

# THE PALACE OF WONDER

by

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## PAVING THE WAY TO GREATNESS

Whitechapel, London. August 1888

Some said it was the worst street in London, but at least the rent was cheap in Dorset Street. That was the most important thing. The Palace of Wonder was neither a palace, nor wonderful, but Stan Garrideb always believed that from small acorns, oak trees grow.

According to the sellers, this particular acorn had once been home to a rich dynasty of coffee merchants, but Stan didn't believe them. When he bought it, it was a doss house, filthy and crawling with vermin. He had ripped down walls, turning the warren of ground floor rooms into one large open space, with an office and two modern WC's, complete with running water. He had then installed a bar and a stage, and spent a fortune on new gas fittings. The lights could even be dimmed or raised depending on the effects needed. With the upstairs he had been even more ambitious, he had removed the floor and created a gallery, with a grand view of the stage and another bar.

You don't open up a new business in a place like Dorset Street without making sure your doors are strong and your locks sound. It pays to be safe. Stan agreed with these sentiments but was just beginning to realise that security comes at a price; and the price at this moment was his bladder. He was bursting.

Should he open up again? He'd never make it. Too many bloody locks. Putting the keys in his waistcoat pocket, he turned into the alley at the side of the Palace, and facing the wall unbuttoned his breeches.

Lost in relief, he whistled softly as he urinated. Someone coughed behind him and he jumped, piss drenching the bottom of his trousers and splashing his shoes. He wheeled around, still pissing and choked back a cry of terror.

A giant loomed out of the shadows. Hairless, the head white and shiny as an egg, the eyes large and glittering. Was it a golem, sent by an unknown enemy, jealous of Stan's new business venture? Was he going to die with his jewels in his hand? How had he not seen the brute lurking in the shadows?

"Mister Garrideb?" The giant spoke, his voice smooth as oysters and champagne.

"Maybe." Stan was too wise to admit to anything unless he had to.

The two men stared at each other in silence.

At length the giant said gently, "I think you've finished now."

Stan looked down and nodded. The stranger was right. He gave it a shake just to make sure and buttoned himself up. He swallowed. It wasn't a golem. It wasn't even a giant. It was just a big, fat, bald man.

"If you are Mister Garrideb, I'd like a word, if I may. I won't shake your hand though if that's all the same to you." The man who wasn't a golem smiled. It was a pleasant smile. The smile of a child, or an idiot.

Thunder rumbled not so far away. Stan looked up into the night sky. A single drop of rain landed on his forehead warm as sweat.

"Make it quick."

"I want to be in show business."

Clutched in the fat man's hand was one of the circulars Stan had printed up. '*Acts Wanted For A New East End Music Hall,*' it read. The sight of it sparked Stan's curiosity. Earlier in the week he had spent the day up West leaving them backstage at some of the more exclusive Music Halls and watering holes. In other words, no riff-raff or bob-tails to waste his time. So, the fat man wasn't a local. That much was in his favour.

"So, what do you do, son? Juggle cakes?"

The fat man smiled again. His eyes seemed to apologise for his size. "No. Do people do that?"

"Not in my theatre they don't."

"I sing."

Stan began walking, composure regained. He'd heard enough. "I've singers comin' out my arse, son. I've got the Lambeth Lark, the Stepney Songbird, the Hackney Hummers and the Poplar Parrot. They've all got one thing in common too."

The fat man raised his invisible eyebrows.

"Titties. And I'm not talkin' about fat man's paps neither. I'm talking milk jugs. The public love 'em." Stan did a mime show with his hands to indicate the size and quality of the delights his singers had to offer.

"But can they sing?"

Stan began to wonder if the stranger really was simple. "Who cares?"

"I can sing."

"Good for you."

Stan quickened his pace, watching his step, hopping over the steaming shit, and piss that flowed like wine. When would this storm come and wash all this filth away? The fat man didn't try to follow.

*"All things bright and beautiful,*

*All creatures great and small,*

*All things wise and wonderful,*

*The Lord God made them all..."*

Stan Garrideb stopped. It was like listening to an angel sing. He turned back to face the singer. He felt like Moses speaking with God. He wanted to say something profound and spiritual.

"You sound like a dolly. Yer not a dolly are yer?"

"No, sir."

"You sure?" Stan hoped the fat man wasn't a woman. He was a businessman but he had a heart. Bad enough to be fat and bald, but to be a fat bald woman who looked like a man. Could there be anything worse?

"Hymns don't go down well in a music hall. Can yer do 'The Boy I Love Is Up In The Gallery'?"

"I can do anything."

"Prove it."

*"The boy I love is up in the gallery,  
The boy I love is looking now at me,  
There he is, can't you see, waving his handkerchief,  
As merry as a robin that sings on a tree."*

Stan was stunned. The boy had a voice alright. The best voice he had ever heard. It had the purity of a young girl. If you closed your eyes you'd fall in love with the singer. If you opened them, you'd run a mile.

"Yer sound better than Marie Lloyd."

"I know I do."

"How d'yer do it?"

"I just sing."

"Yeh, but how d'yer manage ter sound like a girly?"

"I'm a..." His voice so clear up until now became a whisper, drowned out by another rumble of thunder.

"Eh?"

The singer's big hairless face had grown red and slick with sweat. He looked around to check they were alone. No such luck. A dollymop was walking up behind Stan. She looked at them and hurried past, not caring whether they wanted a good time or not.

"Well?" said Stan. He was interested now. There were possibilities here. Endless possibilities.

"I'm a eunuch."

A flash of lightning charged the atmosphere. A dramatic gesture, orchestrated by mother nature to add weight to the fat man's statement.

"You're a gelding?"

"Shhhh!" The fat man's fingers went to his lips. His eyes pleading, begging.

"Yer've lost yer porker?"

He shook his head. "No. It's the other... the other things."

Stan shuddered. "Fancy a drink?"

"That'd be nice."

There was another rumble of thunder as they left Dorset Street. The rain was holding off though. Just the odd drop, warm and dirty. They didn't speak until they were inside Mrs. Evans' pub in Spitalfields. Stan wanted to talk but the subject matter was delicate. It would be better to wait and phrase his questions correctly.

The pub was full of judies and their cash carriers. Mrs. Evans herself had quite a history and could usually be relied on to provide a clean service to gentlemen in need. "What'll you have?" asked Stan, taking his place at the bar.

"Wine?" said the fat man.

"You'll be lucky."

Mrs. Evans gave them two glasses of gin and a friendly wink.

"This'll give your tonsils a work-out," said Stan, raising his glass.

The fat man sipped it and tried not to grimace. It tasted like poison.

"Mmm. Nice."

"Yeh. Nectar. So, how'd it happen?"

"What?"

"Yer plums. How'd yer lose 'em? If yer don't mind me askin'?" There was no nice way of putting it.

Thunder. This time huge, with a crack to it that shook the windows of the pub, rattling them dramatically.

"My father."

"Eh?" Stan had momentarily lost the thread of the conversation, distracted by the sudden downpour that had started in the street outside. He looked out of the windows at the people rushing for shelter and smiled. "At last." He turned his attention back to the fat man, "Sorry. Go on. Your old man?"

"He's in the nut house now."

"Thank fuck for that."

The fat man pondered the justice of this and nodded. "Mmm. Probably the best place for him. Poor soul."

"But why?"

"He was a choir master and I was his star singer. The Sepulchre's Boys Choir. Maybe you've heard of us?"

"No. Sorry. I'm Jewish."

"Oh. No matter. Some of my best friends are Jewish."

"Are they?"

The fat man frowned. "No. I don't know any. Apart from you that is. Maybe you'll be my friend?"

"Who can say? Stranger things've happened. So you were his star singer?"

"Yes."

"And?"

Stan was beginning to sympathize with the man's father. Trying to get information from him was like squeezing out a turd after a week of Mutton stew.

"He was scared my voice would break. He chopped them off with a cleaver on my twelfth birthday. Said I wouldn't miss what I never got to use."

"Fucking hell. Happy Birthday to you! Had the shop run out of penny whistles?" Stan felt sick. "Did it hurt?"

"I should say so. I wouldn't stop bleeding. He thought I'd die. That scared him. He'd ruined his best suit and it looked as if he'd lose me too. He had to take pretty drastic action."

"Sounds like he was good at that. What did he do?"

"Cauterised it with the poker."

"Ouch."

"Mmm."

"Fancy another drink?"

The fat man shook his head. "Not really."

"Don't blame yer. I've tasted better piss."

"Really?"

"No. It's an expression."

The fat man smiled. "I know. I'm 'avin' you on."

They both laughed. Stan looked at his pocket watch. It was late. No wonder he was so tired. He snapped it shut and winked. "I think I'm gonna like you."

The fat man beamed with pleasure. His face reminded Stan of the sun. Or was it the moon? Yes, that was it. Stan grinned. He was chatting to the man in the moon.

"Are you gonna let me sing?"

Stan didn't want to seem too keen. He shrugged. "It's short notice. You'll need an act."

"An act?"

"Yeh. Do you mind dressin' up as a girl?"

The happiness faded from the fat man's face. "Do I have to?"

"It'd help."

He sighed. "Fine."

"Good. Meet me at the theatre at eight tomorrow mornin'. We've got our work cut out."

"I won't let you down, Mister Garrideb."

"Call me Stan."

"Call me Jonah," said the fat man.

"You look more like the whale."

Jonah didn't smile.

"Sorry," said Stan, embarrassed. He wanted to put the smile back on the face of the moon.

"It's part of my condition. This fat thing."

"Really?"

"Mmm. I was never this big before."

"You were only twelve."

"Mmm. See you tomorrow." The sorrow in those eyes made Stan want to cry.

"Jonah?"

"Yes?"

"There'll be no more fat jokes."

"I appreciate it."

Jonah turned to leave, his elbow accidentally nudging Ned Sherkin, one of the local nobblers. Stan knew what was coming next. He closed his eyes.

"Watch it, puff guts," said Ned.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Jonah.

Ned poured his drink on the floor and winked at his brothers. "You spilled my drink, baldy."

"I never."

Stan opened his eyes a little, biting his lip. He didn't want to look but he couldn't help himself.

Jonah swung his meaty fist, quick as lightning and with the same power as the recent thunder it connected with Ned's nose, spreading it across his face. He crumpled slowly to the floor among the spit and the rubbish. The high colour was back in Jonah's normally pale face. Ned's friends shrank back as Jonah's tree trunk foot kicked their fallen leader again and again in the head.

"Don't be rude to me, Mister," he said. He looked at the others. "Any of you." They looked away. He waved at Stan and smiled, the madness fading from his eyes. "See you tomorrow, Stan." He walked out into the rain seemingly unaware of its existence.

Ned's brothers stared at Stan. They weren't happy.

"We don't have Jews in here," said one, a sailor by the look of him.

"Want me to call him back?" said Stan.

They looked away.

Stan ordered another drink and thought about the fat man. A simpleton with a knowing smile. Is there such a thing? No. It had to be an act. Ned Sherkin was what was known affectionately in these parts as a 'fucking nutcase,' a man you did not mess around with.

Jonah had dropped him without any effort at all. Like an afterthought. He was fearless. Fearless could be useful. He looked out onto the street and saw the rain had eased. He downed his drink. Home time.

Stepping out into the street he breathed a sigh of relief. Everything was fresh. He needed to sleep. He hadn't been to bed in days. There had been so much to do. Buying the theatre, decorating it, auditioning the acts, coaching the acts, making sure the booze and food was up to scratch. Cheap fruit, cheaper gin, yesterday's fish; the next best thing to fresh. He knew he was on to a winner with the Palace, but with Jonah's help they really could go places. He grinned. He hadn't felt this exhausted since his days as a butcher, working in his father's shop, but this exhaustion felt good. It was an exhaustion that offered hope of fame and fortune. As he walked home his pace quickened. He had an idea. Sleep would have to wait a while longer.

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Stan was up at five with the first hint of dawn. As he stepped outside he peered up at the sky. Black foreboding clouds threatening further downpours, waiting, lurking like the plague. What had happened to the summer? When was it going to arrive? Another bloody washout of a bank holiday. He smiled. It was what he needed. If the locals stayed at home for the holiday, they'd be desperate to get out by the time he opened his doors. It began to drizzle as he headed down to the Ten Bells, hoping to catch the girls as they knocked off the night shift. He saw Little Bess coming out of an alleyway. She wasn't drunk. That was a good thing.

"Alright, Stan?" she asked, with a tired smile.

He liked her voice. He liked her smile. Actually, he liked her. A lot. The soft Irish lilt. She should be living on a farm in Galway, bathing her pretty white feet in mountain streams. Not sucking cocks for a living.

"Wanna earn some chink?" Stan asked.

She looked at him in surprise. Stan had always been friendly to the girls but he wasn't a customer.

"I'm dead on me feet, dear," she said. "You'll have to do all the work."

Stan shook his head, trying not to blush. "Not that sort of work, Bess."

She frowned. With her short cropped raven black hair Stan thought she looked like a pixie. "What do I have to do?"

"Dance. Tonight. You and a few others. No funny business."

"Me? A dancin' girl?"

"You've got the feet for it."

Her feet were tiny. He could fall in love with those feet.

"Yer a charmer, Stan. I could go for you, so I could."

"Thanks. No need. It's business. I've got a sensational new act. I want you to accompany him. You and your friends."

"My friends?"

"Young uns. Pretty uns. Not Long Annie. She'd frighten away all the punters."

She laughed. "She's not that bad."

"She's not that good either. I want the best you can find. Bring 'em backstage at lunchtime. I'll fix you up some snap an' there'll be a thick 'un in it for you to share."

"A thick 'un? To share?"

"You got your maths right, Bess."

"And no humping?"

"Nope. What you do after the show's up to you. Do this right an' yer can take yer pick o' the swells in the audience. We'll make a toffer out of you yet, Bess."

Bess yawned.

"Get on home to yer pit. An' get the others. No less than five. Got that?"

She nodded.

"Til lunchtime. One sharp. Don't be late."

"See yer, Stan." She looked at him, trying to figure him out. "And thanks."

"Pleasure."

He walked off, humming. He could rely on Bess. She was a good 'un. She'd pick the best. As he headed towards the theatre he wondered if she would make a good wife. Not the kind of wife he could take home to Mother of course, but she was long dead, so that wouldn't be an issue. He knew she had the experience to make a man happy. But could he make her happy? She was Catholic and he was a Jew. Did she like Jews? He'd never heard her say anything against them but tolerance was one thing, marriage another. Would she expect him to convert? Would he consider it? He thought of those feet. Yes, he would certainly consider it.

Jonah was there, waiting for him, asleep in the doorway.

"Oi! Wakey, wakey!" Stan nudged the eunuch with his boot.

Jonah cracked open an eye and was immediately awake.

"You been here all night?"

"Yes sir, Mister Garrideb. Yes."

"It's Stan."

"Stan. Sorry. Yes. I have."

"Why?"

Jonah just looked at him. His eyes big as saucers. Stan pictured him in a baby bonnet, slurping at a bottle of milk.

"Have you got nowhere else to stay?"

"No."

"Why din't yer say so last night?"

"You didn't ask. It's not the sort of thing you boast about. Is it?"

"S'pose not. Come in. I'll get you a cup of something. What's your poison?"

"Milk?" He saw the grin spread across Stan's face. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing my friend, just an image I had in my head. Milk, eh? What do you think this is? A bloody dairy? You can have coffee. I get it from some fellers down on the docks, straight from somewhere or other. They say it's the best."

"I'd prefer a glass of water."

They went into the office. Stan handed him a glass of water.

"You hungry?"

Jonah said nothing.

"Well, we'll eat later. I've been thinkin' about you, my friend."

"What about me?"

"What to do with you. You're good with yer fists. I could use that. You can keep the rampers in line. Stop any trouble before it happens."

"I'd sooner sing."

"You'll do that too. You're gonna be my headliner, Jonah."

"I am?"

"Yeh. Top of the bill. So, what d'yer say? I'll give yer a joey a day?"

"What's that?"

"Fourpence."

"And meals?"

Stan sighed. "You sure yer not Jewish?"

"Yes."

"I'm jokin', Jonah. Han't yer ever heard of irony?"

Jonah frowned. "The lowest form of humour?"

"That's sarcasm. Irony's different."

"Oh."

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Inspector Samuel Trimp sat in a chair behind his desk, pulling gently at a nasal hair with a pair of silver tweezers, mulling. The weather was starting to depress him, as was the lack of anything interesting to get his teeth into. He worked an area where life was cheap and you were guaranteed a murder or two every week, most of which drink related. Any fool could solve them in minutes. He was tired of shovelling up society's shit. He was a good detective and he got results primarily because he was a product of the area. He had done well to get this far, considering his upbringing. It had been a miracle really. He knew these streets and the people who inhabited them. Not quite the poacher turned gamekeeper but near enough. He pulled ever so slowly, coaxing a hair out, then riding the sneeze like a wave until...Achooo! He smiled in satisfaction. Delightful.

There was a knock at the door and Sergeant Freddie Warner entered. Trimp had a lot of time for Warner and could attribute at least part of his phenomenal success rate to having such an excellent right hand man. Big, tough yet compassionate and not without a sharp intelligence, Warner could have been a great detective but he showed no interest in promotion. He enjoyed working with Trimp, was very happily married with a large brood of kids and saw no need to rock any boats or make any changes.

The two of them were a team. They thought of themselves as pioneers, always ready to try out new techniques. The latest was one Trimp liked to call 'infiltration'. This was a method of disguising oneself completely and moving amongst society to gather

information and clues. Trimp was proud of Warner's talent for disguise and subterfuge. For them it wasn't just a question of sticking on a false beard, but becoming somebody else entirely which meant changing clothes, your gait, voice, accent, hair, everything. But doing it naturally. Yes they worked well together and although they never socialized outside work hours Warner was the closest thing Trimp had to a friend.

"Anything to report then, Sergeant?"

"No not really, sir. Cells full of drunks, whores, dippers and shit sacks. However, I did have an interesting chat yesterday with a Doctor Burley over at Guy's."

"Oh, yes?"

"It seems someone's been hanging about the hospital looking to buy body parts."

"Body parts? What, arms and legs an' that?"

"No sir. Internal body parts. Female. Uteruses, an such..."

"Blimey. Is that how you say the plural of uterus, Sergeant?"

"Couldn't say, sir. I've not had call to say the plural of uterus recently."

"Quite. Would it be worth police time getting someone to check? I'm curious now."

"Probably not, sir. I don't think Abberline would like it."

"I suppose you're right. Do you have a description of the fellow?"

"No. It just came up in conversation when I visited the hospital with the Missus. It struck in me as a bit strange."

"Indeed. Why would anybody want a uterus?"

"Who can say, sir? For some it's bottle tops, for others it's uterus...Uteri...Women's parts."

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Just before lunch Stan sent Jonah out to buy eels, whelks and mash. When he returned the girls were there, lolling about the stage. Little Bess had brought along five friends and Stan was impressed. They were all under thirty and with a bit of paint and some clever lighting they'd look fresh as daisies.

When Jonah came in, Stan made the introductions. The girls stared at the fat man in wonder and a little apprehension. They hadn't been on the streets long and they could still afford to be choosy.

"Pleased ter meetcher," said Bess, shaking Jonah's hand. Then she looked to Stan for reassurance. "We don't have to...?" She left the question hanging in the dusty air.

"No. Golly no," said Jonah, blushing. "No. No. No. I don't."

"It's all right dear," said a ginger nut called Faye. "You a mandrake then?"

"A what?"

"A bum boy?"

His face changed from white to purple. "No. I'm not anything. Miss."

"Oh. Right. Fancy that."

"Right, ladies," said Stan. "Cozzies. Get changed in the office." He turned to Jonah.

"You can get changed in the shithouse, if yer don't mind."

"What am I wearing?" Jonah looked sad. His lower lip was quivering.

"Don't worry. It ain't a dress. Here." He handed him a paper bag, full of clothes. "You'll love it."

While they were getting changed, Stan sat down at the piano and began looking through the lyrics he had written in the small hours of the morning. He'd written songs before but none had come as easily as this. Inspiration was a rare and lovely thing. He tinkered with the keys. A soft melody. Seductive. Redolent of the East. Perfect.

The girls came out first.

"Rapture," cried Stan clapping his hands. He really was on the road to greatness and he was going to bring them all with him.

Bess wasn't happy. "We look a state. We look like..."

"You look perfect, girl," said Stan.

The girls were wearing nothing but wispy sheets of gossamer silk. They were the remnants of his grandmother's summer curtains. He was pleased he'd saved them. Each girl had a transparent veil across the lower part of her face and a glass gem in her belly button. Faye's fell out and rolled across the stage.

"I'll fetch some glue later," said Stan, picking it up. "Come on, Jonah. Don't be shy. Yer public awaits."

Jonah shuffled onstage to a chorus of giggles from the girls. He was wearing baggy purple pyjama bottoms and a pair of matching slippers that turned up into points at the toe. His huge hairless belly quivered and trembled like a fresh dessert at a children's tea party. His bald head was covered by a towel, held in place by a huge amber brooch that had once belonged to one of Stan's aunts.

"What am I s'posed to be?" he squeaked.

"A fuckin' idiot," laughed Faye.

Jonah snatched the turban from his head and threw it on the floor.

"I'm off. This wasn't part of the deal. I jus' want to sing." A tear trickled down his cheek.

Little Bess ran to him and standing on tip-toes gave him a kiss.

"We was just messin'. We're sorry. Yer look a real Don, does he not, girls?"

The girls cooed and ahhed.

"Put the turban on, Jo," said Stan. "Yer look great. Really. A real sultan of dabs."

Jonah smiled uncertainly. "Is that good?"

"Yeh. The best. Now come an' listen ter yer song. Girls, while Jonah sings I want yer to swan about lookin' lovely. Move yer dairies about. Yer s'posed ter be top-notch dollies in a harem. Got that? Jonah's the big cheese. Okay?"

"You're the boss," said Bess.

"Jonah, stand by me an' sing the words. Okay?"

"Mmm."

Stan began to play.

*"I want to be the master of the harem. I want to be a randy struttin' buck,*

*But I lost me Nebuchadnezzar in the storm last night and now I'm just a happy eunuch."*

They ran through the whole song, Jonah's voice creating an aural alchemy, transforming the crass words and tune into an aria.

"Like listenin' to angels," sighed Faye, leaning her head on Jonah's beefy arms.

"Angels don't sing about losin' their Nebuchadnezzar," sighed Jonah.

"They do in this gaff," said Stan. "We're a bloody music hall. People come here fer a laugh. Got that? They're laughin' with yer. Not at yer."

"I'd sooner sing somethin' serious."

"Then go an' do it in church an' see how much they pay yer. Jesus Jonah, you came to me remember?"

Jonah bit his lip. "Okay. Fine. Give it here. I better learn it."

"Girls, can you do a sexy dance with yer veils while he's singin'?" said Stan.

