to be discovered, not simply disposed of, as in my original experiments.”

Talbot was becoming increasingly agitated, pacing the room at a rapid rate. “Please realize, Simon, these were not criminal acts of passion, of violence, of hatred. They were acts of science, a future bold science.” Ever the researcher, thought Wise irrelevantly. Even in murder.

“And you had no qualms about involving Oliver Brantley in this ‘science’?” Constable Brown asked. “He trusted you implicitly, regarded you as some sort of secular savior. Did you think he deserved to be implicated in the murder of infants? Do you think he deserved to die protecting you and your reputation?” William Benjamin Brown fell silent. He remembered his grandmother telling him stories of suicides being buried at a crossroads with a stake through their hearts to prevent their ghosts from walking. Of course, such barbarities were no longer practiced, but even now, although a suicide could be buried in a church graveyard, no service could be read over the body.

“I fear you misunderstand me. I was forced to use Oliver. Because of his background, his social class if you will, he had certain connections with the poorer areas of London to which I simply had no access. I would have made a spectacle of myself, a gentleman doctor buying up anomalous infants, it would have been commented on, and very quickly my work would have been interrupted. Oliver was essential. Indeed, although we never discussed it directly, I feel sure he saw the necessity of what I was doing.” Somehow the Inspector doubted that this was the case. Brantley had remained

loyal to Dr. Talbot, who had redeemed him from misery and, according to his own light, given him a better life. But Inspector Wise was by no means certain that Oliver Brantley would have approved of murdering infants, no matter how disabled, or even that he fully understood the purpose of Dr. Talbot's scientific experimentation. And Brantley must have been devastated by Lady Fairhaven's death, the only person other than his mother who had shown him genuine affection. But perhaps Brantley felt he had no choice, that no matter how ghastly the consequences, he was no Judas, in the end he could not betray his – what had Brown called him? – his savior.

“And my Sergeant?” Simon Wise felt the room spinning. The sensation was not wholly uncomfortable. His head was pounding. He heard his voice coming to him as through a long tunnel. “Did my Sergeant have to die so that your ‘science’ could proceed?”

Dr. Talbot looked away. “I regret that death, as I do Lady Alicia's. Unfortunately, Oliver panicked. He suspected that your sergeant had guessed a great deal of what was happening and took it upon himself to stifle his curiosity. His demise was unfortunate, never part of my intention.”

The room felt very close, and the Inspector remembered Nancy Murdoch's tear-streaked face as she denied her husband's death. “Unfortunate? You think it was unfortunate?” Inspector Wise half-rose from the chair, grasping his head, then collapsed to the floor in a faint.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-THIRTEEN

The noise brought Nurse Cunningham to the door. Seeing the insensate Inspector, she had the presence of mind to administer smelling salts. Constable Brown collected himself and proceeded to take Doctor Talbot into custody until he received further instructions. The doctor was cooperative, and the constable decided that, despite the severity of the alleged crimes, handcuffs would not be necessary.

Later, Simon Wise would reflect on the scene with considerable embarrassment. Time after time, this case had brought him painful humiliation, as its sheer horror overcame his sense of propriety. Indulging his need for self-recrimination, his mind returned obsessively to the view of himself sprawled awkwardly on the ground, while his putative prisoner hovered over him, solicitous as a well-trained physician should be. The memory seemed emblematic of his handling of the entire case, and he could not escape the judgment that his personal relationship with Dr. Talbot had likely contributed to the deaths of both Oliver Brantley and Thomas Murdoch, as well as the murders of at least a baby or two. It was not a comforting realization.

Eventually, however, order had been reasserted. The whole untidy mess was squeezed back into acceptable boundaries and, as far as Inspector Wise could ascertain, most people seemed reasonably pleased with the outcome. The illustrious Rothsteins, being fully exonerated, were inclined to be magnanimous as they had the fortunes of a nation to attend to. Gertrude Rothstein and her allies continued to advocate for women's suffrage, to the amusement – and growing irritation - of many in her social circle. She commented only that evil men whether in government or in the professions needed the humane moderating influence of the opposite sex.