Buxom Brenda whipped a cloth away, revealing the secret of how she got her name.

"Not that sexy, Brenda," sighed Stan. "Be subtle. We wanna tease them. Not get closed down."

"So no titties then?" she pouted.

"Not tonight, darlin'."

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By the time the other acts began arriving, Stan's show-stopper was ready. He was proud, nervous and exhilarated.

"The audience are gonna love yer, Jonah," he said. "Now go get changed. I want you on the door, takin' money. Okay? Come backstage when I give the nod."

"Stan?"

"Yeh?"

"I'm scared."

"Good. Nerves are good. Stick with it son. You're gonna be a star."

"Irony?"

"Nah. The truth."

Jonah stared at his friend. He wanted to believe him. He thought he could tell when people were being underhand. He got no sense of that with Stan. Stan was honest. Stan was his friend. He smiled. He felt hope for the first time in years. A star? Maybe. Would people still laugh at him when he was a star? Probably. But they would respect him too. That would be a treat.

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Terry 'Growler' Griffin was pleased with himself. It had been a good day in spite of the rain. He whistled as he walked east from Mayfair back towards his digs in Whitechapel. He liked it up West. It was the perfect hunting ground for a skilled dipper. If he had spent the day closer to home where the locals were wary of bludgers and criminals, he would have come away with nothing but buttons, farthings and lint, but take a bit of time to doll yourself up, invest a few pennies in some smart togs, have a bath and a

shave and the world was yours for the taking. Wallets, purses, watches and handkerchiefs galore. He felt as rich as Solomon.

He dropped into the Grapes, a pub he often favoured as it catered to all the young arty bloods. Growler liked the theatre and the arts. He had taught himself the piano and could belt out all the old favourites. Indeed, he had even earned a few drinks from his talents as a comic singer, but that was in another life, another world. Those days were long gone. He was ordering a drink for himself at the bar when he chanced upon one of Stan Garrideb's circulars for the Palace of Wonder.

“Interesting,” he mused. “Maybe those days ain't so long gone after all. Could be a nice little regular earner for the foreseeable.”

He checked the time on one of the delightful pocket watches he had stolen that morning. Time enough to have a good drink, hide his loot, fill his face, then toddle along to this Palace of Wonder and see if it was going to be worth his while.

## OPENING NIGHT

Day turned to muddy dusk. The streets were slick and slimy, the storm giving way to drizzle, constant and apathetic. Seeking shelter, the people of Whitechapel poured into the Palace of Wonder. Jonah was on the door, taking their money and turning away the more obvious dippers and rollers. He was happy with his job. If any of the swells thought they could impress their judies by taking a rise out of the fat man, he would just point towards the street. If that wasn't enough, he would stand up and let loose with his meaty fists, more lethal than any cudgel. When the senseless bodies began mounting up in the gutter, the lushingtons got the message and kept their thoughts on his love of cakes to themselves.

Just before curtain up, the crowd parted as a small Jew with the shoulders of a bull approached Jonah's makeshift box office. The Spiritualists would say he had an aura of evil, like a black cloud, hovering around him. Even the toughest nobblers moved aside, their innate sense of self-preservation kicking in through the haze of gin and dope.

"It's Leather Apron," came the whisper like a Greek Chorus announcing impending doom.

Leather Apron slammed down his ha'pence and Jonah gave him a ticket. Jonah could tell he was Jewish, and sick of playing the heavy, he decided to play sweet.

"My best friend's a Jew," he told the man.

"Fuck off!" growled Leather Apron, pushing through the crowd to the bar.

Jonah blinked in surprise. He fought back a tear and debated whether to sling the man out. He decided against it. The man had been rude but he hadn't made any personal comments about him. Maybe he had been mistaken and the man wasn't a Jew at all but

one of those anti-semites. He knew there were no shortage of them in these parts. He couldn't throw the man out for that. There'd be a riot.

John Pizer, better known as Leather Apron, was a Polish Jew. His command of English wasn't perfect but he had mastered every obscenity the language had to offer and invented a few of his own. He was a bootmaker by trade and every time he hammered a nail into the sole of a shoe he imagined he was bashing in the brains of the local filth and scum. He hated all the English, but in particular he hated the whores and their cash carriers. He blamed them for the squalor of the East End. Without them, he would have a better class of customer. His only escape from hate was drink. He pushed his way to the bar and ordered a pint of gin, which he downed like lemonade.

"Another."

He took his time with the second. Relishing the burning sensation in his throat as he watched the theatre owner step onto the stage from behind the curtains.

Stan Garrideb was dressed in his father's old top hat and an opera cape he had found in the street one night two years ago. He was carrying a silver-topped cane that had also belonged to his father, and he had curled his hair in the jug loop style that was the fashion in higher circles.

"My Lords, lay-deeez an' genullmen," he called, his voice cutting over the din from the bar. "Welcome one and all to the ninth wonder of the modern age, an establishment to rival the hanging gardens of Babylon, an enterprise worthy of the Pharaohs, the burning light of civilization, the one and only Paaaaalace of Wonder!"

There was a smattering of applause.

"Gerronwivit!" yelled a lushey.

An empty bottle sailed through the air and shattered at Stan's feet.

Jonah's fist crashed down on the drunk's head.

"Thanking you, Jonah. Give the genullman some air, please," said Stan, calm as the Dead Sea in summer.

Jonah hauled the man out and added him to the pile of casualties in the street.

"Without further ado," Stan continued. "May I present for your edification and delight, the indefatigable, incomparable, Harry Harris, the Bolton Clog Dancer!"

Stan took his place at the piano and began belting out an air as the curtains swept back and an elderly man in white grocer's apron and wooden clogs clattered onto the stage and began a curious, lunatic dance, to the jeers and hoots of those assembled.

More bottles flew, but the old man's technique made him an adept at dodging the missiles as he hurled himself across the stage. When his face took on a purple hue, Stan fearing for his performer's health brought the tune to a premature conclusion, signaling to the girls backstage to close the curtains.

"A fitting beginning to an Age of Wonders," said Stan, taking the stage and daring anyone to disagree with him. "However, there is more in store my friends. If you were suitably impressed and stunned by the talents of our northern friend and his ecstatic feet, you will be swept heavenward by the divine rapture of the Stepney Songbird, Miss Hettie Maffrett. My friends, let us raise the roof!"

Hettie's voice wasn't bad. She was seventeen and in her little maid's outfit, she captured the interest of the men in the room and got through her comic song about her 'Master's French Poodle' without any serious interruption except for an invitation from Ned Sherkin and his Punishers to join them afterwards for a dog training session.

Count Cagliostro, the Magical Mage of Camden Town was next up and found himself doused with gin when he attempted to breathe fire. Stan had to sacrifice his cape to douse the flames. Then came Kiddy Malone, the Cork Comedic Sensation who failed to raise a smile but did receive a bouquet of rotten fruit for his efforts.

Stan wasn't worried. He knew this audience were the toughest in the world. A night's entertainment wouldn't be entertaining at all if they weren't allowed to assault the acts. He remained calm throughout the on-stage death of the Hackney Hummers and the bottling of Prince Trevor, the Juggling Midget from Mesopotamia. He still had one final card to play. The Ace up his sleeve.

"And finally, we have saved the sweetmeats for last!" cried Stan, after seeing off the Incredible Moe and his Talking Mutt, whose entire vocabulary evidently consisted of an assortment of growls and yelps. "All the way from the deserts of Constantinople, the wonder of Araby, the Sultan of Sensuality, the Nomad of the Night, the Bedouin of the Bedroom and his Harem Houris..."

The curtain opened and Little Bess and her chorus of harem girls fluttered onstage like butterflies in gauze. Whistles of appreciation went up as the music swelled. Then on came Jonah transformed into a symbol of power. He commanded the stage. There was laughter in the right places and sighs as the audience were caught up with the performance. They had never heard such a voice from man or woman. Only one person remained un-moved. As the song reached its climax, an accented voice roared out in rage.

"Whores!"

Jonah didn't stop singing as he bounded from the stage and lifted Leather Apron high above his head. He sang louder, drowning out the torrent of bi-lingual filth from the bootmaker as he made his way through the crowd and hurled him out into the gutter.

As he fell, John Pizer twisted his ankle and staggered back onto the wet cobblestones.

"You'll pay for this, whore monger," he growled.

Jonah didn't hear him. He was back on stage, taking his bow, telling the audience how there were none like them in all the world.

As the Palace of Wonder emptied, Jonah's name was on everyone's lips. Stan was over the moon. He offered the girls an extra penny between them to help him clear up. It gladdened Stan's heart to see them so excited. It was clear that being onstage in costume with the lights and the music receiving appreciative cheers and whistles from a mostly male audience was a damn sight better and easier way of making a living than a tuppenny upright in a dark alley amongst the shit, the rubbish and the dead vermin. Though he was not of a missionary nature, it would please him no end if he could be responsible for giving these girls a new start in life. Especially Bess.

"Girls, we can say goodbye to the streets. We're goin' to the top," said Faye, helping herself to a mug of gin.

"You certainly are, my angels," grinned Stan. "All of you. Same again tomorrow night?"

Jonah was sat on the stage, lost in a dream. Reliving his moment of triumph.

"And how's our favourite sultan?" asked Bess, sitting down beside him.

Jonah couldn't stop smiling. "They liked us."

"They liked you, darlin'," said Bess, hugging his arm and kissing his cheek.

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Leather Apron staggered into Whitechapel High Street. He stopped to piss and saw two tarts come out of the White Hart. They were with a couple of soldiers. The women were laughing. So were the men. The couples separated. He followed one. The older girl. The one in the black bonnet who reminded him of his mother. The soldier had his arm

around her as he led her into George Yard. He saw them sharing a drink from the soldier's flask. It was the last drink she would ever taste. They were kissing now, fumbling with each other's clothes. Leather Apron watched from the shadows until they concluded their business and the soldier departed. He allowed the hatred and disgust to bubble and boil like lava in his breast.

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It was a little after three in the morning when Stan and Jonah finished cleaning up. Stan poured them both a glass of port wine. It had belonged to his father who had kept the same bottle for over twenty years, only bringing it out for 'special' celebrations. The bottle was still three quarters full, a testament to the fact that there had been little to celebrate in the life of Stanley Garrideb Senior.

Neither Stan nor Jonah were hardened drinkers, but they polished off the bottle in record time. Stan enjoyed the warm, numb feeling in his cheeks, but Jonah felt sick.

"I've never really been drunk before," he confided.

"Get used to it," said Stan. "All the best Music Hall stars are drunks."

"Am I really a star?" said the eunuch. He was blushing with childlike pleasure.

"The brightest, my son. The brightest. I'd give you a cigar, but I don't smoke."

"Me neither."

"We could start?"

"Maybe tomorrow?" said Jonah. "I think it might make me spew."

"So what? It's all paid for?"

"I'd sooner go to bed."

"You can sleep in my office, son," said Stan. "You'll find some blankets backstage. Shake the bugs out first, mind."

As he watched Jonah preparing his bedroll, Stan fell to thinking about Little Bess. He had never been in love before. He wasn't sure that he was in love now, but he couldn't get the girl out of his head. His father would have loved her. He wasn't the type to let race or background interfere with his appreciation of beauty. Petite and feminine with an hourglass figure and lovely Irish skin. Cat-like eyes always twinkling with humour and mischief. There really was no reason for a girl like her to be working the streets. Not anymore. His father had always told him that the mark of a good man was how his life affected others for the better. "My life could affect Bess for the better," he mused. "I could make her rich." He pictured the two of them together, in a swell house out in Highgate. Why couldn't he tell her how he felt? Did she know? He wondered if it ever crossed her mind why he had never wanted to do business with her. She must know how he felt.

He had met her for the first time when she came into his father's shop to buy meat. She must have had a good night and wanted to celebrate with a decent meal. Stan had been so struck by her charms and lusty sensuality that he had been unable to speak to her. He let his father serve her. Afterwards, he got to know her a little better just from passing in the street. She would always stop and chat. He always enjoyed those little chance meetings and would even go out of his way to bump into her accidentally. Now here he was, her employer. He was in a position to support her at last. There was no more need to keep his thoughts to himself. He smiled. She would be his. She would want him and him alone. She would love him. She had to love him. Just look at all he was doing for her. He wondered if he should sleep with her. He didn't want it to appear as if he were taking advantage of the situation. He shook his head. He was being foolish. Telling someone you love them isn't taking advantage of the situation. It's being honest. Women liked honesty. His father had taught him that.

"I'm gonna check up on Bess," he said suddenly, climbing unsteadily to his feet. "You can't be too careful these days."

"About what?" asked Jonah, lying down on the floor, and spreading the mildewed blankets around him.

"There's nasty folks about. Poor Lizzie Smith was killed a couple of months back. Punishers. Nasty business. I'll be in George Yard if yer need me."

"Right-o. Good luck, Stan."

Stan smiled. "Thanks. I'm just checkin' on her. That's all. I'm not sweet on her or nothin'."

"Course." Jonah winked, and the two of them began giggling like drunken children.

\*\*\*

The rain helped to clear Stan's head as he made his way towards Bess's lodgings. He stopped for a while, leaning against a wall, until the damp soaked through to his skin, making him shiver. His nerve was failing him.

"What am I doin'?" he thought to himself. "I should go to bed. No. No. No. Bessie needs me. She might need me. I'll jus' check she's fine an' fuck off home. Nothin' else to it. She's my employee that's all. Jus' checkin' on my staff. A good boss does that."

He saw a dingy light in the bootmaker's shop. Leather Apron was working late, hammering hell out of some poor glock's shoes.

Stan spat and lurched on.

He climbed the flight of stairs in the dark, stumbling on every other step. On the first floor landing he tripped over a woman lying in a heap against the wall. She didn't wake.

The floor was wet all around her. Stan sniffed in disgust.

"Piss. For fuck's sake."

He carried on up the stairs, and banged on the door.

The door opened and the dim light half-blinded him. It was Faye the red-head, dressed in a shawl and precious little else.

"Mister Garrideb?"

He swayed in the doorway. He was more drunk than he had thought. "That's me."

"What d'yer want?"

"Little Bess."

"She's busy."

He stared at her.

"How d'yer mean?"

"With a feller."

"Oh." He wanted to scream. He smiled instead.

"D'yer wanna come in?"

"Might as well."

He followed her into the squalid parlour, and shifted a pair of gentleman's trousers from a wooden stool. He sat down and sighed.

"She don't have to do this anymore. None of you do."

Faye smiled. "Got any grog?"

"No." The thought of more drink made him want to shit through his teeth.

"You're soft on her, aren't yer?"

"Eh?"

"Little Bess. You like her?"

"No. Yes. No. I jus' wanted ter check she got home all right. All of yer. That's all. Jus' checkin' on my dancin' angels." He sat dejected, shoulders slumped.

Faye pulled up a stool alongside and held his hand. "Poor Stan."

"I'm all right. Honest."

"We can do it if yer want?"

He looked at her. She was pretty. He shook his head. "It wouldn't be right. I'm yer boss. I..."

"I was right. You are soft on her."

"Am not. I... I don't wanna be like the others that's all. I'm offerin' you all a second chance. Can't yer see that?"

"Blimey. You're worse than the biddies down the Mission Hall tryin' ter save our souls."

"It ain't like that. Oh, fuck. Faye. Can yer keep a secret?"

"Course."

"I think I love her." There he'd said it. He waited for her to laugh at him. She didn't. She squeezed his hand.

"She's a lucky girl. Trouble is, if lucky girls don't know they're lucky then they ain't so different from the unlucky ones, are they?"

"Fuck knows. Yer've lost me, Faye. I'm not thinkin' straight. I'm banjaxed. That bloody port."

He closed his eyes and after a while fell asleep with Faye stroking his hair.

## GEORGE YARD

In the theatre, Jonah snuffed out the candle and closed his eyes.

The wooden floor creaked. He opened his eyes. Something was moving in the next room. He wished he was an owl and could see in the dark. Maybe it was a mouse? He hoped so. He liked mice. It could be a rat. He hated rats. There had been rats in his bedroom as a child. His brother used to feed them with pieces of bread. "They are just God's children, like you and I," he used to say. He knew it wound Jonah up. He was always teasing him. In a kind way though. Never nasty. He loved his brother. He missed him more than anything when he ran away from home at fourteen. He was special you see. He had a special gift. Like Jesus. It had been getting harder and harder to hide it from their father. He wouldn't have understood. His father would have thought his brother possessed by the devil. His fate would have been far worse than castration. He hadn't seen his brother since that long ago night when he had woken him to say goodbye, before climbing out of the window and disappearing into the darkness.

Jonah sat up and shook the sad memory from his drink-addled brain. He cursed the alcohol. Why couldn't he just forget? That noise again. Rats. They would bite him in his sleep. He didn't want to get bitten. He was afraid of disease. He had read about disease. It could be passed on by a bite. He fumbled for the tinder box but couldn't find it. He closed his eyes again. Another creak. He opened his eyes. He wanted to piss. He didn't want to get out of his bed and stumble around in the dark for the privy.

"Stan," he called. "Stan!"

Nothing. He drifted away. Creak. He opened his eyes, sweat beading his body, cold and rank. He felt his heart pounding. He tried to swallow but his tongue was stuck to the roof of his mouth. The darkness was overpowering, suffocating. Bad things always happened in the dark. He sat up, catching his head on the edge of Stan's desk.

"Help me God. Help me God. Help me God," he whispered. He found the tinderbox and struck a light. Shadows loomed, dancing in the dark.

Jonah left the office, candle in hand. He turned up the gas in the auditorium and smiled. It really was a palace. He turned up the lighting on the stage and imagined he was watching himself sing. He heard that noise again. Something was moving behind the curtains. Something was moving in the walls. The Palace was alive. The walls were closing in on him. The shadows danced, like demons beckoning him down to the inferno. He told himself it was all in his head. He wished Stan would come back. Bad things only happened when you were alone. They never happened if you were with your friends.

"I'll go and check on the boss. He might need me," he decided. "I'm not scared for me. I'm worried about him. That's all. He'll be glad to see me."

He took the candle with him guarding it against the wind and the rain as he locked the doors. The clock at Saint Botolph's struck the half hour. Then he remembered that he hadn't turned off the gas. He groaned. He didn't want to go back inside, but he had to.

"Gas doesn't grow on trees," he told himself. "It costs money."

He extinguished the lights. The Palace creaked and groaned, like an old man in pain. He had one last look around and hurried outside, tripping on the steps. He picked himself up and locked the doors. He held his jacket open to guard the candle as it flickered and guttered in the wind.

He passed Pizer's cobblers and crossed to the other side of the street. The shop was dark, but he had the impression that someone was watching his progress. He quickened his pace to a rolling trot. By the time he reached George Yard, he was gasping for breath.

"I'll have a rest when I'm inside," he promised himself, taking the stairs three at a time. At the landing he pulled up short. A woman was asleep. As he stepped over her he noticed the blood in the guttering candlelight. No. It couldn't be blood. She had probably had an accident and wet herself. He bent down. It was blood. He could smell it. It was everywhere, flooding the landing and dripping down the stairs. He shook the woman gently by the shoulder.

"Miss?"

He couldn't help himself. He screamed. The woman's throat had been slashed and hacked apart. His fingers came away, slick with blood.

"Murder! Murder! Help!"

Doors opened above him. Then the door on the landing opened. A woman came out, saw him, saw the body and screamed, running back and slamming the door behind her. Stan, Faye, Little Bess and a man in his underwear that Jonah had never seen before came tumbling down the stairs. Jonah was sobbing. That poor woman. What a way to die. Alone. Left on a dirty landing like a bag of rubbish.

"Fuck!" Stan swore. He turned around to block the sight from Bess and Faye.

"Get out my way," said the undressed man. He came to a halt as he saw the body. He looked at Jonah. "You're covered in blood. Murderer!"

"Eh?" said Jonah. "It wasn't me, mister." He wiped tears from his eyes. "I wouldn't hurt her. I never even knew her."

"Call the Crushers," said the man, disappearing back up the stairs to fetch his clothes.

"An' don't let the fat un get away."

"Go find a p'liceman, Jonah," said Stan. "Don't worry about that silly cunt."

"He thinks I done it," said Jonah. He felt his heart would break.

"I told yer not ter worry 'bout him," snapped Stan. "Go on. Fetch the p'lice."

"On my own?"

"You'll be fine. I'll stay with the girls."

Jonah stared at him. He didn't want to be alone. The woman had died alone. Bad things always happened when you were alone. He wanted to beg Stan to come with him, but he couldn't. Nobody loves a coward. He would have to be brave. He turned and ran down the stairs. The sooner it was over the sooner he would be safe again.

Faye looked down at the body. "Poor Martha. I always thought it'd be the drink what killed her."

"Come back inside, ladies," said Stan, shepherding them back up the stairs.

In the rooms, the man was dressed. He flung a handful of coins on the table, "I'm not stickin' around. Where's the fatty?"

"He got away," said Stan. "We couldn't stop him."

"Too bad. He looked a right wrong 'un. Well...See yer around."

While they waited for the police and Jonah, Stan tried to take the girls' minds off the body on the stairs by getting them to run through a new song, which he played for them on a pair of spoons.

"We can't go on tonight," said Bess. "So give it a rest, Stan, love."

"Eh?"

"She's right," said Faye. "It wouldn't be right."

"Why not?"

"Martha's dead. How can we go on like nothin's 'appened?"

"But yer din't even like her. She was a drunken old trout. Everyone knows it."

Little Bess's green eyes flashed with fire. She stood up and would have slapped him, if he hadn't backed away.

"Don't you dare speak ill o' the dead. You'll be bringin' bad luck on all of us."

"Fer fuck's sake. I'm sorry. I din't know she meant so much ter yer."

"She lived next door, Stan. It could've been one of us lyin' there," Faye explained.

"Not anymore," said Stan. "I keep tellin' yer. It's dangerous fer street girls these days.

You ain't street girls no more. Are yer?"

The girls said nothing.

Bess sighed. "What if all this... at the Theatre o' Dreams doesn't work out?"

"Palace of Wonder. It's the Palace of Wonder."

"Same thing. What if it all goes arsy yarsey? Where'll we be then?"

"It won't," said Stan. "We're gonna be rich. I promise."

"I need a drink," sighed Bess.

"No yer don't."

"Yes I fuckin' do." She stared him down and then headed to the door.

"Where are you going?" Stan asked, following after her.

"That's for me to know." She slammed the door.

"Where's she gone?" he asked Faye.

"We'll find out soon enough," she replied.

They sat in silence. Faye stared at him, hoping to make him notice her, but he was lost in thought. The door opened and Bess appeared clutching a quarter bottle of nasty looking brown liquid.

"Where've you been?" Stan asked.

"Martha's." She uncorked the bottle. "God rest her." She raised the bottle, swallowed and grimaced. "Ugh! Want some?" She offered the bottle to Faye.

"What is it?"

"Fucked if I know."

Faye took the bottle and drank. She offered it to Stan but he shook his head.

"I say we open tonight."

"No. Stan," said Bess.

"We do it for Martha. It's what she would've wanted."

Faye nodded. It made sense to her. It didn't to Bess.

"How d'yer work that out? Why would she've wanted it?"

"We do it as a benefit for her. I'll donate some o' the proceeds to her funeral costs. We'll have a knees-up for her an' free drink. Don't try tellin' me she wouldn't've loved that."

"Free drink?"

"Yeh. With what we make tonight, I'll put some aside fer the funeral. Fair enough?"

"An' we'll still get paid?"

"Course. Bloody hell girls, you just don't get it do you?"

"I'll talk to the others," said Faye.

Bess thought for a while and nodded. Why not? She never really liked Martha. Always poking her nose where it didn't belong. Why should she lose her livelihood just because someone she didn't like had been murdered? Bloody stupid. Even so, nobody deserved to end up like that. Cut up like meat. She shuddered and finished the bottle.

There was movement on the stairs. Faye went outside and looked over the banister.

"The bluebottles are here."

"I'll deal with this. You girls stay here," said Stan.

When he reached the landing, one of the constables was being sick. A sergeant was kneeling beside the body, shaking his head and two others were putting handcuffs on Jonah.

"Oi!" said Stan. "Take the derbies off him. He ain't done noffin."

The sergeant beside the body looked up at him. His moustache bristling. "Call this nothin', do yer, Jewboy?"

"Do yer really think he'd come an' fetch you lot if he'd done it?" said Stan. He could feel a cold fury building up inside him Why did these trained monkeys always have to bring his religion into everything?

"He's got her blood on his hands," said the sergeant, a smug look on his face.

"So have you, bright boy," said Stan. "He got it same way you did, by checkin' ter see if she was dead. You've got it on yer shoes too. An' so's he." He nodded at the young copper who had been sick.

"How do we know it wasn't you?" said the policeman, his hopes for a quick end to the case evaporating like morning dew.

"Coz I was with the ladies all night, and so was he," said Stan. "Ain't that right, girls?" Bess and Faye poked their heads over the stairs.

"That's right, Stan," said Faye.

The sergeant shook his head. "Fuckin' haybags. Release him, lads."

They unlocked the handcuffs. Jonah rubbed his wrists and blinked at Stan.

"Thanks, Stan. But you must be confused. I wasn't with you all night. I..."

"Strike me down, God. Fer fuck's sake, do it now!" groaned Stan.

"I think I'm gonna have to ask both you 'gentlemen' ter accompany us ter the station," said the sergeant. "You girls better come too."

"Why couldn't yer old man've chopped off yer tongue when he was cuttin' off yer ballocks?" Stan hissed as he was led past Jonah.

"Sorry, Boss. But my Dad always told me to tell the truth."

"Yeh well, we all know what a saint he was, don't we?"

"No fuckin' talkin'," snarled the sergeant, pushing them along.

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It was lunchtime before they were released. There was no evidence against them. Sergeant Houghton, the arresting officer wasn't happy. "I'm keepin' my eyes on you two," he told them. "You may think you've got away with it this time. But you haven't. I'm like a spider, I am. Bidin' my time. Waitin'. Watchin'."

"Good fer you, Sergeant," said Stan. "I like a man who takes his job seriously. If you're free tonight, come along to the gaff. It's on the house fer London's finest."

"Beat it, before I lay one on you."

"Come along, Jonah. Ladies."

They filed out of the station, heads high.

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It didn't take long for the news to filter down to Inspector Trimp.

"Murder? Who was it, Warner?"

"Local haybag by the name of Tabram, sir, Martha Tabram."

"Who dealt with it?"

"Houghton, sir."

"Fer fuck's sake," sighed Trimp in disgust. "Any arrests?"

"Two men an' a couple of dollymops brought in for questioning found at the scene, released earlier. Lack of evidence."

"Indeed. No doubt Houghton will be watching them like a spider."

"That's right sir, an inacey wincey spider, I reckon."

Trimp chuckled. "What were they like, these men?"

"Beauty and the Beast, sir. From that new music hall on Dorset Street. A little Jewish fella and a big fat bald fucker. A bit of an idiot by all accounts."

"Quite a circus. Fancy a night at the music hall, Warner?"

"Always up for a bit of entertainment, sir."

FOR THE BENEFIT OF MARTHA TABRAM

Stan was quick to make up the posters advertising that night's show as a '*Grand Benefit for Martha Tabram, Sorely Missed. Featuring The Ealing Eunuch and his Harem Houris, The Great Fandini, The Poplar Parrot, and Many, Many More...*'

"Who's the Ealing Eunuch?" asked Jonah, studying the posters.

Stan rolled his eyes. "You, yer great lump."

"But I'm not from Ealing. I don't even know where it is."

"Oh, shut the fuck up."

\*\*\*

Bess gathered the rest of the girls and met Stan and Jonah back in the theatre. The joy and excitement of the first night opening had been cruelly wiped out by Martha's murder. The girls were subdued. They didn't want to work. They wanted to drink and thank God that it wasn't them lying on a cold slab being poked and prodded by detectives and surgeons.

Stan knew he would have to tread carefully, or they could well walk out and leave him without a show. He began by handing out bottles of beer.

"One drink and that's your lot. Afterwards you can bathe in the stuff for all I care, and it'll be on me. But first I want you to give the performance of a lifetime. Fair enough?"

The girls nodded. The beer had won them round.

"Right," said Stan. "We'll 'ave ter be quick. We ain't got time ter piss about. I wanna get this song learned so we can grab a couple o' hours kip before curtain up. It's called '*You can make me go, but you can't make me come.*' It's a bit saucy but the crowd'll love it."

While he was tinkering on the piano, a shadow fell across him. He turned and saw a rough looking muck snipe, in a shabby checked jacket. He reeked of spirits and tobacco.

"Sorry chum. No moochers today. We're rehearsin'."

"I'm Growler Griffin," growled the man. "D'yer need a pianer player?"

Stan thought for a moment. It would free him up if he wasn't tied to the piano all night.

"You any good?"

"I've heard worse."

"You'll play an' do yer own act too?"

"If the price is good."

"I'll give you a downer a night."

"An' booze?"

"After the show."

"During. I can't do it sober. I've tried. I fell flat on me face."

"You twisted my arm. A pint o' yer favourite poison an' not another drop."

Growler pumped Stan's arm. "Yer a gent."

"Hold your horses old chum, let's not get ahead of ourselves here." Stan gestured at the piano. "Let's hear yer."

Growler gave Stan a look before breaking into a wide smile. He gave Bess a little wink and took his seat at the piano. Milking the anticipation he cracked his knuckles, rolled his sleeves up slowly before running up the octaves with a flourish. Having now got the full attention of his small audience he started a song he had picked up from a reformed preacher in Singapore. "*Jes' cos your the daughter of a doughty sergeant major, it don't mean we always have to fight!*" Growler's voice was strong and warm. He definitely had 'something'. The girls were all laughing at the lyrics and Jonah was clapping along like a toddler listening to a nursery rhyme.

Stan clapped him on the back. "Welcome aboard Growler. Here, run through this. I'm off ter me pit, fer some kip."

He handed Growler the night's music, and headed off to the office to enjoy the calm before the storm.

"Come on babies! I wanna see yer bloomers when yer dance," cried Growler, hammering the piano. "Humpty Dumpty, shift yer arse. Get in time, blast yer eyes."

\*\*\*

The gaff was packed with locals and newshacks for Martha Tabram's benefit. This time when Leather Apron, tried to get in, Stan was on hand to turn him away. Normally he would think twice about taking on the local maniac, but with big Jonah at his side he felt a renewed confidence in his abilities.

"Sorry, John. It's a private function."

"Private my fucking arse!"

"Cuss all you like, brother. You ain't welcome here."

"Fucking goy!" Leather Apron spat on the ground in front of Stan. A big gooey mess of green veined with red, like hell's own molten marble.

"Very nice," sighed Stan. "Fuck off, John, or Jonah's gonna start flexing his muscles."

Leather Apron stalked away, pushing back through the crowd.

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When everyone was seated, Stan took to the stage.

"Lay-deeeez, Lords, Duchesses, assembled esteemed personages, we bid you welcome on this sorrowful occasion when we are all gathered together to remember and mourn our dear friend, Martha."

"Ballocks!" came a cry from the back.

Stan peered through his glasses. It was Ned Sherkin, the nobbler Jonah had flattened the other night. Stan ignored him.

"Now Martha wouldn't want us to get all maudlin," he continued. "She'd want us to have a good old laugh, and that's what we're going to do. Tonight instead of mourning a death we will be celebrating the wonder of life."

"That's rich!" hooted Ned. "We heard you an' the fatty did her down good. How d'yer get off? You an' the pigs in the same club then?"

Growler Griffin stood up from behind the piano, took a swig of grog and climbed up on top of it. He swayed, dangerously, as if he were in a high wind, and glared down at the loafer.

"You wanna shut yer fuckin' mouth. Spreadin' all them flams."

"And what better intrerduction do we need ter the charmer of Bow, the dandy of the East End, the Marquis of Merriment, I give you the one, the only the incandescently iridescent Growler Griffin!" roared Stan, stepping off the stage with a sigh of relief.

Accompanying himself on spoons, Growler launched straight into an up-tempo chaunt entitled 'I drink to forget the thing I forgot.'

Ned Sherkin, sensing the comic's popularity with the audience, kept quiet, occupying himself with flimping the pockets of the unwary, and passing his ill-gotten gains on to his accomplices to share out after the show.

"He's good, ain't he?" Stan whispered to Jonah from the wings as they watched Growler spin a comic tale about the night he'd spent in a Chinese water-front opium den and come out the proprietor of his own Chinese laundry.

"I don't really get it," said Jonah. "Why's he telling everyone this? Don't most people keep quiet about stuff like that?"

"He's a bloody comedian," sighed Stan. "He's jus' tellin' a funny story. Don't take it so serious."

"Oh. So it's not true then?"

"I doubt it, Jonah. Does he look like he owns a bloody laundry? He ain't had a wash in weeks."

"Oh. Okay then. I get it now."

Stan could tell he didn't, but he let it drop. A lewd sense of humour was obviously not one of the eunuch's talents.

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The rest of the night went off without a hitch. Nobody was bottled from the stage. The Great Fandini hypnotised Little Bess and made her believe she was a nun, the Poplar Parrot wowed the crowd with her little girl lost ditty about searching for a man big enough to fill her daddy's great big trousers. Finally it was time for the Ealing Eunuch. That was when the storm broke.

*"You can ask me to go but you can't make me come,"* sang Jonah, as the girls fluttered around him like wanton butterflies.

"Fuckin' murderer!" roared Ned, pushing his way to the front.

Jonah stopped mid-flow, and his lip began to quiver, not sure how to deal with the situation.

"He can't gerrit up so he kills 'em!" roared Ned, obviously very drunk and looking for revenge for the other night

"I never!" quailed Jonah.

Ned flung half a brick at the eunuch's turbanned head. It struck him just above the eye.

He stood, blinking, startled, as the blood gushed, then he tottered and collapsed, breaking the sultan's throne behind him.

Growler slammed the lid down on the piano, stood up and smashed his bottle of gin against a nearby table, drenching the occupants.

"Sorry, Duchess," he said, with an amiable wink. Then, grasping the jagged bottle in his hand he leaped up on the stage. "I wanna clear fings up once an fer all," he bellowed. "This man," he pointed towards the unconscious giant. "Struggled in vain to save the life o' Martha. Givin' her the kiss o' life. It din't work. The animal what did it had done her good. Now who the killer is I 'ain't got the foggiest, but one fing I do know is this man is a hero. Not a fuckin' killer. Pardon my French. Now if anyone else has got anyfink ter say, he can have a chat wiv my pal here." He gestured to the broken bottle. "He's got a sharp tongue an' he don't like people talkin' gammon." Growler had thrown his speech out to the auditorium but his eyes were focused on Ned Sherkin. Challenging. "Now. Is there a doctor in the house?"

A chubby bespectacled gent with a chest full of military medals rose and addressed the room in a loud Yankee drawl.

"Doctor Francis Tumblety at your service, sir. Your hand please."

Growler reached down and grasped a clammy paw. He pulled the newcomer onto the stage.

"You Irish?" he asked.

"Close enough, sir. Irish American and proud of it."

"Patch him up an' we won't hold it against yer," said Growler, watching Ned Sherkin and his boys pushing their way towards the exit. Growler knew what he had to do. It was the only solution.

"Ladies an' gents, if you'll excuse me, all this excitement's gone ter me bladder. Back in a tick."

He left the stage, as Doctor Tumblety began massaging Jonah's chest.

"You girl," snapped the American, addressing Bess. "Don't just stand there trying to look attractive. Fetch me towels and water."

Stan stepped onto the stage to address the audience.

"In lieu of these dramatic events, ladies an' gents, I'm going to have to beg your collective pardons and bring the show to a close. However, every cloud has it's own silver lining and you are welcome to tomorrow's event at half price. Just bring your tickets as proof of admission and you'll get a full show for half the going rate. And now may I bid you all a good night and safe home."

The curtains closed and he stood watching the doctor, whose hands were moving all over Jonah's body.

"Interesting," he mused. "It seems he really is a eunuch. What a shame."

"Yeh well, his rockies aren't the problem right now," said Stan. "How's about patchin' up that head wound, doc?"

"Of course," said the doctor. "This is thirsty work. Any chance of a brandy?"

"Fine. Here, Faye, be an angel, get the sawbones a bottle of our finest cognac, will you?"

"Yes, Mister Garrideb, sir."

She returned in an instant. The doctor snatched the bottle from her hands, pulled out the stopper and chugged it back. Then he began bathing the wound on Jonah's head.

"Is he gonna be all right?" asked Faye.

"If you stop all your female chatter and let me do my job, I'll be able to let you know," snapped the doctor.

"Keep yer wig on, doc," said Stan. "She's concerned, that's all."

Tumblety looked up at Stan. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Of course. My apologies. He will be fine." He pinched Jonah's cheeks.

Jonah groaned. His eyelids flickered open.

"What'd yer do that for?" he asked.

"What did I tell you?" He looked up at Stan "Tous les puits qui se termine bien "

"If yer say so, doc," said Stan. "Sterling work, thank you very much"

"My pleasure. I do my best."

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Growler Griffin had exited via the stage door and raced around the corner into Dorset Street. It was pissing down again. Growler cursed. He hated the rain. He wasn't used to it. He saw Ned Sherkin and his Punishers huddled in a doorway, examining the collection of wallets and handkerchiefs they had snatched during the evening's entertainment. Ned was guzzling beer and laughing.

"Did yer see that fat cunt? Fell like a fuckin' tree he did."

Growler reached inside his pocket and unclasped the razor. He stepped up behind the bully and with a single fluid arc of his wrist sliced his windpipe. He stepped away to avoid the torrent of blood that spewed out drenching his crew who stood in shock.

"Let's see how you fall, eh?"

He gave Ned a shove in the back, and he toppled, face down on the cobbles.

"Now then, lads, good evening!"

Ned's crew stared at Growler as though in a trance, their mouths gaping open.

"Catching flies?" said Growler, getting straight to business. "Now listen up. I'll keep this very simple. You boys work fer me now. I want a quarter of all you earn. Understood?"

The men glanced at each other, then at the body of their captain and nodded. They were no strangers to violent death, but they had never seen anyone taken out with such ruthless and merciless expertise. It demanded respect.

"Good. I'll have me first payment now. Hand it over lads."

They handed him Ned's share. He stuffed it in the pockets of his jacket. "Much obliged." Growler looked at the tallest of the men, a lurker with a lazy eye and a brass hoop in his left ear. "You, what's yer name?"

"Kenny. Kenny Boyle."

"Right Kenny Boyle. You're my Cap'n. Got that? You bring me my take each night. Meet me back stage tomorrer, after the show. Got that?"

"Got it."

"Good lad. Now clear up this mess before someone steps in it." He spat on the body, and headed back to the theatre.

He headed straight to the privy and stared at himself in the mirror. His hands were shaking. A drink would sort that out. It wasn't the first time he had killed. This one had been easy. Ned Sherkin wouldn't be missed. He was a louse, picking on the gelding like that, he had been asking for it. He had probably saved the hangman a job. He grinned at his reflection in the mirror and noticed a piece of meat stuck between his front teeth.

"Fuck," he thought. "I went on stage with that in my gob. I bet I looked a right fuckin' scrub." He removed it with a blackened thumbnail and flicked it at the mirror.

\*\*\*

Growler came out of the privy and found Stan at the bar with Doctor Tumblety.

"Growler, good show tonight," said Stan. "Have a drink?"

"Don't mind if I do. Where's that tasty little Irish lass?"

"Bess?" said Stan, trying to keep his voice neutral. "You keen on her? She's with Faye, putting Jonah to bed. The other's have all gone home. Didn't fancy moppin' up the mess."

"Could I ask you a favour, dear boy?" asked the doctor, staring at Growler, a smile on his wet lips.

"Askin' dunt cost nothin'. Go ahead."

"Could you escort me to my lodgings? Tonight's excitement has rather unnerved me."

Tumblety's hand squeezed Growler's arm.

Growler looked at the doctor's hand and moved away. "I'll walk yer ter yer door. But you keep yer hands ter yerself. Understood?"

"Why yes. Of course. I hope you don't think..." blustered the American, his cheeks glistening with sweat.

"I don't bother much about thinkin'," said Growler. "It gives me a headache. I prefer instincts."

"Well, yes. Quite. Shall we go?"

"In a minute." He drained the bottle. "Same time termorrer, boss?"

Stan nodded. "Yes."

"An' the big lad's fine?"

"He'll live," said Stan.

"If he don't, I'll know who to blame." He grinned at Tumblety, who swallowed and smiled.

"English humour. I love it."

Bess emerged from Stan's office.

"Hey, Irish, fancy a stroll with me an' the doc?"

Stan saw the look in her eye. It made him want to cry. "Say no, just say no," he prayed in silence. She said yes.

Stan looked away. He wondered why it was that intelligent women always made stupid choices? Stan wasn't vain, but he knew he wasn't ugly. Surely he was a better catch than Growler fucking Griffin? He told himself to let it go. Now wasn't the time or the place to reveal his feelings.

Stan was not the only one against the idea of Bess accompanying Growler and the American on their late night ramble.

"You should stay inside, Ma'am," said the Doctor. "You could catch a chill. Your presence is not necessary. Really."

"Oh yes it is," said Growler. "I want some company on the way back. I get scared of the dark."

"But Bess, I need you to help me clear up," said Stan, stepping between her and Growler.

"It's okay. Faye'll help you. Won't you Faye?" said Bess.

"Course I will," said Faye, joining them at the bar. "Jonah's fast asleep. Bless 'im."

"Sorted," laughed Growler. "See yer, boss. Don't work too 'ard."

Stan sighed as Bess, Growler and Tumblety left.

Faye bit her lip. Why was Stan so interested in Bess? She could tell he was upset. She wished a man would feel that way about her. She put her arm around him and smiled.

"Come on Stan. Let's clear this mess up shall we?"

"Might as well." He didn't care about cleaning. He didn't care about the Palace at all.

"Do you think Bess will be safe?"

"She's with two strong fellers," said Faye. "Well, maybe one and a half. She'll be fine."

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Yet more thunder, brewing up in the sullen night sky.

"Another storm on its way," said Doctor Tumblety. "We are blessed indeed."

"How d'yer work that out?" said Little Bess, as they walked along.

Here it came, slow at first, like the drip, drip, drip of a tap.

"All this electricity in the air," said the doctor. "The rain will wash us all clean."

"If I want a bath, I'll have a bath. An' I'll take me clothes off first," said Growler.

"Be my guest," said Tumblety.

Bess giggled. "Go on Growler. Get yer toggs off."

"You first, dumplin'," said Growler giving her a peck on the cheek.

"Control yourselves," said the doctor, walking on ahead of them.

Bess rolled her eyes and Growler smiled. He had the measure of the doctor. He'd met plenty like him before. Perhaps there could be some money to be made here.

"So, Doc," he said. "You're from America then. What brings you here?"

"A sabbatical dear boy."

"Eh?"

"A vacation."

"Eh?"

"I think you call it a holiday. A break from affairs of state."

"Affairs of what?" asked Bess.

The doctor glared at her. "State. Government."

"Thought you were a doctor not a bleedin' politician," said Growler, being a liar himself, he was naturally suspicious of others.

"Ah yes. Very astute. I am. Doctor to my country's leading luminaries."

"Don't he talk funny?" giggled Bess.

"He can't help it," said Growler. "That's Americans for yer."

"Quite," said the Doctor. "I'm personal physician to Grover Cleveland."

"Who?" asked Bess.

"He's the President," said Growler.

"Of what?"

"Of America, fer fuck's sake."

"I attended your Charles Dickens when he was Stateside too."

"He's dead," said Bess.

"He didn't die on my watch," smirked the doctor. "Now, I'm looking after your boys. I'm treating Sir Robert the Marquis of Salisbury."

"Blimey," said Growler. "You can't be short of a few bob then."

"Sorry?"

"You must have plenty of chink? Cash? Money?"

"Oh. Mmm. I get by."

"Good fer you."

"You want some company tonight?" asked Bess. She knew her days on the game were supposed to be over, but she had a nose for money and a wealthy patron was just what she needed. It could propel her to the top a lot quicker than working for Stan Garrideb.

"No. Thank you." He shuddered.

They walked on in silence. Growler thinking to himself that a fool and his cash were soon parted. It just remained to be seen how big a fool this Doctor Tumblety really was.

They came to a seedy establishment in Batty Street.

"Well thank you, folks," said the doctor, flipping them a farthing. "I appreciate it."

"This your crib then?" said Bess, unimpressed. It was nicer than her own lodgings, but not the kind of place you associated with friends of the Prime Minister.

"Yes," said the doctor. "Yes it is. It's not much but I'm a simple man. With simple needs."

Growler looked at the doctor's military jacket and chest full of medals. "Mmm. I can see that."

"A man like me has many enemies. Enemies of the United States. Enemies of the British Empire. It is best that I stay in the last place those enemies would expect to find me."

"Oh. Right. Yeh. Good one."

"Err... Mister Griffin, may I have a word with you in confidence?"

"Fire away."

Tumblety stared pointedly at Bess.

"Give us a moment, Irish?" said Growler.

Bess nodded and walked away a little, straining hard to hear. The rain was falling in earnest now, and lightning scoured the hot black sky. She stepped into a doorway.

"Well?" asked Growler.

"If you would like to step inside, we could continue this edifying conversation," said Tumblety. "Alone. Have a drink. Maybe a few laughs?"

The thought of a drink was tempting. But the time wasn't right. He had to get this right. He had a plan. A real winner. "Not tonight, doc. I can't leave the girly. Not with what happened ter Martha last night. It wouldn't be right."

"No. No. Of course not," said the doctor.