Other more minor players resumed their previous roles with surprising ease. Mr. May found himself free to forever mourn the loss of his one true love, the radiant Alicia Fairhaven, in peace, while satisfying the querulous demands of his invalid wife. He devoted the remainder of his life to seeking ways of replacing the dangerous white phosphorus matches with the safer, but more expensive red phosphorus ones. Professor Maximus returned under the hood of his camera, and if he took a few little girls with him, it was only in service of a carefully regulated imagination. He continued to propound the feminist views of John Stuart Mill, which were only slightly less abhorrent to society than his very real but unfulfilled corporeal yearnings.

Poor Molly Reid passed away shortly after Dr. Talbot was arraigned. She was headed for a pauper's grave until Constable Brown took up a collection at the Whitechapel station to give her a proper burial. The Inspector had to admit that the boy showed flashes of promise. Mrs. Martin mended her ways and spent the rest of her days caring for infants whose mothers could no longer manage. The Inspector once saw Nicholas Prodger walking up and down a busy London thoroughfare, wearing a board announcing the prototype of a device called the telephone. Reading about it later, Inspector Wise thought it sounded impractical and unlikely to be widely adopted.

Kate Hamilton's establishment flourished, so much so that rumor had it she was contemplating retirement to a cozy cottage in the countryside. Even Arabella found that her custom increased, as men of all stripes patronized her services not only for their inherent pleasures, but for the tidbits that might be innocently dropped about the infamous case. James the footman managed to find a place where his unofficial services were valued not only by his mistress but by his master as well. Mr. Creavey proved

himself to be just as insufferable in his new position as his old, which pleased his new employer to no end. His association with the Fairhaven affair added a dollop of spice to an otherwise dull, although eminently genteel, family. Only Sir Gregory felt he still had cause for complaint, as he insisted that the only proper place for Dr. Talbot was swinging from the end of a rope.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-FOURTEEN

Much to Sir Gregory's furious displeasure, for the time being Dr. Talbot had been packed off by his well-to-do family to a private asylum, Laydock Lodge, near the town of Newton in south Lancashire. It was certainly more convenient for all concerned, as well as society as a whole, to label Dr. Talbot mad. In this way, everyone was able to avoid thinking about the idea of pursuing racial purity through systematic elimination of undesirable elements. Of course, no one took such nonsense seriously, but in gentlemen's clubs and scientific circles, some remained discreetly intrigued. On the whole, however, most interested parties agreed with Superintendent Walker's assessment that no one wanted the inevitable scandal that would result if a man of Dr. Talbot's reputation, class, and breeding should endure the spectacle of a long public trial.

For a week after Dr. Talbot's confession, the Inspector had been flat on his back in bed, the victim of, in Dr. Baumgarten's solicitous diagnosis, lung infection and exhaustion. When Dr. Baumgarten warned Miss Gelbstein about the possibility of sepsis setting in, she glared at him so fiercely he decided her obduracy was the best

prognostication of a positive outcome. Lady Abbott made discreet inquiries about the state of the Inspector's health and sent her condolences for the loss of Sergeant Murdoch, but to his profound disappointment, Simon Wise heard nothing further from her.

The Inspector's situation remained serious for several days, and notwithstanding his protestations, he proved too weak to attend the Grand Jury hearing. Instead, Constable Brown, looking both self-important and terrified, gave testimony regarding Dr. Talbot's confession. Afterwards, Brown felt confident he had acquitted himself admirably, being both accurate and impartial. Superintendent Walker commented only that the boy mumbled and was hard to hear, but perhaps that was just as well.

During Wise's convalescence, Superintendent Walker took it upon himself to call on his subordinate at home to explain the disposition of the Fairhaven case. This brought on the barely concealed disapprobation of Miss Gelbstein, but Simon waved aside her objections. He wanted to know.

"It was all over very quickly, Simon. The doctor appeared before the King's Bench, represented by an expensive barrister. Of course, he was not permitted to testify, which was just as well, since by then the man was raving incoherently about something he insisted on calling race suicide. I believe the technical term applied to his condition by the barrister's alienist was 'partial insanity,' in which the sufferer is utterly deranged in certain aspects of thought or behavior but appears perfectly sane in others. Sad, very sad, indeed.