"Some other time, perhaps?"

"I shall hold you to that. Well, goodnight, Mister Griffin. Goodnight, Miss."

"Night, love. You sleep well now."

Growler slipped an arm around Bess's waist and squeezed. "Come on Duchess, let's go somewhere an' get out o' these wet clothes, eh?"

"You're a one, you are," laughed Bess. "I could go for a man like you."

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Faye and Stan were exhausted. The show, the violence, the lack of sleep and now the cleaning. It was too much. The theatre, now illuminated by just candles threw eerie shadows that danced and lurked, teasing and taunting as though watching in the darkness waiting for an opportunity to pounce.

"Why don't you hire cleaners?" said Faye, mopping the blood from the stage. Her voice, hardly above a whisper echoed atmospherically.

"Overheads," said Stan.

"Is that why we are trying to clean in the dark?"

"It's dangerous to keep everything lit Faye. Anyway it doesn't look so bad in the gloom." Stan stood upright, leaning on his brush he let out a huge yawn. The sound echoed through the whole of the building. Like a church.

"What's the point in making money if yer too knackered to enjoy spending it?" Faye asked, pushing back a stray lock of red hair from her eyes. She caught his yawn and followed suit.

Stan smiled. He thought for a while as he continued to sweep up the broken glass. "Who would I spend it with?"

Faye said nothing.

"You haven't said nothin' to Bess about what I said. Have you?"

"These lips are sealed, love,"

"What do you think she's doing now?"

"Well whatever it is I bet it ends in I-N-G." She saw Stan wince as though pained. "Why do you want to know?"

"I Just do."

"Why torture yourself?"

He shrugged. "I can't get her out of my head."

Faye couldn't hold back any longer. "But you're old enough to be her dad!"

"Eh? Blimey Faye, how old do you think I am?"

"Forty...Fifty?"

"Near enough," sighed Stan, "I'm forty five. That's hardly ancient, is it?"

"Not to me love. I like a man with a bit of experience. Especially a man like you, Stan. But you know, some girls..." She let the sentence trail off, before adding, "Anyway, what's she got that I haven't?"

Stan looked at her. Was she making a play for him, or just practicing the tricks of her trade? She was nice. Especially in this light. With a bit of food and nice clothes she could even be beautiful. But she wasn't Bess. "Little feet," he said at length.

"Fuck off! My feet aren't big, yer cheeky bugger." She poked him with the mop handle.

He grabbed hold of it and the two of them struggled with it until his feet skidded out from under him and they both landed in a puddle of soapy water on the stage.

"You want to watch that mouth of yours, young lady," he said, turning her over on his lap. "I might have to punish you."

"Ooh. Go on sir. I'm a naughty girl, I am. Punish me."

"I..." He was aware of a stirring in his groin. He wanted her, but he knew it wasn't right. He didn't love her. He would be no better than the men who used her and Bess every night. "But what do you think Bess would..."

"Shut your gob... sir," she said, sitting up and kissing him, hard. "Do you like that?"

"I...yeh. Thank you." He kissed her again.

"Ooowwoooowooooo!" A banshee wail filled the theatre.

Stan and Faye pulled away from each other. Their eyes peering through the gloom as the candle guttered out.

"Oooooowooooo!"

"It's Martha's ghost!" whispered Faye, trembling against him.

"Ballocks!" snapped Stan, "Don't be ridiculous." He wished he felt as confident as he sounded.

"Oooooowooooooo!" came the wail again.

A shadow loomed from the wings.

"It's her killer. He's come to get us," whispered Faye.

"Stop it Faye!"

"Daddy," came a cry from the darkness. "Where are you? I'm lost."

Stan looked at Faye. She began to giggle.

"Jonah, you great lump! What are you doin' out of bed?" Faye's shoulders were shaking with relieved laughter.

Stan lit another candle. Jonah was standing at the edge of the stage, still in his blood spattered Arabic pantaloons. He had pulled the bandage off his head and his forehead was now a livid purple with a weeping wound.

"Stan? Is that you?"

"No it's Sweeney fuckin' Todd. Course it fuckin' is."

"Oh. Am I in the theatre?"

"Yeh."

"I thought I was dead."

"You will be if yer pull another stunt like that. Frightenin' the life out of poor Faye here."

"Hey, you were scared too," said Faye, poking him in the ribs.

"I was not."

"Was."

"Can I have a drink?" asked Jonah.

Stan sighed and stood up. "Sure. Why not. What's yer poison?"

"I don't want poison."

"I know you don't. It's an expression."

"It's not a very nice one."

Stan laughed. "Well excuse me. Brandy'll probably do you good."

"Can I have cocoa?"

"No you can't. I ain't gorrany. Brandy or water. Take yer pick."

"Brandy then. Just a small one."

"That's all yer gettin'."

He took three glasses and poured for all of them.

"Now. Drink up an' get back to bed."

"Yes, boss. Thanks for lookin' after me. You're a real toff."

"Yeh. Yeh. Yeh."

There was a pounding on the door.

"For fuck's sake," sighed Stan. "I'll get it."

It was Growler Griffin. Soaked to the skin.

"Fuckin' rain," he said shaking himself like a dog as he entered. "How do, boss?"

"Fine. Where's Bess?"

"Gone home."

"Did you see her to the door?"

"Oh yes. No need to worry about Little Bess, chum. I tucked her up good an' proper."

Growler peered over his shoulder and saw Faye and Jonah drinking. "Looks like I'm just in time. What're we celebratin'?"

"Fuck knows," sighed Stan. "They said it might not rain tomorrow. Will that do?"

"That's good enough for me, boss." Growler helped himself to the bottle.

"So, what are you doin' here, Growler?" asked Stan. "Apart from drinkin' me dry?"

"I've gorran idea for a spot for tomorrer night. You got a p'licemen costume?"

"I might have."

"Can I borrow it?"

Stan sighed. "If you must. It'll be hangin' up backstage. There's a rack of costumes in my office. There's a helmet too. It's in the cupboard above me desk."

"You're a scholar, sir."

Growler went into the office taking the bottle with him.

"Jonah," said Stan. "Go keep an eye on him an' then get to bed."

"Will do, boss."

When they were alone, Faye turned to Stan.

"Now where were we?" she asked.

"Do you think he really did take Bess home?" asked Stan.

Faye reeled as if she had been struck. "Fuck off. I'm goin' home."

"But..."

Growler came out of the office, the policeman's uniform over one arm, the helmet on his head.

"I'll walk yer home if yer like, chicken?"

"That'd be nice," said Faye. "At least someone knows how to treat a gal."

"I'll come too," said Stan.

"So you can check on Bess?" said Faye. "You don't care about me."

"I... course I do. It's just..."

Growler looked at the two of them and grinned. "Don't you worry, boss. She's overtired.

Dollies get like that when they're tired. Just like little kids. Cranky."

"And you can go frig yourself too," she snapped, turning on her heel and struggling with the door. At last she got it open and raced out into the storm.

"I better get after her," said Growler. "You stay here, boss. Keep an eye on Jonah. I reckon he's feelin' a little vulnerable. He's just like a little baby, ain't he?"

Stan nodded. "Yeh. Look tell Faye I'm sorry will yer?"

"You leave it to me. Night-night boss."

"Night-night, Growler."

Stan sat alone in the candle-light on the stage of the theatre listening to the creaks and groans of the old building. The sound of the rain outside made him shiver. He loved that feeling. Listening to rain in a dry place. Lovely. Bess. Why could he not just tell her how he felt? Was he scared that she would tell him that he was too old for her? Did age really matter? Lots of rich, 'senior' gentlemen had little dollies on their arm. Faye had spelled it out pretty clearly a few moments ago. She had sworn that she hadn't talked about him with Bess, but he didn't believe it. Women talked about everything. He knew that they were given to discussing the most inane rubbish at great length so affairs of the heart would be irresistible. Maybe that was it; he wasn't rich or powerful enough. He snorted. What about Growler Griffin? He was no younger than Stan. Older probably. Hardly a shining success story. Stan knew when a woman liked him. He knew Bess barely noticed he was there. She was happy to be his friend but as far as anything else goes, he just didn't ring her bells. Yet he rang Faye's. She'd have him in the blink of an eye. But he didn't want Faye. Not really. There was another reason he couldn't tell Bess of course. The same reason that he would never trust himself with a woman. He shuddered at the memory and struggled to dismiss it from his thoughts. That was a long time ago. He wasn't that man anymore. He had changed.

## THE COLD LIGHT OF DAY

"Morning, sir."

"Morning, Sergeant."

"Don't you ever go home, Inspector?"

"Course I do Freddie, it's just that Mrs Trimp is getting heavy with child and welcomes a bit of calm and serenity. Doesn't want me getting under her feet." Trimp was tempted to confide in his trusty right hand man. He was longing to shout out the truth. "I can't fucking stand it Warner. All she does is nag, nag nag! Like she's the only woman on earth who's ever been pregnant! We've got a live-in nurse who waits on her hand and foot, for God's sake!" He kept quiet, knowing deep down it was his fault. He loved Clara but he had not adjusted well to being the father of small children. He put it down to being an orphan. One of life's survivors. He was jealous and angry. Clara worshipped her little boys, fussing over them like some demented mother hen. They burst into tears the moment they fell over, running to Mummy who would hug them to her breast, bathe their wounds and give them little loving kisses. When they were sick she would sit with them through the night, soothing their brows with cold presses, whispering softly to them. Worst of all was when nurse put food in front of them that they didn't like. They sometimes had the affront to refuse to eat it. Trimp had to stop himself from flying across the table and ramming it down their ungrateful little throats. He knew his thoughts were unfair. His children would never know what it meant to go without. He would make sure of that. He sometimes wondered if he were doing them a disservice. In his former life, if you got sick you either got better or died. There was no one else to care for you. It had been a rough life. Horrible. Yet it had made him strong. Maybe strength wasn't so wonderful really. His boys would grow up without fear. They would receive an education. They would be treated as gentlemen. He knew in his heart that if

they were ever really threatened he would be just as protective as their mother. Perhaps more so. Yet, sometimes, family life overwhelmed him. He preferred to keep his distance. Clara knew this. She may not like it, but she accepted it.

"Did you enjoy the show, sir?" asked Warner.

Trimp nodded. "Hard to tell what was more entertaining. The show on stage or the skirmishes in the audience. I thought we'd dealt with Ned Sherkin?"

"So did I. He's a slippery so and so. He got off."

Trimp sighed. It was no surprise. Sherkin had been arrested for beating up prostitutes. It was even rumoured that he had been involved in the Lizzie Smith murder. Trimp thought it highly likely that he had been. The problem in cases like that lay in getting reliable witnesses to come forward. Nobody would speak out in a court of law against the likes of Ned Sherkin. The consequences could be fatal.

"So you don't think Sherkin had anything to do with this recent one, this erm..."

"Tabram. Martha Tabram. No, sir. I don't. Lizzie Smith was done in by a gang. Beaten and stabbed. We're still waiting for Doctor Killeen to confirm it but this one seems like a different matter altogether. Nasty, sir. Very nasty."

Trimp agreed. "Quite. So the feller in the top hat and the fatty, they were the ones Sergeant Houghton was so interested in, eh?"

"That's them all right."

"And those girlies were quite pretty for these parts wouldn't you say so, Warner?"

"I would sir, yes." Warner suppressed a smile. He knew Trimp had an eye for a pretty girl.

"Look, Doctor Killeen should be coming over at some point this morning. Give us a shout when he pitches up would you?"

"Will do," said Warner, taking that as his cue to depart.

Trimp put his feet up on the desk and reached for the tweezers in his jacket pocket. He thought about the comedian. Terrence "Growler" Griffin. He never forgot a face and he had been shocked to see him there in the Palace that night. Could it really be him? He knew it was highly unlikely. Growler had been dealt with a long time ago. There was no way he could be here. Yet Inspector Trimp was never one for discounting the impossible. He had watched with interest when Griffin stood up to Ned Sherkin and his crew and he had seen him make his excuses and depart after the gang left the Palace. He felt as if he were on the edge of a precipice. Something strange was brewing here. He plucked the hair from his nostril but the sneeze would not come. He sighed with disappointment and tried for another.

\*\*\*

Growler Griffin never suffered hangovers. He liked to think of himself as a sponge. He could soak up as much liquor as you cared to provide him and so long as he could wring out his bladder now and again, he was happy. Today, he was up bright and early. He peered out the window at the cloudy sky. At least it wasn't raining. Stan had been right. He headed out into the street, searching for the crew he had inherited from Ned Sherkin. He found them in a chop house in Limehouse.

"Mornin', Cap'n," said Kenny Boyle, the thug with the lazy eye, raising a glass of ale.

"I've got a job fer you, Kenny," said Growler.

The others looked up with interest.

"Just Kenny," said Growler. "Sorry lads. It's a delicate matter. See yer later."

He led Kenny out of the chop house and into an alleyway.

Kenny looked about him. He didn't like following Growler into quiet places like this, not after what had happened to Ned Sherkin.

"Relax Kenny. I ain't gonna kill you. You an' me is gonna be best mates," said Growler.

He handed him a large paper parcel and the policeman's helmet.

"What's this all about?" asked Kenny. "You din't kill no bluebottle did yer?"

"I ain't killed nobody," said Growler. "Well, no one you don't already know about. Now, you like dressin' up don't you?"

Kenny was wearing little more than rags. "Ain't got nuffin ter dress up in, Cap'n."

"You have now. This p'liceman's togs. Should fit splendid."

"Why'd I wanna dress up as a crusher?"

"Coz I say so. It's a sound plan, and the easiest finny you'll ever earn."

"A finny? Fuck me. What've I gorra do?"

"Listen up an' I'll tell yer."

\*\*\*

Stan had spent the entire night in the Palace of Wonder, he had tried to go home but as soon as he had opened the doors, Jonah had started wailing again, begging not to be left alone. Rather than bring the concussed giant home with him he had set up a camp bed in the office alongside Jonah.

He awoke in a sweat with the first light of dawn. Horrible dreams. First he had found his father, dead in a bath of blood, then his father had turned into Bess, dead as poor Martha Tabram and not in much better shape.

He sat up, wide awake. His father had set great store by dreams. The night before his death he had told his son that he had dreamed he would never see the sun again. He was on his last turn of the merry-go-round. He had been right. He had always been right.

"That fuckin' Growler. He was supposed to look after her," he cursed, frantically searching for his clothes.

"Where you goin'?" asked Jonah, sitting up, staring at him through swollen eyes. His bald head grotesque with its recent wounds.

"To check on Bess. Stay here."

Jonah saw the light coming through the window and lay back. "Okay. Don't be long."

"I won't, Mum."

Jonah giggled. "You're always joking."

"I should've been a comic."

"Mmm. You're funnier than Growler."

"Who isn't?"

"Me. I'm not funny at all."

"It was a rhetorical question, Jonah."

"A what?"

"It's a question you ask when yer don't expect an answer."

"Oh. Why ask it then?"

"Because... I don't know."

Stan hurried along to George Yard. It wasn't raining but the street was still wet. His shoes were leaking and his socks sodden. If all was well with Bess he would treat himself and give his feet a soak later that morning. He raced up the stairs, jumping over the stain on the landing. He pounded on the door. After a while, Faye opened the door. She still had her makeup on and her face was all blotchy. It looked as if she had been crying.

"What do you want?" she asked, her face hard.

"I... I just wanted to check you were all right."

"Ballocks. You want to see Bess."

"No I don't. I was worried about you, Faye."

"Really?" she looked hopeful, touched. "Do you wanna come in?"

"Yes."

Inside, she kissed him. He responded. When they pulled away, he peered over her shoulder. "Everything all right?"

"It is now."

"Good."

They went into the parlour. He glanced at the door to Bess's bedroom. It was closed.

"We can do it here if you like?" said Faye, pointing to the rug in front of the tiny fireplace.

"I'd sooner wait."

"For what?" That hard look was coming back.

"Well. You know. Take our time. I like you, Faye."

"Do yer?"

"Mmm. Have yer seen Bess by the way?"

She threw the kettle at him.

It missed him but hot water splattered out splashing his hand, scalding it.

"Ow!" he cried. "Fuck yer do that for?"

"Get out!" she screamed, flying at him, claws ready to rip and tear.

"What did I do?"

"Get out of here you fuckin' bastard!"

Bess's bedroom door opened. Little Bess stood there in her shawl, bleary-eyed.

"What's goin' on?"

"You're all right?" said Stan, backing away towards the door.

"I was til you cunts woke me up."

"Growler saw you home, then."

Her face lit up. "Yeh. He's a real card that one. A diamond."

"Yeh," agreed Stan, wishing Growler dead and buried.

A shoe hit him on the side of the head.

"I'll see yer later, ladies."

"Go frig a monkey!"

"Faye, calm yerself down," said Bess going to her.

"An' you can fuck off an' all!"

Stan ran.

\*\*\*

Trimp admired Doctor Killeen, he dealt with the dead all day but always managed to maintain an extremely cheery disposition. As he followed Warner into Trimp's office, the Inspector was pleased to observe that today was no different.

"Samuel, how are you?"

"Never better, Doctor, thank you. Listen thanks for coming by, we could easily have come over to you."

"Think nothing of it. Does me good to get out of the 'office' as it were, every now and again. So, you got the sniff of something interesting?"

"I was hoping you could tell me, Doctor."

"Well, I've looked at the Tabram woman, God bless her, and I think that whoever killed her certainly knew his bulbs from his onions. Rough but efficient. Very efficient."

"Right."

"On saying that, it seems that some of the slashes on her stomach were frenzied and what I would call agricultural. Ergo the person slit her throat, knowing exactly what he

was doing, but then attacked her stomach and nether-regions in what I can only describe as a cack-handed manner."

"Or there were two killers?"

"Possibly, Samuel. I would hate to say yes for sure, but I wouldn't rule it out either. As for your other enquiry..."

"Yes?"

"Surprisingly there are two correct answers; Uteri and Uteruses..."

\*\*\*

Growler Griffin and Kenny Boyle watched from a discreet distance as the maid left the premises and scuttled off down the street clutching her shopping basket. It was a little after ten in the morning.

"Right, Kenny, give it half an hour, no longer. You sure you know what you are doing?"

"Aye aye, Cap'n. Don't worry about me."

"Right then , here goes."

Growler sauntered down the road hoping his confident stride masked his anxiety. He wrapped on the door and took a step back. After what seemed an age he heard shuffling footsteps approach the door,

"Who is it," came Tumblety's voice from the other side.

"Growler Griffin. You know, from the Palace of Wonder?"

"Oh. Oh wonderful, indeed. Just give me a few moments."

Tumblety rushed back to his room trying to contain his rising excitement and sexual anticipation. He combed his hair and slipped into the velvet smoking jacket, an extravagance he had treated himself to in Paris, on his first trip to Europe. He popped a mint into his mouth and helped himself to a generous spray of scent.

Checking his reflection in the mirror on the dresser he hurried back to the front door to receive his guest. He was surprised that Growler was here, he hadn't thought of him as 'one of the club'. "What can I do for you, Mister Griffin?" he asked on opening the door, "Our patient hasn't taken a turn for the worse, I trust?"

"No, sir. Not at all. It's a social visit. I thought you an' me might... be friends?"

It wasn't often Griffin felt nervous but he was now. It all lay in the timing. If he played his cards right he could be rich. Play them wrong and... well, the worse thing that could happen would be a blow to his pride. Not that he had a problem with homosexuality. He had spent over half his life as a guest of Her Majesty and had learned to take his pleasures whenever they were offered. This was different though. Given the choice, he would sooner be ploughing Little Bess's fertile fields rather than the flabby buttocks of this middle-aged American. He wasn't sure how to proceed.

Tumblety was an expert in such encounters. They had hardly entered the room before he made his first move, caressing Growler's shaven head and kissing him softly on the lips. Growler tried not to gag. The Doctor's breath was foul.

"You like that?" said the Doctor.

"Yeh. It's great."

"Little Tumblety wants some attention. Will you wake him up?"

Growler looked down at the semi-erect penis poking through Tumblety's breeches. He shuddered. It was one thing letting the doctor pull him off. It was another having to suck the fat bloater's squib.

He did as he was asked.

"Ah! Heaven," sighed the doctor. "You wonderful man you."

"Hurry up, Kenny!" Growler thought, desperately. "If he spends in my gob I'll fuckin' kill him."

"That's enough," gasped Tumblety. "He's awake now. Take off your clothes my boy. Lie on the bed. I'm going to give you a good seeing to."

"Err... I thought you'd prefer me to do it to you?"

"Nope. It's your sweet ass I want and I want it now."

No-one had ever called Growler's arse sweet. He disrobed and lay on the bed.

Tumblety removed his trousers quickly and knelt beside him. "On your knees, my fine man."

"Blimey. You don't waste any time do yer?" said Growler, playing for time. "Don't yer wanna drink or somefink?"

"No. I want to feast on your plump cheeks."

"Well, I want doesn't get. You'll have ter ask nicely."

Tumblety blinked in surprise. "Please?"

"That's better."

"Now let me in!" He turned Growler round, with surprising strength.

"Yaaaarghhh!" squeaked Growler.

In answer to his unspoken prayer the door smashed open and there stood Kenny Boyle, in his policeman's dunnage, lazy eye goggling at the sight on the bed.

"What've we got here then?" said Boyle.

"It's not what you think, Constable," said Tumblety covering himself with the sheet.

Growler jumped from the bed and began dressing as quickly as he could.

"It's a bleedin' disgrace is what it is, sir," said Boyle. "Gross indecency. I'm gonna have ter ask you genullmen ter accompany me ter the station."

"Ain't there somefink we can do?" said Growler. "We're all men o' the world, after all."

"Depends what you mean, sir," said Boyle.

"Well, I imagine you've got a family? A nice little wifey? A nipper or two? What if the good doctor was ter give you a little present for 'em?"

"Well..."

"I have five pounds with your name on, my good man," said Tumblety. "It is in my bag. Allow me to fetch it."

"As you wish, sir?" said Boyle, tipping Growler a wink with his lazy eye. Then all of a sudden both eyes widened in pain and surprise. He gasped and choked as blood surged up into his mouth from the punctured lung.

Tumblety stabbed him in the back again and again and again until he tottered and collapsed onto the bed.

"Fuckin' 'ell!" gasped Growler stepping back in horror. Tumblety was the last man he would have pegged as a killer.

"The man was nothing but a common blackmailer," said the doctor.

He went back to his bag and removed a surgical saw.

"Whatcher gonna do wiv that?"

"We have to dispose of the body. I've just killed an officer of the law. That's a serious offence in this part of the world, I understand?"

"Err... yeh."

"Well then, unless you want to dance from the scaffold you'll look sharp and give me a hand."

"Do I have to?"

"Unless you want me to tell the authorities you killed him, yes."

"Fuck."

They dragged Kenny Boyle over to the bathroom and put him in the tub. Growler's mind was racing. This was not part of the plan. The situation had descended from a nice

little blackmail racket into the macabre. Working quickly they stripped the body. Tumblety was an expert. He could have been a butcher. He chopped and sawed. Soon, they were up to their arms in blood and offal, and poor Kenny Boyle was in several small bags and packages.

"Take them and dump them in the Thames in different places," said Tumblety. "I'll see about cleaning this place up, oh, and take the uniform as well, I don't want anything incriminating lying about the place ."

"But...There's too many bits. I can't carry them all! "

"Fine," snapped Tumblety exasperated. "Put him in that." He pointed to a large travelling trunk in the corner of the bedroom. "Before you go, perhaps we could finish what we started?"

Growler had met his share of cool customers in his time but never one as cool as this. He was shocked and revolted. "No. No. Better get rid of him first."

Tumblety nodded. "You're right. The maid should be back soon. Here, let me help you." Together they filled the trunk with the dismembered remains of Kenny Boyle. Tumblety watched as Growler manhandled it down the stairs and into the street, sweating and straining under its weight.

"That trunk was a present from General Grant. I sure would hate to lose it. You'll be sure to bring it straight back?"

"Yeh. Course." Growler promised.

It took him ten minutes to reach the corner of Batty Street. He was exhausted and desperate for a drink. "It'll take me all bloody day to shift this fuckin' thing," he grumbled to himself. He spotted a grocer's boy wheeling his barrow down the street. "You on your rounds?" he asked.

"That's right," said the boy.

"How'd yer like to earn a flatch?"

The boy was interested.

"Let me plonk this on yer barrer til we get to the river."

"I ain't goin' to the river."

Growler bit his lip. Charm was required, not violence. "I'll give you a downer." He took sixpence out of his pocket and held it out to the boy who made a grab for it. "Ah-ah-ah.

You gets paid after we gets there. Fair enough?"

The boy nodded. "Go on then."

"Give us a hand. Earn yer pay."

Together they hefted the trunk onto the cart, making sure not to squash the vegetables and groceries.

"Phwoah! You ain't murdered yer wife an' dumped her in there have yer?" asked the boy with a wink.

"Just what I need, another bleedin' comedian," laughed Growler. "You ain't got nothin' ter drink, 'ave yer?"

"Nah."

They made their way down to the river, making several stops on the way to deliver the groceries. Upon their arrival, Growler handed the boy the promised sixpence and dragged the trunk down to the river's edge.

He sat on it and smoked, waiting until nobody was around to see him.

"What'll I do about the doctor?" he thought to himself. "Kill him?" It would be difficult. Tumblety was tougher than he looked. "Stay clear of the bastard?" That sounded like a surer plan. Much safer. What a sick bastard! Did the fucker really think that he was going to bring his bloody trunk back an' finish off lickin' his cock? Not a bloody chance.

He stood up and pushed the trunk slowly into the water, wading into its brown, murky depths. When the water was up to his chest, he pushed the trunk as close to the middle as he could muster. He was delighted to watch it float off to the centre of the river before it began to sink. He waited until it had vanished from view. A couple of bubbles floated up in its wake. Then all was still.

"Sorry Kenny," he murmured, softly. "We should've been spendin' our wages now."

He trudged away, wet and stinking up the bank of the river. "That fucker. That fuckin' dirty fucker."

## THREATS AND MENACE

It was the morning after Kenny Boyle's murder and Stan Garrideb was exhausted. Rehearsing his acts by day and cleaning up the theatre by night was beginning to get to him. Maybe Faye was right. What was the point in amassing money if you made yourself too ill to enjoy it? He needed a cleaner. He headed down to the Bells pub and found a group of ageing dollymops enjoying a healthy breakfast of gin.

"Anyone fancy a job?" he asked.

The women looked at each other and giggled. They were drunk.

"You want all of us?" said one. "You sure yer can manage it? Little chap like you?"

Stan sighed. "Look I might be short but not where it counts, dear. Anyway it ain't that kind o' job."

"What is it then?"

"Cleanin'." He was beginning to think he was on a hiding to nothing. These bawds couldn't even keep themselves clean, let alone his Palace of Wonder.

"What sort o' cleanin'?" asked one.

"Cleanin me theatre. After the show. It's a duce a week an' yer get ter see the show fer nothin'."

"I'll do it. I like a bit o' theatre me," said one. "Is it Shakespeare?"

"Nah. Music Hall."

"Thank fuck fer that. I never know what they're on about in Shakespeare. I had a feller once took me ter see one o' his shows. Pile o' pooh if yer ask me, love."

"Yeh well, there's none o' that at the Palace," Stan promised.

"Ave yer got yer own mops an' shit? If you ain't that'll cost extra."

"I've got mops comin' out me arse," Stan assured her.

"Aright darlin'. Consider me hired."

"Will do. Report tonight. Palace o' Wonder, Dorset Street. Miss?"

"Nichols. Polly Nichols."

"Great." He tossed a coin to them. "Here 'ave a drink on me. But sober up fer tonight. There's a good girl."

He went home to change, wondering why men would pay good money to go with the likes of women like that. He could understand the appeal of Bess or Faye, although the idea of men buying their services repulsed him, but those women in the pub? What was the attraction? He wondered if the men mistreated them? Or if they were kind and tender. Maybe they were just plain desperate. Desperation did strange things to men. He knew that only too well.

At home, he lay on his bed and closed his eyes. Last night had been strange. He had been worried that Faye wouldn't turn up. She had though. In a foul mood. Giving him the cold shoulder whenever he tried to talk to her. Then there was Growler. His policeman song had gone down well, but his behaviour off-stage was worrying. He had obviously been drinking throughout the day and instead of trying to pull the girls he had remained at his piano all evening barely speaking unless spoken to and even then only in grunts and growls. Maybe it was stage jitters, but he doubted it. For some reason he had kept looking over his shoulder and staring into the crowd.

He told himself not to worry. Growler was obviously one of those temperamental artistic types. That was all. The Palace was going to be a great success. The show had gone well. People loved his acts, especially Jonah. They couldn't get enough of the singing eunuch.

There was a knock on the door. He ignored it. The knocking continued. He rose from the bed and looked out of the window. A carriage had pulled up beside his house. One of those dapper black things that the toffs like to use.

He went downstairs and opened the door. A rough looking young Jew was standing there. Stan had seen him hanging around with some of the girls in the show. The young blood turned back to the carriage.

"Boss!"

A curtain was pulled aside in the carriage and a young man with curly black hair and a trimmed pirate's beard stared out at him. The rough young man opened the door for him and stood aside as his master descended.

"Mister Garrideb?" asked the young man, his voice soft and slightly accented.

"That's him alright," muttered, the tough.

"Allow me to introduce myself," said the young man, smiling and offering a gloved hand. "My name is Ezekiel. Aaron Ezekiel. Perhaps you have heard of me?"

"No. Sorry," said Stan.

"A shame. They tell me I am a pillar of the local community. Is that not so, David?"

The tough nodded. "That's right, sir."

"May we step inside? I have a little business proposition for you."

Stan shrugged. All he wanted was his bed.

They went into the parlour.

"I'm afraid I can't offer you any refreshments," said Stan. He had no maid and no time to order provisions.

"No matter," sighed Mister Ezekiel, unscrewing the top off a silver flask and sipping from it. "Care for a drop?"

"No thanks."

"I'll 'ave a nip," said David the thug.

"You'll buy your own," said Ezekiel, reclining on the chaise as if he owned the place.

"My family are behind various little ventures here in Whitechapel and Limehouse."

Stan waited for him to continue, Ezekiel waited for him to express interest. They waited.

At length Stan broke the silence. "Such as?"

"Yiddish Theatre and Music Hall. Giving back to the community. We are the competition."

"Not really," said Stan. "We're just a Music Hall. Not Yiddish."

"You're a Jew aren't you?"

"So?"

"So support your community. We offer security. Remember the Hebrew Dramatic Club in Princes Street? We gave them insurance. Security."

"It closed down."

"They got behind with their payments."

David cracked his knuckles in Stan's ear.

"Oh."

"We can make sure nothing nasty happens in your establishment."

"I've already got protection. You've seen Jonah? He keeps an eye on all that sort of stuff for me."

"Ah yes," smiled his visitor. "But who keeps an eye on him? What if something were to happen to your little songbird? Tut tut tut. I hate to think. Now look, Mister Garrideb. You think things over, eh? In the meantime, how about lending Jonah to us for a night? I want him at the Yiddish Music Hall we're opening in Bow. I want him to sing a little Yiddish ditty I've written."

"He don't speak Yiddish. He ain't Jewish."

"That can't be helped. He can read though. He can learn."

"Yeh but."

"Good. That's that then. David will pick him up on Thursday. It's just a loan. One night only. For now. It'll do the boy good. Oh and another thing. You really need to appeal to your own people. I have a musician. A klezmer. Very edifying. He will be on your bill tonight. Pay him well. He's worth it."

"But."

"No buts. And think about the security arrangements. Here is my card." He handed Stan an embossed card with Ezekiel Enterprises and an address in Thomas Street. "Good day Mister Garrideb. It has been a pleasure. I look forward to our next meeting. Come along David."

David popped his knuckles again and scowled at Stan before following his employer out into the street.

"Bloody chancer," said Stan once they were safely out of earshot. He went back to his room and lay down again. He couldn't sleep now. That man was trouble. Could Jonah handle it? Maybe, with a little help from Growler. He closed his eyes. Jonah and Griffin were more than a match for that rich swell with his snotty hired bugaboe.

\*\*\*

Growler Griffin was drinking even more than ever. He was in a funk. If he ran into the crew he would have some awkward questions to answer about Kenny's disappearance. What if they blamed him? The disappearance of a respected gang member could lead to mutiny. And what about Doctor Tumblety? He had seriously under-estimated him. He was handy with a knife and if his stories were to be believed, he was well in with the government of both England and the United States. Growler was in over his head.

He spent the night with Little Bess, but sex was out of the question. His normally enthusiastic member felt pickled. Bess didn't seem to mind. In a way she was touched.

"Normally that's all fellers are interested in. It's nice to be with a feller who just wants to be with me an' not hump me."

"Yeh," agreed Growler. "I really like you Bess. I just wanna get to know you better."

In the morning, his desire for drink got the better of him. He left Bess sleeping and ran straight into the Demanders, loitering at the street corner.

"Aright, boss," said Tiny Pete, a dwarf with a mouth full of gold teeth. "Seen Kenny?"

"Yeh," said Growler, thinking on his feet. "His Mam's sick in Glasgow. He's gone off ter look after her."

"He ain't got no Mam," scowled Blue Skin, a tall barrel-chested gypsy whose permanent dark stubbled face had earned him his nick-name. "What's goin' on?"

Growler shrugged. "Fuck knows. That's what he told me. That thing about his Mam. If he's lyin', he'll answer to me for it. You got anything for me?"

They handed over a collection of pocket watches and handkerchiefs.

"Nice. Any cash?"

"Nah," said Tiny Pete.

"Tchh. Look lads, I'm busy right now. Meet me at the theatre tonight. Should be good pickin's there."

The men left, Blue Skin glaring at him.

Growler shuddered. He was going to have to do something about Blue Skin. He didn't want to kill him. You couldn't have a gang consisting of just one dwarf. People would start to laugh. But he had to do something. He'd give it some thought. As he turned into

Whitechapel High Street, a man stepped out of a chop house. He recognised the military jacket and chest full of medals immediately.

"Mister Griffin," called Doctor Tumblety. "A word please."

"What is it?"

"You never came back."

"I was detained. Business."

"No matter." The doctor smiled. "I've been watching you. You're a disappointment Mister Griffin."

"Eh? How d'yer mean?"

"Consorting with filth like that woman from the theatre. She'll be the death of you."

"Ballocks."

"Disease. That's all she will give you. Come with me to my rooms. I have something to show you."

"No thanks. I'm busy."

Growler felt the sharp end of a knife dig into his ribs.

"Oh but I insist."

"In that case we better get a move on."

Growler felt a cold trickle of sweat run down his spine. Usually it was him doing the threatening and making the demands. He decided to wait and do as the man asked. The doctor hailed a cab, all the while keeping the knife in place in the small of Growler's back.

"Don't worry my boy, this is all for your own good. We won't be long. I promise."

They didn't speak during the cab ride to Aldgate, but Tumblety placed his hand on Growler's thigh. Growler moved away but the doctor moved again and repeated the

action. The presence of the knife persuaded Growler to allow the hand to remain in place. He could feel the doctor's sweat seeping through his breeches to the skin.

When they arrived at Tumblety's lodgings they bustled past the maid and into the rooms. The bedroom was spotless, not a drop of blood or piece of gristle to bear witness to the recent violence.

"You must be a dab hand wiv a mop an' duster, doc," said Growler as Tumblety locked the door.

"Cleanliness is next to Godliness, my friend."

"Right. Gorranyfink ter drink?"

"Later. First we must talk. Then I have something to show you. I think you'll find it most instructive."

They sat down at opposite ends of the bed. With each word spoken, Tumblety edged closer and Growler edged away, until he reached the wall and had nowhere else to go.

"You have been associating with that whore again," said Tumblety, his voice calm but his cheeks glowing red with what may have been shame or anger. "You spent the night with her."

"She's not really a whore, doc. She's a showgirl."

Tumblety's hand slapped the mattress. "All women are whores!"

"I'm not 'avin' that. My ol' Mam was a woman. An' she weren't no whore." If one thing was beyond the pale in Growler's world it was criticizing mothers, any mother was out of bounds and beyond reproach as far as he was concerned.

"Sorry," said Tumblety, shocked by Growler's outburst. "Forgive me. All women except your... our mothers are whores."

"Me Nan weren't no whore neither."

"Semantics, Mister Griffin. Let us say that for the sake of argument most women are whores. Satisfied?"

"Not really. No."

"You will be." He produced a key from his waistcoat pocket and walked over to a large black cabinet against the wall. It was secured by a chain and heavy padlock. He unlocked it and placed the chain on the bed. "Observe."

He opened the cabinet to reveal a series of four shelves, containing large specimen bottles filled with murky liquid.

"Look at this one," he said, pointing to a bottle on the top shelf.

Growler rose and approached the bottle. It was filled with a brownish liquid. A shapeless lump of matter was inside, preserved for what purpose he could not imagine.

"What is it?"

"A uterus."

"Eh?"

"A uterus. You know what that is?"

"No. It looks horrible."

"Every time you fuck a woman. You're putting your penis close to that. Your precious penis."

"Fuck off!"

"It's true."

"What's that?" Growler pointed at another bottle.

"Fallopian tubes."

"You sick bastard. Where did yer get all this shit?"

"Don't worry. The owners won't be needing them. Not any more."

He put a hand on Growler's shoulder.

"Get off me."

"Have I put you off women?"

Growler said nothing. He backed away from him.

"You've had a nasty shock. Let's go to bed. You can fuck me if you like. Release all that tension. Then I'll do the same to you."

"Get the fuck away from me."

Tumblety showed him the knife. "That's no way to talk. I'm trying to help you."

Growler made a lunge for the chain on the bed and swung it at the doctor's head. The knife fell from his hand as he clutched his bleeding forehead. One of the lenses in his spectacles had cracked.

"You maniac. You could have blinded me."

Growler swung the chain again. Tumblety cried out and fell to the floor, arms covering his head. Growler raised the chain, meaning to finish him off for good. He stopped himself. The maid had seen him enter. If the murder attracted the notice of Tumblety's powerful friends that would be the end for him. He walked to the door.

"You just stay away from me, you fuckin' freak. If I see you again, you'll regret it. Understood?"

Tumblety moaned. "You are going to hell, Griffin. And I'll be there waiting for you."

## STORM CLOUDS BREWING AT THE PALACE

Stan was in his office when he heard the row at the front. He glanced at the clock. It was too early for the audience. What was going on? Ever since his encounter with Aaron Ezekiel and his hired gorilla he had been feeling unsettled. As far as he knew he didn't suffer from indigestion or stomach ulcers, but his belly had been in knots all day. He knew he was probably over-reacting. Jonah and Growler would frighten anybody off. He heard more shouting. Foreign voices. Yiddish. He shuddered. Maybe Ezekiel had sent his men around to persuade him to cooperate. He thought about hiding in his office. Leave it to Jonah. He shook his head. The Palace was his baby. Everything he had was invested in this building. Nobody was going to take it from him. He picked up the letter opener from his desk. It could make a handy weapon if the worst came to the worst. He hurried out to the entrance, doing his best to appear calm and unruffled.

Jonah was holding Leather Apron by the neck, shaking him like a wild dog shakes its prey.

"I told yer, you're barred! We don't want you here!" Jonah shouted, his face red with rage. "But you keep on comin' back. Do you think I like bullyin' people? I don't. It stinks. So don't make me do it! Do me a favour and stay away."

Leather Apron tried to speak but Jonah's meaty hand was crushing his larynx.

"Drop him, Jo," said Stan, noticing the battered violin case in Leather Apron's hand.

Jonah did as he was asked and dropped him in the dirt.

"What's all this about?" asked Stan, staring at the bootmaker.

He blurted something out in Yiddish.

"In English please," said Stan.

"You bastard!" snarled Leather Apron. "Was this trick?"

"I don't know what yer on about, you old goat."

"You invite me play here in your filthy theatre. Then you have me beaten. Like dog."

He spat. "Like dog I say." He spat again.

"I never invited you. Why would I?"

"Mister Ezekiel. He say me you want very much I play this night."

"Oh. Fuck." So this was the klezmer? Fucking great. Life was just full of shitty surprises. "You play that thing?"

"No. I fuck it. Course I fucking play it. I play it like fucking wizard."

Stan sighed. He wanted to send him away but he knew it would be unwise to antagonize Mister Aaron Ezekiel too much. "Come in. It was a misunderstanding. Say sorry, Jonah."

"For what?" asked Jonah, perplexed.

"For strangling the artiste."

"Oh. Sorry."

"You fucking will be, you fucking goy."

"What's a goy?" Jonah's eyes flashed with anger.

"Never mind, Jonah," said Stan.

"It's not a nice thing is it?"

"Not particularly. No."

"Well just you watch your mouth then." He shook his fist at Leather Apron. Leather Apron ignored him and went inside.

"Do you want to rehearse?" Stan asked, trying to be friendly.

"No. I wait. Soak up atmosphere."

"Please yerself."

\*\*\*

The house was full. The night was another big success. Growler at the last minute had brought in a new opening act, The Goblin King and The Dwarf. It consisted of a dwarf with stage beard and leather jerkin and a blue-faced villain with flashing eyes and gypsy earrings. Blue Skin would hurl the dwarf around the stage and swing him by the heels over the audience much to their delight. Then the dwarf would chase him around the stage with his axe. It went down a storm and Stan was quick to congratulate the comic for bringing the act to his attention.

"Always a pleasure to find int'restin' new acts," said Growler, looking nervously into the audience. In truth he had his own reasons for involving his crew in the production side of the Palace, the main being to protect him if Doctor Tumblety dared show his face again. He wasn't afraid of facing him in one to one combat, he knew he was stronger. But he had seen him kill with stunning efficiency and he didn't want to be caught unawares.

"Keep an eye on me all the time. If you see any toff with medals coming up behind me, take him out," Growler had instructed Blue Skin and Tiny Pete.

It was a brilliant arrangement. Now Growler could keep an eye on his men and they could keep an eye on him. As an added bonus, they were now earning legal chink, rather than robbing the Palace's patrons. Growler was pleased. He liked Stan Garrideb and he liked the Palace. Robbing the audience was too much like shitting in your own bed for his liking.

\*\*\*

While Growler performed his new comic song, "Give me a Coconut an' I'll give you my heart," three newcomers entered the theatre and made their way to the bar. They were obviously gentlemen, slumming it. The locals glanced at them. Some with mild curiosity, others with anger. The three men glanced around, excited to be in these

strange surroundings. One of them, a big burly toff dressed in the finest silk with piercing blue eyes and floppy hair, ordered brandy for himself and his companions, an elderly gentleman with a barrel chest, and a slightly built young man dressed in an opera cape with a black silk mask hiding his face from view. They stood by the bar, drinking and watching the performance. The masked man, had to raise the veil from his lips in order to drink. Anyone watching closely would see that he drank much and often. As the song came to an end he clapped his hands furiously. His companions did likewise, although the older man with less enthusiasm.

\*\*\*

"And now, my esteemed lords, ladies and gentlemen," Stan announced from the stage. "The Palace of Wonder is delighted to bring to you for your delectation, the mysteries of the East, John Pizer, a friend of us all, performing a mazurka of his own creation. Put your hands together please!"

"Pssst!" came an angry whistle from the wings.

Stan turned to see Leather Apron glaring at him from the shadows.

"What?" he whispered.

"Not yet. I no go on yet. *Leh tezayen kivsa!*"

"Eh?"

"*Ma nisrat lech bamoch?* I headliner. I star. Top of bill. Put other shit on now? Not me. Put on the *zonas*. Mister Ezekiel he promise me top bill."

Stan turned back to the audience. "Whoops! Bit of a mix-up here. All adding to the experience of the Palace of Wonder. You will have to wait a little longer before we treat your palate to the delightful Mister Pizer. For now though, raise a glass and raise the roof for every one's favourite capón and the Palace of Wonder temptresses!"

Tonight, Jonah and Little Bess were performing a duet. A tragic love song about a couple separated when the man has his genitals removed by the Amazons, who were of course played by the other girls. The song was a huge success.

"I fuckin' love you Jonah," a woman's drunken yell came from the crowd. Stan looked out. It was Polly Nichols, the new cleaner, pickled in drink. Stan sighed. He had an idea she was going to be a huge disappointment.

As the song came to an end, the elderly friend of the masked man made his way to the piano to speak with Growler.

"My friend."

"Yeh?"

"My colleagues are most taken with the little lady who sang with the fat man. Could you perhaps introduce us? My companion is a man of considerable means. He will make it worth your while. And hers."

"Yeh. Okay," said Growler, looking at the old man's friends. "What's with the mask? Is he ugly?"

"No. Not at all. He simply prefers discretion."

"Oh."

Growler's eyes widened in horror as Blue Skin threw himself from the stage on top of the old gentleman, sending his hat flying into the crowd. Tiny Pete was hot on his heels, wielding his stage axe like a maniac.

"It's all right, boss. We got the fucker!" he yelled with glee.

"Gerroff him, you dozy cunt!" yelled Growler, pulling Blue Skin away from the old gentleman.

"But you said..."

Growler punched him on the nose. "I said a feller wiv medals. I din't tell yer ter assault anyone what speaks wiv me. Did I?"

"Sorry, Boss."

"Ain't me yer should be sayin' sorry to."

"Sorry, guv."

The old gentleman was holding a handkerchief to his ear, which was dripping blood onto his linen shirt. The ear had a nasty bite in it.

"For fuck's sake. Were yer tryin' to eat him?"

Blue Skin shrugged. "I've said I'm sorry. Don't fuckin' rub it in."