"In the end, the Grand Jury was unable to find a true bill against the doctor. Of course, the poor man had to spend a week in Newgate, awaiting the disposition of the case, which even in his demented state could not have been a pleasant experience. But

despite Constable Brown's efforts, the doctor's barrister managed to convince the twenty-five householders who comprised the jury, mostly tradesmen who seemed not a little intimidated by the ancient lineage of the prisoner, that his "confession" was simply the babbling of a lunatic, and that very likely the original identification of Brantley as the warped baby farmer who did away with his infant victims for a fee and slaughtered Lady Fairhaven when she stumbled on his scheme was correct. As you well know, tampering is not unheard of in the Grand Jury process. Perhaps that happened in this case, who can say? No one wants to look under that rug!

"Naturally, Sir Gregory still wants blood. He has not forgotten that he came very close to Newgate himself. He is going about saying it's a pity that public hangings have gone out of style. But revelations regarding his encouragement of a common prostitute to extricate him from his financial dilemma by whatever means necessary have compromised his influence in this situation. In addition, the Talbots are a powerful family. For the moment, they have the ascendancy, and their brilliant, but unbalanced second son remains safely hidden away in the asylum. On the other hand, the baronet has his own connections and, despite the specter of scandal, is appealing to the Supreme Court. We may yet see a hanging, but knowing the twists and turns of the law, we shouldn't be holding our breaths. *Bleak House*, and all, you know," he added, to show he knew his popular culture.

When Inspector Wise protested this outcome, Walker continued reasonably, "What purpose would it serve, Simon? Would it do anyone any good to see the esteemed Dr. Talbot swinging in a noose, or on a treadmill, or moving a shot back and forth? After all, unsoundness of mind does not *de facto* excuse a homicide, but merely averts the

death penalty. No, he's better off where he is. He'll be well cared for, and the celebrated Sir James Crichton-Browne has recently been appointed the Chancery Visitor in Lunacy, so his treatment will have the finest supervision. As a matter of fact, I believe the two were previously acquainted. However, the doctors hold out little hope for the reestablishment of his mental balance." I imagine Talbot and Crichton-Browne will have a great deal to discuss, Inspector Wise thought to himself, recalling the references Talbot had made to the alienist's racial superiority theories.

The Inspector's mind drifted to the last public execution he had witnessed, seven years ago. The Clerkenwell Outrage, a bombing of the prison that resulted in 12 deaths and 120 injured, turned the London masses, who previously had been sympathetic to the Irish cause, strongly against the Fenians. The escape attempt failed and Michael Barrett, one of the perpetrators, was sentenced to death. Wise, along with much of the London force, was present for the "The Nine O'Clock Walk to Eternity," so called because the hangings usually took place at nine a.m. Old Calcraft, the hangman, had been alive then. Doddery but determined, he meticulously tested the rope. Head shrouded, ankles strapped, Barrett stood subdued while the hempen noose was slung around his neck and attached to a hook that dangled from the crossbeam. Bets were placed on the length of his last words, whether he would beg for mercy, in what position his head would finally come to rest, and how long the leg twitches would last. A public hanging was considered a festive event, with hawkers and street sellers mingling with a generally merry crowd singing, drinking, fighting, the windows of householders near the scene packed with paying customers. A hundred years ago, when criminals were still put to death at Tyburn, it had been the custom for the hanging cart to stop at a number of public houses

along the road, where the condemned were given jugs of ale. Amidst jeering and ribald shouts of encouragement from the boisterous onlookers, they had to promise to pay for their drinks on their return journey.

But what Wise remembered most was the complete silence that had fallen just before the drop, the upturned faces of the crowd, like flowers lifted toward the sun, staring at the scaffold, even children on their fathers' shoulders quiet and awed. In a moment it was over, and Calcraft pulled on the feet of the dangling man, as though straightening the disorder of death. Barrett's body was cut down an hour later. In his mind, Wise tried to weigh the various bodies that had collected in these latest cases for which he had been responsible, the small misshapen ones, the exquisite, comely body of Lady Fairhaven, Brantley, Thomas, against those pendent memories. Did the scales of justice ever really balance? He could come to no conclusion. Perhaps after all Michael Talbot did not deserve to hang.