"Look, I'm really sorry. About the girl."

"Get out of my way." The old man pushed him back and staggered away to his friends who were laughing hysterically. By the time Stan had finished introducing John Pizer for the second time, they had left the building.

"And now here he is! The Lion of Judah! The Crown Prince of Cobblers! Mister Pizer, known to friends and family alike as Leather Apron."

"Stupid fucking made up names," scowled Leather Apron, taking centre-stage with his battered violin.

A high, strident, ear-rupturing screech filled the air, as Leather Apron's bow scraped across the strings. He began to sing and dance to what he fondly imagined was a melody, but had more resemblance to the sound of a lamb being ritually slaughtered with tools left out in the rain since Moses led his people out of bondage.

"What a fuckin' wanker!" roared Polly Nichols from the back.

Leather Apron stopped playing and glared at her through the darkness. "I see you. *Ya zevel!* You fuckin' die! Whore! *Zona! Sharlila!* Bitch! Fucker! I no play no more."

He stormed from the stage to the hoots and hollers of the crowd.

"Well!" cried Stan taking the stage. "How could anyone follow the sublime Leather Apron? We'd like to thank you for your custom and bid you all a veeeeery good night!"

He stormed backstage and found Leather Apron shaking with rage.

"For fuck's sake! You don't let 'em get to yer. Anyway. Here's sixpence. It's yer fee. Don't spend it all at once."

"Fuck that!" spat Pizer. "I prostitute my art for sixpence? No. Double. Mister Ezekiel promise me double."

"Then get him to pay you."

Stan turned away.

"I make you sorry. You will rue the day our paths crossed."

"You got that right! Now fuck off."

"L..."

"Jonah! See our friend out would you?"

"Yes boss."

Jonah hauled Leather Apron by the neck, out through the departing crowd and into the street.

He didn't see the carriage parked in the shadows. Nor did he see Doctor Tumblety watching the theatre from the shadows of a doorway on the other side of the street.

## DELICATE PROPOSITIONS

Stan didn't hear from Leather Apron or Mister Ezekiel. He was relieved. He had been asking around about Aaron Ezekiel. On the face of it he was a respectable businessman and property owner, but anyone he questioned refused to say much more. In fact the shopkeepers he asked paled at the name and would say little except that Ezekiel was 'firm yet fair' so long as they kept their payments up to date. He had asked what they were paying for exactly.

"Health and peace," said Perlmann the grocer. "Be wise. Pay him what he asks. Give him what he asks. Nobody refuses Mister Ezekiel."

Bearing this and several other warnings in mind, he made arrangements for Jonah to go to Ezekiel's new Yiddish theatre in Bow.

Jonah wasn't happy.

"They want me to sing in Yiddish? Is it a proper language?"

"Yes."

"But will anyone understand it?"

"Don't matter. You could sing in Chinese an' people would listen."

"I don't like it."

"Me neither but Aaron Ezekiel's a powerful man. Best give him what he wants."

"You're the boss."

\*\*\*

Word must have got round that the eunuch wasn't playing that night. The Palace was almost empty.

Stan waited in the wings, watching Polly Nichols drinking herself into a stupor at the bar, flirting with some poor old sod who wished he was somewhere else.

"I'm gonna have ter do something about her," he promised himself. As he was about to step on stage, a shadow fell across him. He turned. Aaron Ezekiel and his bodyguard David were at his side.

"Good evening, Mister Garrideb," said Ezekiel, smiling.

"What you doin' here? I thought you'd be with Jonah in Bow."

"My nephew's lookin' after it. Thanks for loaning him by the way. That was wise. I'm going to do you a favour."

"Oh. Really?"

"Yes. I'm not going to let David hurt you tonight."

David looked disappointed.

"Why would he want to hurt me?" asked Stan.

Ezekiel shrugged. "Because you've been a naughty boy."

"Eh?"

"Pizer. Leather Apron. I hear you disrespected him."

"Because he's rubbish."

"His sister is a friend of my uncle."

"That's nice."

"I promised my uncle that I'd make him a star."

"I see."

"I always keep my word Mister Garrideb."

"Of course."

"He'll be back on the bill tomorrow."

"Not top of the bill."

Ezekiel sighed. "Fine. He can open for you. I'm not unreasonable. He just needs nurturing."

"He's a lunatic."

"I know."

"Oh."

"Good. You'll have to pay him extra. You've ruffled his feathers."

"How much extra?"

"Let him decide. Oh that reminds me. I've been thinking about the security side of things here."

"Oh." Stan's spirits plummeted.

"I don't think the normal policy will do you much good. It's a rough area. I'll tell you what, I'm going to make you a very generous offer."

"Thank you."

"We're going to become partners."

"Eh?"

"No one will bother you. All I ask is a sixty forty split in the gross. In my favour. A small price for peace of mind."

"But..."

David brought the toffee hammer down on Stan's little finger. He heard the crack of the bone and cried out.

"Sorry about that," said Ezekiel. "We had to make a point."

Stan blinked back the tears as he clutched his hand to his side. "You said he wouldn't hurt me."

"That wasn't pain, Mister Garrideb," said David. "Not in my book anyway."

"So. It's a deal?" said Ezekiel.

Stan howled as Ezekiel shook his injured hand in a vice-like grip.

"On with the show then."

\*\*\*

After introducing the Mesmeric Mesmero, a hypnotist from Holloway, Stan hurriedly bandaged his hand and thought seriously about packing his bag, collecting the week's takings and disappearing into the night, never to return. He waited in the wings to introduce Faye as the Singing Flower Girl. She looked at his hand. Stan thought he sensed a softening in her hostility towards him.

"Sprain yer wrist with all that frigging, did yer?" she asked.

"I love you too."

"Is everything all right?" she asked. He was right. She was softening.

"Yeh. Look, Faye. I'm sorry. Treatin' you the way I did. I'm an idiot."

"Tell me something I don't know."

He stepped on stage.

"And now, prepare for heaven on earth. The impossibly beautiful, the dazzlingly delightful, the voracious Venus of Whitechapel... it's that flame-haired foxy lady of the night... Faye Kennedy!"

\*\*\*

The crowd loved Faye. Growler noticed the old gentleman, the giant and the masked toff had taken their place at the bar again and were knocking back drinks with Polly the cleaner. He made his way over to them.

"Gents!"

The old man scowled. Growler noticed he had a bandage over his ear.

The huge man with the floppy hair gestured to the barman. "A drink for the comic."

"Your health!" said Growler, knocking back the gin in one gulp.

"You wanted to meet Bess," he said.

The masked man whispered in the old man's uninjured ear. The old man looked up.

"Yes. Is she performing tonight?"

"Oh, yes."

Stan was back on stage.

"And now, that angelic orphan, the sweetheart of the East End, it's Little Bess!"

Bess performed a comic song about an orphan girl who fell in love with the Prince of Wales. The masked man turned his back.

"What's up?" asked Growler.

"Our friend doesn't like the song," said the man with the floppy hair. "Feels it's inappropriate."

"Oh. Well. We put the 'in' in inappropriate, mate. It's what the public want."

"It is not what *I* want!" snapped the masked man. "Introduce me to the girl."

"Rightio." He accepted another glass and poured it down. "Back in a tick."

He found Bess and Faye getting changed and decided to invite the two of them over to meet the gents.

"Come on gals. There's some knobs want ter get acquainted with yer."

"I'm not in the mood," said Bess.

"They're loaded."

Her eyes flashed. "Okay. You up for it, Faye?"

Faye shrugged. "Let's meet 'em. Can't do any harm."

"Ladies," grinned the floppy-haired gent. "Delighted to meet you."

The old man kissed their hands. The masked man gave them a stiff formal bow.

"We're going to a party tonight. It'd be ever so swank if you could join us," said the floppy-haired man. "I'm Jem, and you are the lovely Little Bess."

"You got yer facts straight, darlin'," said Bess.

The men laughed.

"So you will come?"

"Yeh. Sounds a riot. You comin' Faye?"

"Nah. Got a headache."

"Perhaps I could give you something for it?" said the old man. "I am a physician."

"Nah. All I need is some fresh air. If you'll excuse me, boys?"

She made her way into the street. She knew she was being foolish. She could smell money on those men, but she didn't like them. Those days were over for her. There was only one man she wanted. And he wasn't interested. She headed home, unaware of the cold eyes watching her from across the street.

"Whore!" It was Leather Apron. He was drunk. He pounced on her as she rounded the corner.

"Fuck off!" She raised a heel and kicked back, catching the bootmaker on the shin.

He howled and cursed.

She cursed back hitting him full on the nose and he ran away. She smiled to herself.

Nothing like a good scrap to raise a girl's spirits.

\*\*\*

Doctor Tumblety licked his lips as Little Bess stepped out into the street. He gripped his bag and was about to call out to her when a black carriage pulled up beside her. The cabby climbed down and opened the door.

Tumblety's pulse quickened as Growler Griffin came out onto the street with three gentlemen. They were laughing. One of the men handed Growler some money. Growler watched as they climbed into the carriage and drove away. Tumblety wanted to call out to him but his mouth was dry. He watched Growler go back into the theatre.

\*\*\*

Stan was down. He didn't like fighting and yet he could see his hard-earned dreams shattering before his eyes. All his life he had dreamed of being his own boss. Doing what he wanted, delighting others, bringing joy and magic into the world. He looked at his hand. Smashed, mercilessly, just like the walls of Sodom. He was tempted to get drunk and follow his father into the great unknown. He missed his father. He wondered if his friends would miss him after his death. He pictured Bess, heartbroken at his grave, being comforted by Growler Griffin. He shook his head to dispel the vision. He wasn't going to die. Not without a fight. He was going to fight for the Palace and he was going to fight for Bess. He would tell her his feelings and he would make love to her. Then he would find a way to rid himself of Ezekiel once and for all. He left the office and went to the bar. Polly was cleaning up the glasses by drinking the leftovers and wiping the rims on her filthy shawl.

"Where's Little Bess?"

"Fucked if I know, boss."

He thought about sacking her on the spot, but he couldn't face cleaning up tonight. He saw Growler chatting away with Blue Skin and the dwarf.

"Seen Bess?"

"Yes, boss," said Growler. "She just left. Went off with three toffs in a cab."

"Fuck." He ran out to the street.

Blue Skin winked. "He wants ter dab it up with her, does he?"

"Desperate to give her Lady Laycocks a good seein' to," grinned Tiny Pete.

"Somefink like that, I 'spect," nodded Growler.

\*\*\*

Stan ran into the street. Not a carriage to be seen. He smashed his hand against a wall in anger and frustration, yelping as knives of pain shot through his broken finger and up his arm.

"You seem troubled, Mister Garrideb?" came a Yankee drawl from behind him.

He turned to see Doctor Tumblety waddling out of the shadows in his ridiculous army uniform.

"Yeh. It's my hand, doc. It's fucked."

"I can take a look at it if you like. Shall we go inside?"

"If it's not too much trouble?"

"No trouble at all."

"Yer an angel, doc."

"So my mother always assured me."

They went inside. Tumblety flashed Growler a smile as he followed Stan into the office.

"Fuck," murmured Growler.

"What's up, Cap'n?" asked Tiny Pete. "Yer look like yer've seen a ghost."

"Nothin'. Let's go, lads."

They left.

\*\*\*

After Tumblety had splinted Stan's hand and given him a shot to take away the pain, Stan called Polly.

"What d'yer want?" said the cleaner, her eyes red and glassy.

"Bring the doc a drink. There's a good girl."

"Can I have one too?"

"Yeh. You look as if yer could really do with one."

Draining his glass, the doctor replaced his hat and stood unsteadily. "Perhaps I can walk you home, Miss?" he said to Polly.

"Ooh, that's very gen'lmanly of yer."

"It's alright, doc. She's still got work to do," said Stan.

Polly rolled her eyes. "Some other time then?"

"I wait with bated breath, my dear."

\*\*\*

In the carriage, Little Bess found herself jammed between Jem the man with the floppy hair and the elderly barrel-chested doctor. The masked man sat opposite, staring at her.

"Well, this is very cozy, isn't it?" she said with a laugh.

"Mmm," agreed the masked man. "Very. Perhaps the lady would like to remove her clothing?"

"Of course she would, your Highness," said Jem. "She'll feel a lot more comfortable as nature intended."

"I'm a bit chilly actually," said Bess. "He called you Highness. Who are you?"

The masked man's eyes flashed with anger. "He's playing the fool. I'm just a friend. More than a friend, I hope."

She was afraid. She had met some dodgy punters before. But none like these. She could smell violence in the close confines of the cab. She thought about opening the door and jumping out but she was trapped between the two men. There was no escape.

"This seat is a bit bumpy," she said. "How's about I sit in your lap?"

"By all means," said the masked man. "It would give me great pleasure."

"Ooh. You are a big boy," she laughed, feeling him hard and ready underneath her.

"Okay if I take my clothes off, your High... Eddy?" said Jem.

"Of course. You too, William."

The old man began removing his neck-tie. Jem ripped open his shirt to reveal a large muscular chest. He was breathing heavily. They all were.

The masked man's fingers were reaching under her skirts, they were hot and sweaty.

She reached for the door and flung it open. They were racing down Fleet Street. She would be hurt, but something told her the pain of a fall could well be preferable to what lay in store for her if she were to remain in the carriage.

While Jem tried to close the door, she leaped out into space, the masked man's nails ripping into her thighs, tearing her drawers. She sprawled into the street, scraping the flesh from her knees as the carriage came to a halt.

"Stop her!" screamed the masked man.

Jem was struggling with his breeches as she got to her feet and tried to run. She fell. She had twisted her ankle. She got up and hobbled as fast as she could. Jem was out of the carriage and racing towards her, when a policeman rounded the corner. She had never been so pleased to see a bluebottle in her life. Jem stopped in his tracks, and raced back to the carriage.

"Drive on!" he yelled at the cabby.

"What have we got here, then?" said the policeman, reaching for his whistle.

"They..." gasped Bess. "They were goin' to rape me."

"Oh yeh? Do that to a nice girl like you? Terrible."

"I am a nice girl."

"I know what you are."

"I..."

"You better come with me, Miss." He snapped the derbies on her wrists.

"But I haven't done anything."

"Causin' an affray. Solicitin' fer business. Upsettin' respectable gentlemen. You know who that was, don't you?"

"No. He wore a mask."

The policeman grinned. "That's him all right."

"Who?"

"Never you mind. I could let you off with a slapped wrist, if you was to treat me nice."

"I.."

She felt his hand on her buttocks.

"Nice nancies."

"I.. go on then."

She allowed him to lead her into a doorway.

## SWALLOWED PRIDE

Stan went back to his office, he knew that Polly would scarper as soon as his back was turned but tonight he didn't care. He wanted to be on his own. He poured himself a large brandy. Perfect for taking the edge off pain. Taking the edge off life.

He slumped in his chair and took a large gulp. Why was success always followed by disaster? He raised the glass and drank to his father, remembering yet another of his many sayings; "Remember son, all major events will always hit you out of the blue. You cannot plan for the extraordinary."

"Right again, Daddy," he sighed. The last few weeks had been a blur. There were so many questions that remained unanswered. Who was Jonah and where did he come from? Blimey you could say that about all of 'em. Growler, Ezekiel and that perfumed old mandrake, Tumblety. He drank again and realising that the brandy was not about to provide him with any answers, he lay back in his chair and fell into a deep sleep.

At first he thought he was dreaming. Everything was white and clean and extraordinarily comfortable. He was floating on a wave of pure and beautiful sound. Was this heaven? If it was, he could see why people raved about it so much. Eventually, consciousness returned but the sound remained constant, pure and true. He stared around the darkened office. The sound was real. It was coming from the stage. He got to his feet and opened the door, stealthily covering the ground until he made it to the wings so he could ascertain the source of this rapture. It was Jonah singing in Hebrew. He stood transfixed. It was as though God himself had decided to visit the East End and open His lungs. The music was worlds away from the rubbish Jonah sang at the Palace. As he listened in wonder, the tears rolled unchecked down his cheeks. The singing came

to an end and just as Stan was about to compliment his friend, a voice from the darkness spoke up.

"Oh Jonah, That was beautiful...just beautiful."

"Bess," said Jonah, squinting out into the auditorium. "How long have you been here?"

"Oh, Jonah love, I hope you don't mind, I've been sitting here a while. I heard you come in and I didn't wanna say nothin'. I didn't know it was you until you started singing and then...and then..." Little Bess burst into tears. "Oh Jonah, it was so beautiful."

Jonah jumped down into the auditorium to comfort little Bess. He felt guilty, thinking that perhaps he was responsible for the tears. Stan remained where he was, rooted to the spot.

Jonah looked Bess over, touching her bruised cheek softly. "What's happened Bess, you been in the wars?"

"Aww don't worry about me love. Nothing I can't handle. What was that you were singing Jonah? It was beautiful."

"Something they gave me over at Mister Ezekiel's theatre. The boss asked me to go over there and sing."

"Why?"

"I don't know, he wouldn't say why. Trouble is..."

"What?"

"Oh... nothing." Jonah looked awkward and started shuffling his feet, shy and uncomfortable.

"What? Come on, sweetheart you can talk ter me. Yer can tell me anything."

"Well. All I've ever wanted to do was sing and I was so pleased when I met Mister Garrideb and he gave me a job. But...."

"Spit it out love," said Bess.

"Yes, fucking spit it out," thought Stan from the wings.

"Well... he has me singing these music hall ditties. 'Don't put your broolly up in the parlour, vicar dear,' and all that and has me dressed up like an idiot in a baby's bonnet or a genie in a lamp and I feel silly and foolish and it's not what I want to do... and when... and when Mister Ezekiel's nephew gave me that song to sing I felt that's the sort of song I want. That's what I feel like I was born to do." He paused, and then delivered his bombshell. "I don't want to sing here, anymore, Bess. I want to sing for Mister Ezekiel."

"What?" yelled Stan, storming out of the wings and jumping into the auditorium.

"What did you just say?"

"I said I want to..."

"I fucking heard what you said you fucking ball-less cunt!"

"Oh, was that one of those rhetorical questions them?" asked Jonah in all innocence.

"Yes! No! It doesn't fucking matter what it was, Jonah." Stan was beside himself with rage. Just an hour ago he had thought things couldn't possibly get any worse. What a joke! "Do you know what you are? Eh? A fucking traitor. Coming to me, cap in hand, begging, fucking begging for a chance. Well I gave you that chance and this is the thanks I get. I offered you friendship. I believed in you. I trusted you. I loved you like a brother. We were gonna be great. We had a future. We..." He stared bristling with rage into Jonah's sad eyes. He wanted to shout, to scream, to break down and beg him to stay. Instead he turned his back on him. "Just fuck off!"

"But Stan..."

"Fuck off...Now!"

Jonah bit his lip. He was shaking. Struggling to hold back the tears. He took hold of Bess's hand.

"Bye, Bess."

"Bye, Jonah."

"Bye, Boss."

"Never mind that," growled Stan. "Go on, sling yer hook."

They both watched the slow, lumbering frame of Jonah, shuffling slowly away into the darkness. They heard the door open and shut, gently.

After a while Bess broke the silence. "Blimey, Stan, don't you think you were a bit hasty?"

Stan looked at her, his eyes hard and cold. "You can fuck off too. Go on, Get the fuck out of here..."

\*\*\*

Jonah didn't know where he was going. His home was Stan's office but he was no longer welcome. His joy had been wiped out in one fell swoop. He brooded. Normally his anger came and went like the wind. Now it settled in his gut like yesterday's pie.

"Fuck Stan. Fuck him. He treats me like a fucking joke. Fucker. Fucking fucker."

He tripped over a drunk, sprawled in the gutter.

"Sorry mate."

"Fuck off, fatty!" the drunk slurred.

Jonah stopped, turned, walked back and kicked at the drunk. Again and again. The drunk groaned and lay still. He hurried on, weeping tears of rage. While he was immensely strong, Jonah was not as fit as he could be. Carrying all that weight was a strain. He came to a halt beside the river and looked down into the still waters. He heard a cry from the other side, followed by a splash and then silence. He sat on the quayside,

breathing heavily, the sweat drying cold under his arms and in the small of his back, the cold damp stone chilling his buttocks. The clock struck four in the distance. The worst time of the night.

As his body temperature cooled, so did his temper. He replayed the events of his confrontation with Stan. Stan was upset. He felt betrayed. He was afraid of Mister Ezekiel, even though, as far as Jonah was concerned, he seemed a real gent. Stan had been good to him, fed him, given him a place to stay, given him work, allowed him to sing. More important, he had given him friendship and a sense of belonging. A family. Little Bess and Faye, Growler, even Tiny Pete and Blue Skin. All accepting him for who he was. No questions asked. Stan was right to be angry. Jonah had stabbed him in the back. Shafted him good and proper. Friends like Stan didn't come cheap. So what if Ezekiel fed his ego and allowed him to sing real music? He wasn't a friend. What good was success without friendship? He knew he would never have a wife or children. Family life was beyond him. Wasn't it better to act the fool and have friends than be rich and respected? He supposed it was. But would Stan forgive him? Probably. He hadn't known Stan long, but he knew he was a good man. His heart was in the right place. He stood up and stretched.

\*\*\*

He stood outside the door in Thomas Street. It was still early. Too early. Nobody likes being woken up in the evil hours. He sat on a wall. The street was empty. He had a vision of himself as an old man, still sat on this wall, still alone. It persuaded him to do the right thing. The morning light had not yet broken but he went to the door again and knocked, softly at first. He heard a cat or a rat inside, scampering in the passageway. He

knocked again. A little louder. The scampering stopped. He hammered at the door with his fist.

"Mister Ezekiel!" he yelled. "Mister Ezekiel! It's me! Jonah! Are you there?"

A window opened across the street and a red-faced woman poked her head out.

"Piss off!"

"Sorry, Missus," said Jonah. He hammered on the door and whispered hoarsely. "Mister Ezekiel?"

The door opened. It was David, Mister Ezekiel's man. He was unshaven and dressed in a nightshirt.

"What the fuck is it?"

"Sorry. Did I wake you up?"

"Course you fuckin' did. What d'yer want?"

"Mister Ezekiel."

"He's sleepin'."

"No he isn't," came a voice from above. "Nobody is. Not anymore. Who's died?"

"No one, sir," said Jonah. "It's me. Jonah."

"I know who you are." Mister Ezekiel stood on the landing looking down at him. "What do you want?"

"Can we talk?"

"Might as well. David, get us some coffee. Hot and black, just like my women." He looked at the eunuch to see if his weak joke registered at all. Nothing.

Jonah followed Mister Ezekiel into a plush sitting room, its opulence at odds with the squalid street outside. Ezekiel pointed to a seat as he eased himself into a gilt throne. He opened a box on the table and removed a cigar.

"It's early I know... but... care for one?"

"I never developed the taste."

"Good for you. Keep those tonsils pure, my boy. Keep 'em pure."

"Yes sir."