On the other hand, did the doctor deserve to hide for the rest of his life behind the shield of insanity? It seemed to Inspector Wise that, although in one sense Michael Talbot's ideas were undisputedly insane, he seemed not so much deranged as absolutely devoted to his beliefs. He recollected a painting he had seen once, he thought it was called *Madness*, of a bestial, naked man, glowering and scowling, chained to a wall. It suggested a creature who had lost his humanity as well as his reason. Wise thought that Talbot had certainly lost his humanity, but whether he had lost his sanity was less certain. In these days of humane management, a private asylum would avoid the purging, burnings, and cold-water immersions that the mad doctors justified as treatments fifty years ago. Talbot would be accommodated in a pleasant room free of restraints, with

cleanly, hopeful surroundings, and plenty of make-work, basketweaving and moral suasion. Despite Walker's confidence that Dr. Talbot would never be a free man again, Inspector Wise worried that with the right connections and the right allies he might be released one day to again promulgate his horrific views.

"Whitehall is satisfied, the Commissioner is happy," Superintendent Walker concluded. "Believe me, the good doctor is where he belongs. Let it go, Simon. Justice has been served."

So Simon Wise let it go. He no longer knew. Perhaps justice had been served.

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-FIFTEEN

After the events concerning Dr. Talbot, Rebecca did not come out of her room for five days. The uncomplaining Martha worked twice as hard, Sarah dutifully jumped into the breach, even Miriam bestirred herself, and with Miss Gelbstein's bustling guidance, the household seemed to run as smoothly as ever. Several times the Inspector approached her door, but hesitated. Once Miriam found him hovering in a paralysis of uncertainty and gave him a dramatic look filled with meaning.

"Papa," she breathed. "If I were you, I wouldn't disturb Becca now. She is quite convulsed with grief."

Convulsed, is she, he thought sardonically, but walked away softly without disturbing his oldest daughter. Perhaps she was convulsed after all. Convulsion seemed

as good a word as any to describe that stomach-turning disorientation and regret that had seized him since Talbot's confession.

At last, late one evening, Rebecca ventured forth. Her father was waiting for her, listening for the sound of her door opening, as he had been nightly.

"Becca," Inspector Wise said quietly.

"Did he really kill Lady Fairhaven?" Rebecca commenced without preamble, her voice tight and distant.

Simon wanted to reassure his daughter that Dr. Talbot did not want to, had not gone to the Fairhaven residence with murder in mind. He wanted to keep her illusions about the justness and fairness of the world, about the possibility of true love intact for a little longer. But he knew there was no way to make this better for Rebecca. He had to be truthful. That at least he could still do.

"Yes, it is true, Becca, Dr. Talbot murdered Lady Fairhaven." Rebecca looked appalled, but Simon continued doggedly. "You see, she began to suspect that he... that he might be harming the helpless infants he was supposed to treat and care for. When she confronted him, in a flash of panic or perhaps mental unbalance the doctor attacked her – to silence her." The Inspector was still not sure that Michael Talbot was really mad, but he decided that it could do no harm to give Rebecca this small protection. He waited for his daughter to say something, but she seemed intent on staring at the emptiness of the first-floor landing.

"Dr. Talbot was not the man we thought him to be, Becca. He had formed some strange, indeed heinous, theories about racial purity, the degeneration of the lower classes, the unfitness, in Darwinian terms, of babies crippled in mind or body to survive.



I still hardly understand what he was advocating, but it went against humanity. It went against God.” Rebecca stared at him in horror, but still remained silent.

“Becca,” her father remonstrated gently, “you are not the only one who did not see things clearly. You are still a young girl, and Michael Talbot appeared to be a charming, intelligent, vital man. He kept these ugly parts of his nature hidden behind a façade. But eventually, as he sank deeper into depredation, these pieces, like shards of broken glass, punctured his soul and led him to do terrible things.

“Like you, I admired him. And that admiration blinded me to his darker aspect, and I willfully refused to believe it even when he tried to reveal it to me. Sergeant Murdoch, and perhaps some of those infants as well, died as a result of my short-sightedness. Your heart is broken now, but it will heal. I can never restore Thomas to life, and that is something I shall have to live with.”

The raw pain in her father’s voice forced Rebecca to gaze directly at him. “Dr. Talbot could have harmed Emily,” she said brokenly.

“No, Becca, you are wrong. No matter what your heart dictated, you would never have released your sister to Dr. Talbot’s malevolent ministrations. You are her substitute mother and her guardian. You have rescued her from certain death countless times, and should it have come to that, you would have made the right decision once again.”

Rebecca turned toward him, and he saw her cheeks were streaked with tears. “Do you think so?” she asked.

“I am certain of it.”

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-SIXTEEN

It was the last *erev shabbat* of the secular year. Although he still seemed frail in Miss Gelbstein's estimation, Simon's fever had subsided and his cough was improved. He was determined to join his family for the traditional blessings. When he appeared downstairs, looking pale and thin, his family sprang up to greet him. Zadok embraced his son, something he rarely did. David shook his hand formally, as though they had just met. Naomi wanted only to sit in his lap.

Sarah announced to her father, with a stubborn, shy look on her face, that she'd decided to be a doctor instead of a detective. When Simon gave her a quizzical glance, she went on, "In either case I'll have to get used to the sight of blood and I would rather save people's lives than put them in prison." Despite Elizabeth Blackwell and Elizabeth Anderson, women doctors were still a rarity. Simon thought it at least as unlikely that Sarah could become a physician as a detective, but he only nodded and assured her that the same qualities of curiosity and investigation that would serve her well as a detective would make her a fine physician.

Not to be outdone, Miriam informed the company that she had just designed an exquisite ensemble. She planned to show it to a buyer at Selfridge's Department Store. "I know you all think my head is full of nothing but suitors and marriage, but I think I can help support the family in this way." Sarah looked at her with renewed respect. Apparently her sister was not as silly as she sometimes seemed. For her part, Rebecca said nothing but smiled at Simon in a way that made him hope that, with time, her tattered heart would mend.

Then Deborah burst into tears. “I don’t know why I’m crying, Abba. I’m very glad to see you better.”

Simon patted her arm awkwardly. “Come, come, child, we are about to welcome the Sabbath Queen. This is a time for joy, no matter the sorrows we have endured.”

After the meal, knowing that he would inevitably incur Miss Gelbstein’s wrath, Simon still felt the need to walk, to think. He knew that he should stay home with his children, to help assuage their fear over his illness, their grief and incomprehension at Dr. Talbot’s disappearance from their lives. But he could not face them any longer.

“Hannah, I have been in my bed for a week. I must step outside for a bit.”

“Nonsense, Simon. You have been ill, you are still not well, it is snowing outside. You need to go back to that bed – now.”

In a conciliatory tone, Simon said, “And I will, Hannah, I will. But if I don’t get some air, I will go mad.”

Hannah looked helpless and said nothing more. But as he put on his hat and gloves, she came up carrying a thick woolen muffler, then watched with gimlet eyes as he dutifully wrapped it around his neck. He was surprised when she touched his arm.

“You must take care of yourself, Simon. We need you. All of us need you.”

Touched by this unusual expression of emotion from his cousin, Simon nodded and said, “I have no intention of abandoning you and the children, Hannah. I am here.”

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-SEVENTEEN

When Simon opened the door, he saw that a flurry of snowflakes was falling, tiny particles that looked like diamond dust, mixing with the soot of factory stacks, trains, and domestic chimney pots. In the resultant atmospheric murkiness, it was hard to discern passing shapes. Simon had the disorienting feeling he was entering some nether region between heaven and earth. The muffled sounds, the ghostly figures evoked a disturbing unreality. Even his footsteps on the granite blocks of pavement sounded hollow.

As he walked, Simon Wise remembered the dead. So many of them. The dead babies... would they ever really know how many of them there had been, when Talbot and Brantley were still covering their tracks, before the doctor's full-blown obsession led him to strew the little corpses all over London. Sweet, pure faces, even with their imperfections, their little souls still untarnished by contamination with the world. The Inspector was startled by his own thoughts. He realized he felt a certain tenderness for these innocents that had been absent only two months ago, and marveled how, in some mysterious fashion, he seemed to have acquired at least something of the compassion that Talbot's distorted convictions had forced the doctor to discard.

Still the bodies kept appearing to him. As Simon walked slowly on, the gas lamps flickered, glinting off the slush that collected at random in the street's uneven indentations. It seemed to Simon Wise that he was not alone, and it was not only the occasional rag seller or scurrying maid that accompanied him. Instead, he felt surrounded, almost smothered, by the spirits of those who had passed on. Indulging in rank spiritualism! he told himself angrily.