"You thought about my offer? The tour? We're going to leave all this behind. We're going to live like kings. You my boy, the King of Song. You hand in your notice with Garrideb? How'd he take it?"

"Not too good, sir. That's what I'm here to talk about."

David came in with the coffee. He poured the cups and stood behind Jonah, cracking his knuckles.

"Fire away. Don't mind David. He's very discreet. Ain't that right, David?"

"Yeh." *Crack.*

"Well, it's like this..."

"Go on."

"Well..."

"I'm a patient man, Jonah, but this really isn't going anywhere is it?"

"Sorry sir."

"Don't be. Just tell me. Now."

"I can't leave him."

"I beg your pardon?"

*Crack.*

"I said I can't leave him."

"There's no such word as can't."

"Yes there is."

"Is it money? If it is you're being silly."

"It's not money."

"He's not... you know..."

"What?"

"Shoving it to you?"

"No. Course not."

*Crack.*

"What is it then?"

"He's my friend."

"I'm sorry to hear that. I'm accustomed to getting what I want, Jonah. People don't say no to me."

"I'm sorry sir. But I have to."

"No you don't."

"I do sir. With respect sir."

He stood up. David barred his path. Ezekiel made a gesture with his fingers and David stepped aside.

"I would hate for something to happen to you, Jonah. Or to your friend."

"You can't scare me," said Jonah, moving to the door.

"Oh but I can."

"Good day, sir."

It had started to rain again. He hurried back towards Dorset Street.

In the house, Ezekiel flung the coffee pot at the door. He stood, red-faced and breathing heavily.

"Follow him, David. See he gets home safely."

\*\*\*

Jonah's next port of call was The Palace of Wonder and after his little chat with Ezekiel he no longer laboured under a heavy heart, for he knew he had made the right decision.

How had he been so blind? Ezekiel was bad news. Stan could be as angry as he wanted, he didn't care, it was important for him to do the right thing. To fix things up. He didn't really expect the Palace to be open but it was, and he didn't expect Stan to be sweeping the auditorium but he was. He felt Jonah's presence and looked up. His face showed neither surprise, or rage. It was a blank page.

"D'you know, I can't think why I ever put that Polly Nicholls on the pay roll, she's the worst cleaner I've ever seen in my life. I need a cleaner to come in when she's finished."

Jonah smiled.

Stan smiled back.

"I'm sorry, Stan," said Jonah. "I made a mistake, I don't know what I was thinking. I'm sorry."

"Me too. You're free to make your own decisions and I shouldn't have talked to you like that. I..."

"I'm not going to work for Mister Ezekiel," said Jonah cutting him off. "He's not a nice person and he's not my friend...You are."

"Right, and are you going to tell Mister Ezekiel this?"

"I already have."

"Fuck me! How did he take it?"

"Not very well. He made threats, I think."

"Did he scare you?"

"Erm, no. Not really."

"Does anything scare you?"

"No, not really, well actually yes, I don't like the dark very much. Or rats."

"Would that I were you. You look tired, have you slept?"

"No."

"Go make your bed up in my office and get some sleep. I've got a few things to do, I'll see you back here at five."

"What's happening at five?"

"What, tell you now and spoil the surprise?" With a wink, Stan Garrideb turned swiftly on his heels and left the Palace of Wonder.

\*\*\*

Jonah had been man enough to swallow his pride and apologise, now it was Stan's turn. He made his way towards George Yard, ready to mend the bridge he had burned with Bess last night.

Faye opened the door.

"What do you want?"

"To see you, my lovely." Stan wasn't about to let her scowl put him off his stride. He gave her a peck on the cheek.

"Really?"

"Nah. I've come to apologise to Bess. I was bang out of order with her last night."

"I heard all about it. You can be a real shit sometimes, Stan."

"Tell me somethin' I don't know."

They stood looking at each other in the doorway.

"You gonna let me in then?"

She smiled. "Fine. Go on. I think she's awake. You know the way."

He crossed the parlour and opened the door to Little Bess's boudoir. Nothing had prepared him for the sight that met his horrified eyes. A scrawny off-white backside with livid red pimples pumping away on top of his beloved who lay, moaning in ecstasy beneath. She glanced over the shoulder of her lover and waved at Stan. The lover sensing company turned and winked.

"Mornin' boss," said Growler. "Scuze us will yer? Won't be a minute."

Stan backed out and closed the door. He staggered over to a stool and slumped heavily onto it. Faye looked at him. She had thought it would be a fine joke but now, seeing his face, so hurt and bewildered, she felt pity. She lay a hand on his shoulder. He didn't seem to notice.

"I'm sorry, Stan."

"It's okay. She's a grown-up. She can dab it up with who she wants."

"You want a cuppa?"

"Got anythin' stronger?"

"Gin?"

"Why not?"

He grimaced as the fiery liquid burnt his throat. "I've not been fair to you, Faye."

"Tchh. No one ever is."

He had been meaning to leave Bess in charge of the Palace that evening, while he and Jonah cemented their friendship with a night off. Now he changed his plans.

"I want to be fair to you."

"Oh yeah?"

"Mmm. Me an' Jonah are takin' the night off."

"Bess told me you sacked him."

"Yeh well. Things changed. I was hasty. She was right."

"Glad to see you talking sense, boss."

"Yeh. Makes a change. Anyway..."

"What?"

He had become distracted as the sound of Bess wailing rang through the entire

tenement. Then came Growler's animal grunts. Now he could see why they called him Growler.

*"Urghh...urghhh...urghhh...!"*

*"Harder...harder...harder...!"*

"For fuck's sake, can we go somewhere else?" said Stan.

*"Fuck me! Pleeese!"*

*"Graaugh! Graugh! Graugh!"*

"I'm not dressed," said Faye.

It was true. She couldn't go out in her shift. It wouldn't be proper.

"Anyway, Faye, what I'm tryin' to say is..."

*"Ooooooh! Ooooh! Ooooooh!"*

"Yes?"

"Well I wondered if..."

*"Gaaagahhhhshugha!"*

*"Nyeeee! Nyeee! Ooooh!"*

"Go on?"

"Well I wanted you to take over from me for tonight. Look after the place?"

"Me?" Faye was shocked and touched.

*"Beeeeeaaauutiful! Gerrin there!"*

*"Ay-ay-aaah!"*

"Yeh. You." Stan smiled. He wanted to cry, but it was easier to smile.

Faye looked close to tears. "No one's ever trusted me with anything like this before. Are you sure?"

"Course I am." He kissed her on the nose and got up to leave. "You won't let me down."

The bedroom door opened and Growler emerged pulling up his breeches. A red-faced Bess hovered behind him.

"You wanted to see me, boss?" said Growler.

"It doesn't matter," said Stan. "Hi Bess. About last night..."

"Yeh?"

"I was an ass. Sorry. Jonah came back. Will you?"

She stepped forward and threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. She smelled of sex.

"You wonderful man, you," Bess kissed him again.

"Right. Me an' Jonah's takin' the night off. Faye's in charge tonight."

"Faye?" said Growler, his eyes wide. "What about me?"

"Faye's got a good head for business," said Stan. "Any problems take it up with her. See you tomorrow."

## PUTTING ON THE STYLE

Just like a hefty bowel movement, dealing with tricky chores and coming away with them resolved always made Stan feel happy and satisfied. Well, to be fair, he could have done without an eyeful of Growler's pimply arse pumping in and out of the girl of his dreams, but the situation called for a philosophical outlook, they were all friends again and that was the important thing. As he strode back to the Palace with a bundle he had collected from the Chinese Laundry, he speculated that maybe if Growler Griffin were to drop his breeches and show his arse to Mister Ezekiel, it could well frighten him off for good. If only things were that simple.

\*\*\*

As the clock struck five he entered his office to find Jonah sleeping like a baby, a contented smile on his face. He gently shook him awake.

"Let's go Jonah, you've got five minutes. Here's a chaunt of togs. Stick 'em on." He withdrew and awaited the transformation.

Five minutes later Jonah emerged dressed like a toff. Stan had worried that he might look comical and people would laugh and point but his fears were unfounded. Jonah looked a real swell. Dressed for the opera in dress shirt and tie, black tail coat, trousers and top hat. He was charismatic, aristocratic even.

"Damn," thought Stan, cursing his lack of insight. "Why did I have him dressed as genies and babies and humiliate him? He'd've gone down a storm togged out like this."

"Do I look all right?"

"All right? Talk about comin' the Rothschild! You look every inch the star you are. I reckon I could pass you off as a Russian Prince."

Jonah's huge chest swelled with pride. "Where are we going?"

"All will be revealed. Come along. Our carriage awaits."

\*\*\*

Jonah barely said a word all evening and Stan, was wondering if he had made a huge mistake, and blown a small fortune in the process. In the carriage returning home he could take the silence no longer.

"Well? What did yer think?"

Jonah had been staring out the window, although they had traveled no more than five miles it was another world to him. His cheeks were wet with tears. His eyes shining.

"It was the best night of my life, Stan."

Stan was happy as he reflected on the evening's outing. The Opera House had been showing *La Traviata*. It had been a favourite of his father's. Now he could see why. It was money well spent. Seeing Jonah's animated face, he wanted to do it all over again.

"Oh Stan, the whole thing was magic, the costumes, the staging, the singing. The audience! All those fancy ladies in their bonnets and the gents, they looked like kings. My head's spinning. It really is. I'll never forget it."

Stan bit his lower lip to stop himself from laughing. Jonah sounded like an over-excited dolly. He decided to take the serious line.

"Jonah, I took you there for a reason. You're well capable of doing all that. You're better than any of those singers."

"No. Stan. I'm not."

"Shh. Let me finish. From now on there will be no more silly ditties for you. We're going to find you the best songs from the best operas. You have carte blanche to sing whatever you want."

"What's carte blanche?"

"It's... it's... never mind. That's not important. You made me realize that the Palace would be nothin' without you. From now on, you're my headline act. I don't give a fuck

what Mister Ezekiel says about putting that twat and his fiddle on. You are number one, my friend. You are the future. I'm going to make you the biggest star the world has ever seen and I won't rest until it's happened. You've got my word on that. Well? You up for it? It's gonna be tough. Think you can handle it?"

"Yes," said Jonah in that simple way of his that made everything seem so straight forward. "Yes Stan, I can..."

\*\*\*

As they pulled up outside the Palace of Wonder, Stan was surprised to hear the scratchy sound of a violin coming from inside and the raucous sound of drunken laughter. He glanced at his pocket watch.

"I'd've thought they'd've shut up and gone home," he said to himself. "Must've been a good night." He paid off the cab and they went inside.

The Palace was heaving. Standing room only. He had never seen it so packed, nor the patrons so drunk. Leather Apron was scratching out an air on his fiddle and awful as it was, the audience were lapping it up, cheering and pelting him with coins. People were staring at Jonah in his finery.

"You go an' get changed," said Stan. "There's a good lad."

"Thanks, Stan."

Stan pushed his way through the crowds to Faye, her face as red as her hair as she presided over the bustling bar.

"Well done, Faye," grinned Stan. "You pulled it off without me."

"As the actress said to the bishop," she replied, with a laugh. "Thanks, boss. Couldn't've done it without Growler. Or Mister Ezekiel. You just missed him."

"Eh?"

"He was here for a while. Keepin' an eye on his investment, he says."

"The cheeky fucker."

"Boss, the acts still need paying."

"Pay 'em out of the till," said Stan. "We must be minted."

Faye bit her lip. "The till's empty boss."

"Eh? How d'yer work that out?"

A wiry little Russian elbowed Stan out the way. "More drink," he ordered, proffering his empty glass.

"Sorry, we're all out," said Faye.

"Faye," said Stan, a sense of doom threatening to spoil his good mood. "What do you mean the till's empty?"

She couldn't meet his eyes. "It was Mister Ezekiel's idea. He said it would be fine with you."

"What would?" He didn't want to hear.

"He said the important thing was to spread the word. Create an atmosphere. Free drinks.

All round. He was right. We've been worked off our feet all night."

"Course you fucking have. The fucker. He wants to ruin us."

He barged his way up onto the stage, pushing Leather Apron to one side.

"Ladeees and Gentlemen! We thank you for your custom! But that's all for tonight! We will see you again soon for another evening of rapture and delight at the Paaaaalace of Wonder!"

The audience groaned, but when it became apparent that the bar had run dry, they soon began making their way out. He noticed that strange masked man and his friends, staggering drunkenly through the crowds. Everyone was drunk. On his money. Someone tugged his elbow. It was John Pizer, Leather Apron.

"My fee," he demanded, his grimy hand outstretched.

"Fuck off!" Stan shoved him.

"Mister Ezekiel will be most unhappy."

"Good. He can join the fuckin' club. Now get out!"

## IN THE WEE SMALL HOURS

With the last of the mob dispersed, Stan surveyed the scene. It seemed a good time had indeed been had by all. He called for his inner circle; Faye, Growler, a sheepish looking Bess (even looking sheepish, Stan couldn't help but long for her), and Jonah, emerging from the back with a serene, smile upon his lips. Stan looked around. There was someone missing.

"No Polly?"

"No, boss," said Growler. "The free booze did for her four hours ago. She stood at the bar and pissed her drawers. I thought for the good of the clientele it'd be best if she made her way home."

"Thanks Growler. Considerate as ever. Mind you, in this place the clientele are gonna be more upset if they don't see someone piss 'emselves in the course of an evening." He turned to Faye. "Is there seriously no booze?"

"Course there's some fucking booze, boss," said Faye. "You don't think I'd give all of it to that riff-raff do yer?"

Stan smiled.

"I'm sorry boss," Faye explained. "That Ezekiel character said it'd be all right, argued that a gimmick like this would put the place on the map. I did what I could to save the stock. We, err.. we watered it down."

"Woah! How'd yer get away with that? The good people of these parts are connoisseurs when it comes to grog. You'd they'd know when their drinks been watered down."

"It wasn't water, boss."

"Oh... Oh... Fuck! I think perhaps in this case, ignorance is bliss, eh? No more inquiries."

Stan and Faye exchanged a warm smile. "Damn these ladies," he thought. "They know all the tricks."

They sat and drank and talked for a good two hours. Stan was excited, revealing his plans for Jonah. Plotting out how to accommodate that with the other acts. Growler offered some excellent suggestions that left Stan wondering about the comic. Where had he come from? What was his history? Were some things better left unknown? However, it was Bess who asked the most pertinent question of the night.

"Stan?"

"Yeh?"

"Just what is Mister Ezekiel's role in all this and how do you know him?"

There was no point skirting round the issue. Stan told them everything he knew. When he finished there was a silence as the assembled party took the information on board and then mulled over what they could do about it.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything?" came a Yankee drawl. Out of the gloom of the auditorium stepped Doctor Tumblety.

"Doctor," said Stan. "I... er... How did you get in? I thought I'd locked all the doors?"

"Perhaps you did, my fine young sir. They may indeed still be locked."

Stan frowned. Was Tumblety one of those escape artists? If so, perhaps they could use his talents.

"I never left the building. I was here all the time. I'm err... I'm afraid I was enjoying myself when err... a young friend came over a bit queer? The excitement I think. I've been... treating him." He looked back into the darkness. "Come on out, Sebastiano. They won't bite."

A young lad emerged from the shadows. He could be no more than fourteen years old. Stan noticed that he had been crying. The streaks across his grimy cheeks glistened in the lamp light. He stood to the side, preferring the anonymity of the shadows.

"So," said Tumblety. "Is this a private function or can we...?"

"Yes, it's a private party," said Growler. "Staff only."

"I'm sure Mister Griffin, with all due respect, that a decision like this is not yours to make, is that not so Mister Garrideb?"

It was clear to Stan that there was something brewing between the American and Growler. Perhaps he would get to the bottom of it one day. But not now. There were more important matters to discuss.

"Sorry, doc. Growler's right. We have a lot of things to discuss, so if you don't mind I'll have to ask you and your friend to leave. However, were you to drop by tomorrow evening we would be most happy to entertain you."

Tumblety fixed Stan with a look. He held his gaze until Stan blinked and looked away.

"Very well, Mister Garrideb, I know when I'm not wanted. Come along Sebastiano."

Away he flounced, the young boy reluctantly trailing aft.

He heard the rattling of the door, followed by muffled cursing.

Stan looked at Growler and glanced to the door.

With a sigh, the comedian got to his feet and slouched away to let them out.

\*\*\*

It was not yet dawn. Stan awoke with a jolt, and then wished he hadn't. His head was pounding. Sketchy details of the night returned to him. He smiled. He remembered seeing off Tumblety and Growler returning with a face like February. He had begun to thaw as the drink flowed. Eventually he and Bess had instigated a sing-song around the piano. Stan reluctantly acknowledged the fact that Bess and Growler made a good

couple. They complemented each other. Like salt and pepper. Liver and onions. Boiled Beef and carrots. Damnation. They seemed so happy together. There was no denying that Growler on form was a real class act and he brought the best out of Jonah. The two of them singing classic duets. Sometimes Growler played the female roles to brilliant comic effect and then it was Jonah, doing gender reversal only to move them to tears with his emotional intensity and heart-wrenching voice. Stan had tried blinking and wiping his eyes but it was no good, there was no getting rid of the pound signs dancing before them as he enjoyed the impromptu performance. The girls were loving it too, laughing and joining in the chorus with complete abandon.

Gradually, drunk as Lords, the company had disbanded, making their way home. Stan, with the intention of clearing up before getting to his pit had rested his eyes for a moment and drifted off.

He rose gingerly to his feet, stretched, yawned, farted and decided to go home. He could clean up in the morning, or better still, he could get Polly to do some work for a change. He noticed a light burning in his office. Maybe Jonah had forgotten to blow out the candle. He made his way over to extinguish it. The last thing he needed was a fire.

As he stood in the doorway, he felt a strange sensation. His chest was too tight. The hairs on the nape of his neck prickled and an icy tremor ran down his spine. He could see Jonah, the serene smile still on his face. He had an urge to laugh. That was one hell of a trick. Had he been waiting patiently in here all this time for Stan to come and see it? He wondered how he had done it. Jonah's huge, smiling head was perched bang in the middle of Stan's desk. At first Stan thought Jonah must have cut a hole in the desk top and poked his head through. He bit his lip. The desk had belonged to his father. He swallowed. He knew it was no charade. What gave it away in the candle-lit, eerie silence of his office was the slow drip...drip...drip. When Stan traced the sound, he

found it was coming from the edge of the desk. Blood was seeping slowly from the bloody stump of Jonah's neck, running along the table and dripping over the edge and onto the floor.

"Jonah?" he said stupidly.

There was no reply. There never would be.

\*\*\*

Leather Apron was a night owl. If he loved anything it was the night. He could get by on less than four hours sleep and the rest of the time was spent roaming the streets in the company he loved above all others, his own. At these hours, the only folk abroad were those practicing evil, those awaiting evil, and those too foolish to know better. He saw them all, the usual crowd, scuttling in the shadows like sewer rats, thinking nobody could see them. Thinking they owned the night and that somehow their activities became legitimate under its cloak. Every night these pathetic people with their pathetic vices. The girls all riddled with the pox, their made up faces like grotesque dolls ready to unload their disease into some weak deserving idiot. That mandrake doctor on the look out for boys to torture and punish. He saw the luxurious black carriage, the horses with their hooves muffled in sack cloth. The same masked man peering out. Only tonight he saw Pizer in the shadows watching. He raised two fingers and pointed them, 'shooting' him, then blowing imaginary smoke from his fingertips. One night he would catch that masked one unawares and then... Tonight, a new sight. Ezekiel's man, David and five others, loading a wrapped bundle into a cart, their clothes darkened with sweat or blood. Melting into the shadows he watched as the cart trundled out of Dorset Street. Pizer was seething with hate. Hate for Stan Garrideb. Hate for Jonah. Hate for whores. Hate for Mister Ezekiel the man who had subjected him to his earlier public humiliation. He walked on, cursing and slashing the air with his clasp knife. He saw the

barber, the one with the mousey wife. He nodded at him. The barber pretended he hadn't seen him and hurried on through the drizzling rain. Fucker. Who did he think he was? He shouted after him in Yiddish. The barber ignored him. He thought about how nice it would be to plunge the knife into his neck. He hurried on, skipping and jumping and twirling like a demented dervish. He stopped to catch his breath in Buck's Row. He looked down at the body lying there. The blood pooling around it. He looked closer and laughed. She had got what she deserved. He was glad. She had laughed at him. Many times. He walked on. God is good.

\*\*\*

Four-thirty in the morning. Inspector Samuel Trimp was out of sorts. His wife was using her confinement as an excuse to make his life a misery.

"You don't love me. You don't love the children. You only love your job."

She was wrong. He didn't love his job. Not anymore. It would be wonderful to have something to love. If he could only bring himself to hold onto his children, the way she did, to cherish them and play with them. He couldn't do it. He didn't know how to play. He had never had time for games when he was growing up. Nobody had ever shown him affection. It wasn't that he didn't love his family. He didn't know how to show it. As a child, whenever he had shown affection or love for something, it had been snatched from him. He had learned to hide his feelings, to bury them. Now he was unsure whether they still existed. Maybe in a few years when his children could talk and run and hold a conversation things would be different. He hoped so.

He had barely spoken to his wife all evening but now that he had to go out in the dead of night, into the rain and misery she was furious that he was leaving. Telling him that she knew he was deserting her for another woman.

"I'm deserting you for a *dead* woman, Clara," he told her. "There's been a murder. You have the nurse. You'll be fine."

"You wish I was dead, don't you?" she sobbed.

"Of course not," he said. Christ, if she were to die, who would look after the children?

\*\*\*

Sergeant Warner accompanied him to the scene. There were four other policemen there already, interviewing the man who had discovered the body. A group of women were gathered beside the railings, staring at the gory sight. He pushed to the front and stared. He was glad he hadn't eaten as he swallowed the rush of bile that came up into his throat.

"Do we have a name?" said Trimp.

"Yes sir," said one of the bluebottles. "This gent here knows her." He pointed to a hospital porter, who was shaking like a leaf.

"Well?" asked Trimp.

"It's Polly."

"Polly?"

"Yeh. That's not her real name though."

"T'riffic. How about tellin' us her real name rather than makin' one up on the spur of the moment? That's how I prefer to work."

"Mary."

Trimp rubbed his bristly moustache. He had always wanted big bushy bacca-pipes but they wouldn't grow. Maybe he would get rid of this one completely. It was annoying. Like everything else. "Mary what?"

"Mary Nichols. Her mates call her Polly."

"Right. Where's she live then?"

"Nowhere. She ain't got an 'ome. Don't fink so anyway."

Trimp sighed. "She a workin' girl?"

The porter nodded. "Sometimes. Not lately. She had a good job she did. She was gettin' herself together, so I heard."

"What job would that be then?"

"At the Palace."

"The Palace? Ballocks." He knew the Prince of Wales liked his ladies, but he imagined he would be a bit more choosey than this.