Yet he could almost see Lady Fairhaven, her handsome, aristocratic head held high, only trying to do her duty toward poor unfortunates and discover something

exciting and glamorous of ‘real life’ at the same time, finding herself in the middle of more sordidness and evil than anything her proper upbringing and sheltered existence had prepared her for. Wise pondered a moment on what else Lady Fairhaven had suspected in the last few months and days of her life. Had she realized, for instance, that her husband was having an impassioned fling with the provocative Arabella? Might such knowledge have pushed her toward more intimate involvement with Dr. Talbot and his ostensibly benevolent work? Did she know her respectable baronet had gambled away all their money, and was trying to get his hands on her holdings as well? If she knew any of this, did it matter?

In the scheme of things, perhaps Sir Gregory’s peccadilloes had been irrelevant, just part of the unsavory but tangential flotsam and jetsam inevitably flung up on the shores of a murder investigation. Perhaps Alicia Fairhaven entered into death blissfully unaware of mounting debts or Arabella’s seductive charms, and her only motivation to learn more about the good Dr. Talbot had been her Christian duty and the desire to escape her upper-class boredom.

And what of Dr. Talbot himself? Simon shifted uncomfortably, breaking his stride as if he had almost bumped into the animated young physician. An eye for an eye, he thought, and a life for how many lives? Simon Wise knew his Scriptures well enough to understand that this was one of the most frequently misinterpreted passages in Torah, and that rabbinic sages over the centuries routinely looked for loopholes in the text to prevent the taking of life, even in cases of murder. In order to actually be put to death, Biblical law required a minimum of two eyewitnesses, and even so, the culprit could always claim sanctuary.

And wasn't that what Talbot had done in a way? Taken refuge in apparent insanity? Simon cringed inwardly at the thought of Michael Talbot in the grip of full-blown mania, his intelligence swamped, his compassion distorted. Dr. Baumgarten had told him that the treatment of lunatics had become increasingly bankrupt, that the nerve doctors themselves no longer had faith in what they were doing. But did an element of mental derangement excuse his rantings about the pollution of the lower classes, of imperfect children, of Jews? Even if he could recover from his insanity, Simon knew it was unlikely he could abandon these frightening convictions. They were not evidence of madness, but of evil.

And Oliver Brantley? Simon remembered with shame his initial repugnance at the thought of Oliver's spasmodic gait and perplexing speech. Yet the origin of Brantley's sin was only that he had loved too well a man who suborned his sense of right and wrong. Wise again imagined again the deformed figure made suddenly graceful by flight, the ground rushing up to annihilate him. Oliver's words on jumping were a celebratory cry of freedom. Perhaps in this society he had been trapped in a life from which he could find no other escape.

Simon Wise could see where this line of thought was taking him, and he didn't like it much. He remembered one afternoon toward the middle of their investigation when Murdoch had, with some embarrassment but also some glee, divulged Kate Hamilton's assertion that even the ecstasy of physical intimacy contained a sense of loss. As the brothel madam delighted in informing the red-faced Sergeant, the French had the right of it. They referred to the culmination of the sexual act as "un petit mort," a little death. Was that all life was about, a series of deaths, small and large? Perhaps she was right.

For it was not only the professional deaths that haunted him on this road, the deaths he was paid to uncover and resolve. The personal deaths were present as well, crowding the pavement, Rachel, little Leah, Thomas, his comrades in the Crimea, blood and pain, the dimming of the light.

Simon felt like weeping. When he thought of his Sergeant, his heart still contracted as though a hand had reached into his chest and squeezed it. That death at least surely was on his head. He wondered briefly whether he would ever be able to relinquish his guilt. Then he thought of Rachel and Leah as well, and it unexpectedly occurred to him that all these lives, these memories, these deaths would always be... perhaps not his burden, but his responsibility, and that it was his duty somehow to adequately honor them all. He continued to ponder. In the scheme of things, all deaths were little, inconsequential passings. Yet it was also true that not a single death, not Brantley's, not that of the most blemished infant, could be considered small.

And what of love? How did love factor into the scheme of things? Did it matter in any sense and could it in some fashion redeem all the death? Had there ever been love between Sir Gregory and Lady Fairhaven, between the baronet and the trollop, or were each of these in their own ways nothing more than relationships of mutual convenience? He pictured the fragile innocence of Rebecca's love, shattered against the severe rock of Michael Talbot's demented notions. Could you glue trust back together like a smashed platter, and if so, would the flaws always show? Next, unwillingly, he forced himself to consider the possibilities of his own love, his devotion to Rachel submerged in the carmine sea of her blood, and his unseemly but undeniable attraction to the lovely,

outspoken, and lonely Lady Penelope perhaps forever suspended in the wastelands of class and religion.

In the end, was there really any justice, any love, or only an ending? Was it just that Lady Fairhaven's curiosity and boredom brought about her untimely death? That helpless innocents were murdered in the name of science? That Oliver Brantley felt he had no recourse but suicide, thereby risking damnation of his immortal soul? Was it right that Thomas Murdoch should be rewarded for his stubborn independence and commitment to the truth as he saw it with a bullet through his heart? That the brilliant and compassionate Michael Talbot ended up fractured in shards of lunacy and delusion sharp enough to destroy so many? That Becca's heart was broken, that Emily could not talk or cogitate, that Leah had died at eight years old, that Rachel had vanished forever from the face of the earth?

It seemed to Simon Wise that he had failed to impose any order at all. Right had not triumphed over wrong. Far from justice prevailing, all the strands he had attempted to hold so tightly had loosed from his hands, drifting aimlessly into the night air, little deaths filling the sky. He recalled a line from Tennyson's immortal poem, *In Memoriam*, written to commemorate the loss of Arthur Hallam, his anguish still poignant thirty years after the death of his best friend: "... Time, a maniac scattering dust, And Life, a Fury slinging flame..." Was that all that remained, fire and ashes?

## CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED-EIGHTEEN

Simon Wise was weary to the bone. The aimless walking had tired him, but his exhaustion went much deeper. He craved escape from his dark thoughts. Suddenly, he



heard a chorus of bells begin to ring. He realized with a start that tonight was New Year's Eve. During the day housewives - or their maids, if they had them - would have brushed out all the ashes from their hearths, sweeping away the pain and suffering of the old year. Simon knew that the bells represented the triumph of good over evil, the hope for happiness and peace. As if on cue, doors began to open. People stood at their entryways, shouting out "Welcome! Welcome" to all good things. Tomorrow throughout London there would be open homes, people visiting and exchanging presents. Not unlike the Jewish New Year of Rosh Hashana, the secular New Year's was a time for new beginnings.

Simon had come to his own front door. Walking into his home, his nostrils were assailed by the scent of freshly baked bread. Martha must have left the loaves out in the kitchen, knowing that their fragrance gave the house a warm, lived-in feeling. He closed the door gratefully behind him, leaving outside the living and the dead, the innocent and the guilty alike, those troubled souls doomed to restless wandering and those who had at last found peace.

Simon took off his damp greatcoat and hung it on the clothes-rack. Then he walked slowly into the kitchen and saw the challah, brown, braided, still slightly warm, a portion of which he had consumed as part of the sabbath's blessings. He stoked the fire and shook the kettle hanging over the grate to ensure there was adequate water for a cup of tea, then tore off another piece from the loaf. Munching the bread, Simon settled into one of the kitchen chairs and pulled the *Times* toward him. The smell of the bread, the coziness of the room made him think again of Rachel, and to his amazement the image brought a tentative smile to his lips, like a watery rainbow after a spring shower.

After only a few minutes, however, he heard a high, mewling sound. At first Simon thought it must be the whistling of the kettle, but not nearly enough time had elapsed. Then he realized it was Emily. He waited expectantly for Becca's door to open, and for her to go and comfort her youngest sister. But seconds passed, and the door to Rebecca's room remained obstinately shut. Poor girl, the Inspector thought, she's probably exhausted. This last week had not been easy on her either. No one else in the household appeared to be stirring.

Emily's cries increased in intensity. Automatically, Simon pushed back from the table, not thinking that never in his life had he gone to Emily when she was sick or frightened or in pain. Fatigue had stripped him of the intervention of rational thought, decisional capacity and logical analysis. Instead, he was propelled by some primitive instinct of the species that commanded parents to protect their young.

When he opened the door to Emily's narrow little vestibule, the shock of seeing her father was so great that Emily stopped crying instantly. Instead, she gazed at Simon with surprised, moist eyes, her cheeks flushed from her bad dream, her fair hair limply plastered against her face. Simon returned Emily's stare and, as he looked at her, he was aware of a tumult of sensations within him, strange reverberations at the core of his being to which he could not even begin to give voice. Suddenly, Emily gave an experimental chortle and held out her hands. Simon bent over the cot and lifted her up, the unaccustomed weight filling his arms.

"Abba," his youngest daughter said.