"Palace of Wonder. That new gaff in Dorset Street."

"Ah. We know all about the Palace of Wonder, do we not Sergeant?"

"We do indeed, sir."

"That Jew runs it don't he? Little feller. Garribaldi or somethin'."

"Garrideb, guv. That's right."

"I think we should pay him a little visit. Tell him the bad news."

He bent down and looked at the body. The clothes were shredded around the belly. He shook his head. "Nasty business this." He turned to the bluebottles. "Right, take her away. Get this place cleaned up, eh? You don't want to attract rats. Not this close to the hospital."

"Yes, sir."

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As they walked towards Dorset Street, Trimp noticed blood on the knees of his trousers.

He sighed. He crossed the street and banged on a door.

"Open up! Police!"

Sergeant Warner crossed the road after him, puzzled.

A pasty-faced red-eyed woman opened the door. "What is it? Is it my Jonny?"

"I don't know anything about your Jonny, madam," said Trimp. "You have a kitchen, I take it?"

"Course."

"Show the way."

The woman led them down the stairs into the kitchen.

"Brown paper and vinegar!" snapped Trimp clicking his fingers.

The woman frowned and he clicked his fingers again. She hurried into the pantry and returned with a bottle of vinegar and a roll of brown paper.

"Good woman."

He soused the paper with vinegar and then rubbed it into the knee of his trousers.

"Sergeant, rub it for me, will you? It's the wrong angle for me."

Warner sighed. "Yes, guv."

He rubbed at the trousers until the brown paper shredded into tiny pieces. The stain was still visible but it was fading.

"Use some more paper. And plenty of vinegar."

"Yes, guv."

By the time he had finished the stain was barely noticeable, although Inspector Trimp's trousers reeked of vinegar.

"Thank you, Madam. You have been a great help. Once bloodstains dry it's the devil's own job to get 'em out," said Trimp, tipping his hat. "Come on, Sergeant. We've wasted enough time."

The rain was falling heavily now and by the time they reached Dorset Street, they were soaked to the skin.

"Might as well come in a bloody boat," sighed Trimp. "When's summer gonna start? Eh? That's what I want to know."

"I wish I could tell yer, guv," said Warner.

Trimp knocked on the door. There was no answer. He tried the handle. It was unlocked. They entered the theatre. The sound of sobbing led them towards a dim light. Trimp looked at the door. A sign hung askew on a nail. It read 'Manager's Office'. The door was ajar. He pushed it open.

The sobbing man was sat on the floor, a bald, fat, bloody head lay in his lap. He looked up at the policemen, his face a mask of sorrow.

"I think we've got our man, Sergeant," said Trimp.

"Looks that way."

"Mister Garribaldi?" said Trimp.

The man stared and sobbed.

"It's Garrideb, sir," said Warner.

"Mister Garrideb?"

Stan nodded.

"I'm arresting you for the murder of Polly... what was her name again, Sergeant?"

"Mary, sir. Mary Nichols. Her friends called her Polly."

"Right. I'm arresting you for the murder of her, and Martha Tabram and of this chap too.

I'm presuming he is dead?"

"I think so," said Stan. "He won't sing to me."

"Put the derbies on him, Sergeant."

\*\*\*

When Stan was handcuffed they led him out of the theatre, leaving Jonah's head on the floor.

"What's goin' on?" came a gruff voice from the entrance.

Growler had come in early, he was planning to meet Blue Skin and Tiny Pete first thing.

He stared at Stan, covered in blood.

"Boss?"

Stan stared at him. "He won't sing."

"What's he mean?" said Growler, looking at the policemen. His eyes widened as he took in Trimp's beady eyes.

"Well, well, well! Curiouser and curiouser. It *is* you," said Trimp, recognising him as the years fell away. "You shouldn't be here, should you?"

"I..."

"If I remember rightly, you were lagged. Good an' proper. You should be rottin' down under. Yeh? Last time I looked, penalty for returned convicts was the long drop. Am I right?" He looked to Sergeant Warner for assurance.

"I 'spect so, guv," said Warner, shrugging.

"That was a long time ago, Sammy. They don't transport folks no more."

"That don't mean we want 'em back though does it? An' don't call me Sammy. Workhouse scum."

"Call me Mister Griffin then, you workhouse snitch."

They stood staring each other out.

"I'm gonna be back for you, Griffin. You mark my words. I've seen men hanged for comin' back."

"It'll never happen, Trimp." Growler tried to sound confident.

"We'll see, Mister Griffin....we'll see."

## BETWEEN THE DEVIL AND THE DEEP BLUE SEA

Old Jack was a sea dog. When he walked he rolled. It could have been the grog, or it could have been a life lived aboard ship. He was old now, never sober. He hated life on land but no ship would take him on. All sailors like a drink, but they know when to stop. Jack didn't. He was a drunk through and through. He lived for grog. He sweated grog. He shat and pissed grog. He was sat on the docks. Drinking. Telling stories to Joe and Phil, a couple of youngsters with nothing better to do than listen to the ramblings of an old fool.

Joe interrupted the story about how Jack had saved Lord Nelson's life. He had heard it before, at least twelve times and he didn't believe a word of it.

"Fuck me! It's a whale!" he pointed across the morning mist down into the murk of the Thames.

"Bollocks. Ain't no whales in the Thames," said Old Jack. "Now where was I? Ah yes... Horatio, he says ter me, Jacky lad, yer a prize cunt burra love yer like a son... and..."

"I'm tellin' yer, it's a fuckin' whale."

"Shut yer maw, lad an' let me fin... bugger me. Yer right!"

He staggered to his feet and moved closer to the quayside.

In the gloom he saw the pale white shape. Large and bloated, bobbing up and down with the tide.

"Whale ahoy!" he yelled. "Whale ahoy!"

Some of the dockers heard him. At first they thought it was old Mad Jack raving again.

But then they saw it too. A crowd gathered. Poles were fetched, along with grappling hooks. The whale was caught and hauled alongside the quay.

"That's no whale," said Phil. "It's a man."

"Where's his fuckin' head then?"

They hauled the body onto the quay. It took five strong men. They stared at it.

"No head an' no balls. Fuck me."

"Told yer there weren't no whales in the Thames," said Jack. "Anyway, Horatio wanted ter gimme a medal, but I said nah."

\*\*\*

Trimp sat at his desk mulling. He did that a lot. He discovered the 'mulling' talent around the same time his marriage had begun to turn sour. That was when he had taken to sitting in his office, in the dark, thinking through his cases when the rest of his colleagues were rushing home to their families. It worked for him. Sitting alone, the tips of his fingers tickling the insides of his nostrils trying desperately to make himself sneeze. Trimp loved sneezing, but not as much as he loved sex. That was what got him into this marital mess in the first place. When he met Clara she was a diamond. He had been in love for the first time in his life. At it like rabbits they were. Dabbing it up at the drop of a hat. Then she fell on and it was downhill all the way. Out popped his first born and Clara had been transformed into a relentless, nagging haybag . He kept his distance but every time he had to satisfy his sexual urges, the consequences were dire and nine months later out popped another. He longed for a mistress but held himself back, restricted by a sense of honour and loathing himself for it. He was becoming a miserable bleeder. A miserable bleeder with a martyr complex.

Tonight he was mulling about Stanley Garrideb. This man seemed to attract murder like a dollymop attracts pricks. He didn't like it one bit. It was the same old story. One that always made his fellow officers and superiors despair. "Look," they would wail, "he was bent over the body with a bloody knife in his hand. Charge him, stretch his neck and rid the world of one more miscreant. Do the world a favour." You lie down with dogs you get fleas. That much was true. Garrideb moved in that sort of society, mixed

with all those music hall bohemian types, ran an establishment that attracted the detritus of society. The sort of people who would never be leaving their livers to medical science, well only as an 'after' example on the consequence of drink perhaps. If you were to pull in Garrideb because he was seen with and around the two murdered women, then you would be pulling in half the layabouts of the East End as well. However... At this point Trimp let out a huge sneeze which made him smile with pleasure... However, that does not tell us how he ended up with a big, bald, bloody head in his lap, or how he came to be an associate and friend of one Terrence Growler Griffin.

Inspector Trimp did not like surprises. He had not been pleased to see Griffin resurfacing like a bad penny all the way from Australia. Not only had he escaped, that alone being a near impossible thing to do, he had also worked his passage back to the old manor. Why? Why was he here? He could have chosen a new life anywhere but he had come back home. AAAACHOOOO!!!.... Ahhh, heaven!

He closed his eyes and remembered the supposedly good old days of his childhood. He and Growler had been orphans together in the workhouse. Growler had chosen the path of all things bad and evil and Trimp the path of righteousness and enlightenment. They had been friends, thrown together through adversity but Trimp had never approved of Griffin's ways. He was a born ramper living on his wits. That was fair enough. You needed them when you had nothing else. But when he had started mixing with that Fenian crowd, Trimp could turn a blind eye no longer. The odd card game he could turn a blind eye to. He even respected the ease with which Growler could dip into any pocket that passed him by, but treason was another thing all together. Treason went against all Trimp believed in. He knew Griffin was using the Irish. Making money anyway he could, but he was also putting money into their pockets. Money that could be used

against England. He was in way over his head. He wouldn't listen to reason. Then the rumours had begun. Everybody knew what the Irish were planning. Everybody except Growler. He wouldn't listen. He always thought he was smarter than everyone else. Trimp had no option but to approach the authorities. Growler was picked up with a pocket full of cash, five wallets, ten silk handkerchiefs and a bag of banned Fenian pamphlets. He had been exiled to Australia. Trimp remembered the guilt he had felt at the time. He had known Growler since they were infants. It was Growler who gave him his first smoke. He had often wondered if Growler had ever found out who had betrayed him. That quip about him being a workhouse snitch would indicate that he most probably had.

Trimp smiled. He had always been troubled by his actions. He had read about the awful conditions on the convict ships. He was glad his old friend was still alive, although that did present a problem. Growler had never been one to forgive and forget. If he knew that Trimp had handed him over to the law then he would not rest until he had paid him back. A lifetime of guilt would not be enough for Growler. Guilt. Yes, he had felt guilt. He had buried it alongside all of his other weaker emotions. After Growler's arrest, the policeman in charge of the case had taken Trimp under his wing, given him an education and a leg up into the force. That should have been the end of the story. But stories never really end. There's always a sequel waiting to be read.

He owed Griffin. If not for him, he would never have joined the force. He would never have seen the importance of education. Griffin had created him. Prompted him into implementing his own personal method of policing. One he was sure would influence future generations of detective procedure. So sure was he of his methods that he had written papers about them and been asked to speak at various conferences on law and order. Samuel Trimp had realised that talk is cheap, especially amongst the working

class criminal fraternity that like a good drink. There's many a slip between cup and lip. Trimp was able to clear so many cases because he could, thanks to his workhouse upbringing become one of 'them' slipping effortlessly back amongst the people he was employed to police. He was amongst fledgling police force's first true undercover officers. Of course all that would count for nothing if Growler Griffin was to catch him unawares.

Trimp sighed. He could do without this added pressure. He would need all his skills to deal with the immediate threat. A murderer was cutting off heads and butchering the local romping girls. Was it the man sitting in his cells? Time would tell but he had his doubts.

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The prisoner had said nothing all day. Trimp's superiors wanted him to apply pressure, but he preferred the waiting game. He was not a cruel man, at least not gratuitously so. Getting your answers through kindness may take longer but more often than not the results were more reliable. So he waited, allowing the suspect to stew in his own juices. Then he and Sergeant Warner brought Stanley Garrideb a cup of tea, hoping that now he didn't have a fat man's head in his lap he might prove a little more communicative.

Stan unshaven, pale and disheveled was sat on the stone floor.

"Good morning, Mister Garrideb. Feeling a little better this morning?"

"Not really."

"I don't blame you. It ain't every day something like that happens. Nasty business. Very nasty. Who was he?"

"Jonah."

"Jonah who?"

"Jonah...I don't know, Inspector. I didn't know him long."

"How long is not long?"

"A couple of weeks."

"And Terrence Griffin?"

"Who?"

"Growler. Growler Griffin."

"About the same."

"Hmm....." Achooooo!! "God! Yes! Sorry about that. Bit odd isn't it? These two people coming into your life like that. From nowhere so to speak."

"If you say so," said Stan. "Though I did open a Music Hall. We need all sorts of different acts. People came out of the woodwork. Seemed natural to me."

"All sorts."

"Yes. All sorts."

"Polly..." Trimp clicked his fingers. He was hopeless with names. "What's the wretched woman's name, Sergeant?"

"Nichols, sir. Mary Ann Nichols," said Warner.

"Hmm. Where's the Polly come in then?"

"Pet name, sir. Her friends called her Polly."

"Hmm. Quite. Were you her friend, Mister Garrideb? Did you call her Polly?"

"I did call her Polly."

"So where does she fit in then?"

"She was my cleaner."

"Oh. That her job, was it?"

"No. I don't think she'd ever cleaned a single thing in her life...including herself."

Trimp smiled. Humour in adversity. Interesting. "So why d'yer employ her?"

"I couldn't be arsed cleaning up after a night at the Palace."

"Yes, but why her?"

Stan tried to think of a reason. "I'm fucked if I know, Inspector."

Trimp didn't say anything for a good two minutes. Hoping it might draw Stan out. It didn't so he pressed on.

"I'm going to ask you to refrain from mouthing obscenities in here, sir. Sergeant Warner is a very sensitive man. He had a sheltered upbringing. Isn't that right Sergeant?"

"Yes, sir," sighed Warner.

"I'm sorry," said Stan. "Won't happen again. It just slipped out."

"Hmmm. You married?"

"No."

"Courting?"

Stan frowned. "No."

"You had to think about that."

"Yes. It was either 'No' or 'not really'. I decided on 'No'. It required a second or two to make my mind up"

"Fair enough. Do you like women, Mister Garrideb?"

"I do, Mister ....."

"Trimp. Samuel Trimp."

"I do, Mister Trimp."

"Any woman in particular?"

"Do you mean 'type' of woman or 'a' woman?"

"You choose."

"Then, yes, there is a woman I am particularly fond of."

"What's special about her?"

"I could say her face, her personality, her general demeanor. The cut of her gib. Her scent. How she looks in her dunnage. All those things. Most of all though, it's her feet."

If Trimp was taken aback by such a candid answer he did not show it. A detective who shows his hand is a poor detective indeed. "The shape of a woman's foot can be a thing of great beauty. So what's stopping you from stepping out with this lady?"

"She is unaware of my interest and she is stepping out with another."

"You know this person?"

"I do, Inspector. It's Growler."

"Hmm. He's like that is our Mister Griffin." Trimp got up to leave, taking the finished cup of tea from Stan. As he reached the cell door he turned and asked, "Why would anybody want to cut off his head?"

"To stop him singing," said Stan.

Back in his office Trimp sat at his desk gently pulling on his nasal hairs, mulling. He was tempted to mull over a lady's shapely foot but disciplined himself to turn his attentions to that last comment of Garrideb's. Did he mean to stop him singing literally or did he mean to stop him talking about something? This was going to be an interesting nut to crack. How excellent!

He began writing it all down in his notebook. His memory had never been good but once he had it down on paper he felt like a bloodhound, capable of tracking down anything. He was contemplating calling for a cup of tea and a fancy when Sergeant Warner poked his head around the door.

"Someone to see you, sir."

"It's not the wife is it?"

"No, sir."

"Who is it then?"

"A Jewish gentleman, sir." He handed Trimp the caller's card.

"Hmmm. Aaron Ezekiel. Nice card. Ever heard of him, Warner?"

"Yes sir. He's a big noise in these parts."

"Show him in then. Let's see what he has to say."

Trimp pocketed his notebook and cleared the papers on his desktop into a drawer. When Sergeant Warner showed Mister Ezekiel into the office Trimp was stood at the window, looking out onto the street below. Ezekiel, not a man who liked to be kept waiting by anyone, cleared his throat. Trimp turned and smiled.

"Ah, Mister Zachary is it? Pleasure, I'm sure."

"It's Ezekiel," said Ezekiel. "Aaron Ezekiel."

"Of course it is," said Trimp shaking the offered hand and gesturing towards a chair.

"Please, make yourself at home."

Ezekiel sat on the edge of the chair. Trimp perched himself on the edge of his desk, looking down at his visitor.

"So, to what do I owe this honour?"

"It's about Mister Garrideb. I believe he's lodging with you at present?"

"In a manner of speakin'. Yes."

"He didn't do it."

"Do what?"

"Kill anyone. The haybag. The singer. No one."

"And you know this for a fact do you?"

"Yes."

Trimp fought the urge to play with his nostrils. "And how did you come by this information? Sir?"

"I have my sources. One of them saw two men leaving the Palace. They were carrying what could have been a body. A large body. The two men did not resemble Mister Garrideb. I also have a cab driver in my employ who saw a gentleman walking away from Buck's Row at around the time the lady was murdered. He was carrying a knife. He seemed agitated. He didn't resemble Mister Garrideb either."

"Hmm. These 'sources' of yours would be only too happy to furnish me with information I take it?"

"Of course, Inspector." Trimp allowed a small silence to follow. Ezekiel continued, "I want you to release him. Now."

"I can't do that."

"I play cards with your boss, Sir Robert. He tells me you are under-funded here in Whitechapel. I'd like to make a donation. The city needs men like you, Inspector."

Ezekiel handed him an envelope. It was heavy.

"Is this a bribe?"

"Ugly words, Inspector. Ugly words indeed. No. It's not a bribe. It's a gesture of friendship. I consider myself a man of the community. I do very well for myself, I like to put something back so to speak. I would hate to have to bother Sir Robert with this. He could make things difficult for you."

"Well..."

"Let me ask you something."

"What?"

"You don't think Garrideb did it, do you?"

To hell with it. Trimp's fingers sought the hairs in his left nostril and tugged. "No. I don't."

"Then where's the problem? There is no quandary? Do the right thing. I understand you have a new little policeman on the way. Buy a toy for the nursery. Treat your wife. Everyone's happy."

Trimp sighed. Maybe he should play cards with Sir Robert instead, because this chap must be rubbish. You don't get to the rank of inspector without having to face a few threats, veiled or otherwise. This young dandy was new to him. He was confident, cool and dangerous. He felt a frisson of excitement as the case continued to unravel right in front of his eyes. He thought about giving the money back but he didn't. A gift might help mend a few bridges between him and Clara. He nodded.

"Very well."

"Good man. I can see you are just the sort of man I could get on very well with."

"Glad to hear it Mister Zachary, I shall be sure to tell Sir Robert about our new and generous benefactor." He shook Ezekiel's hand warmly. He had enjoyed the flash of anger in his eyes as he got the name wrong again. He saw Ezekiel to the door, then returning to the desk, he opened the envelope, took two notes for himself and with his pen wrote 'Sir Robert' on the envelope and placed it in the top drawer of his desk. He then removed his silver tweezers from his waistcoat and placing them up a nostril, he gently and ever so slowly, pulled out a hair. There then followed a fine sequence of five sneezes in a row. Oh, joy! There was a knock as Warner entered.

"Inspector, they've found a body in the Thames. It's headless."

"Are we still in possession of the head, Warner?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent. Find something suitable to put it in. A hat box perhaps? Meet me in the lobby in ten minutes."

"Will do, sir."

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The cell door opened. Stan looked up.

"It's your lucky day, Mister Garrideb," said Trimp entering the cell. "Someone up there likes you."

Stan looked up at the ceiling. "That'll be a first . Who?"

"We've had a witness report. Looks like you're in the clear. For now. You're free to go."

Stan stepped out into the heat of the morning and blinked in the sunlight like an owl. He noticed a carriage waiting. The curtains parted and a face smiled at him. He shuddered.

"Come along, Mister Garrideb," said Ezekiel.

Stan climbed into the carriage. "It was you."

Ezekiel tapped the roof of the carriage with his cane. "Drive on!" He turned to Stan.

"What was?"

"The one who had me released?"

"Very astute, Mister Garrideb. Or may I call you Stanley? Yes. Stanley. More appropriate I think."

"Why?"

"Because I wanted to. David. Remember David? He says he saw the killer. He says he didn't look like you."

"I..." Stan was still in too much of a daze to know what to say. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Of course, everything has its price, Stanley. Even friendship."

"Is it about the insurance? I'll pay."

"No. We've gone a bit far for that, I think."

"Then what?"

"The Palace."

"Eh?"

"Now, I had my lawyers draw up the papers." Ezekiel picked up the contract that had been lying on the seat beside him.

"It's all I have."

"Wrong. You have your life. If not for me, the only thing you would have would be an appointment with the hangman. Sign it please."

"I..." Ezekiel offered him a quill. It was all happening too fast. Stan couldn't think straight.

"Don't worry. I'm going to keep you on a retainer. I hate to see my friends go without. You'll continue to work there. As manager. Things will go on, same as before. You just hand over the profits to me and I pay you a generous stipend. I'm doing you a huge favour, you won't have anything to worry about. It'll be money for old rope and Everyone's happy. Of course there's always the possibility that David might remember things with a greater clarity."

Stan's hand was shaking. He went to sign.

"Wait," said Ezekiel. He offered him a flask of brandy. "Have a tot. Calm your nerves. I don't want you fucking up the paperwork. Looks bad."

Stan drank. He signed. They had arrived at the Palace of Wonder.

"Excellent, Stanley. Well done. Now, I think it would be wise to remain closed for the rest of the week. Don't you?"

"Why?"

"Sign of respect. For our lost songbird. Terrible tragedy."

"It was you. Wasn't it?"

Mister Ezekiel looked directly at Stan his eyes cold. "You want to watch your mouth, Stanley. I don't like blubbermouths. Let's not get off on the wrong foot, eh? I have great expectations of you. Don't spoil them and end up dead. That would be most unfortunate.

Good! Now that we have that settled..." He leaned across Stan and opened the carriage door, "...I'll bid you good day."

Stan climbed down from the carriage.

"Oh, and Stanley. Get some sleep. Rest. You're going to need it. Business as usual next week. You have a whole week to find some new and exciting acts. You need to start a search for another sensational singer so I want you fresh and strong." He tapped the roof of the carriage. "Drive on!"

## ON THE LAM

In the lobby of the police station Freddie Warner was waiting with Jonah's head in a sack.

"Is that the best you could find, Sergeant?"

"Hat boxes are a bit thin on the ground in the station sir, anyway, I don't think he'll notice."

They climbed into the waiting carriage. "The morgue," said Warner to the driver.

Settling back into the seat, Trimp asked, "So how come I've not run across this Aaron Ezekiel before?"

"Dunno, sir. You don't live in the borough, perhaps?"

"You say he's a big noise in these parts?"

"Yes, he likes to think himself a father of the community. A generous benefactor."

"The man's a fraud and a leech. Singularly untrustworthy. Do me a favour Warner?"

"Yes, guv?"

"Sniff about and find out all you can about Stanley Garrideb."

"Will do, guv."

The rest of the journey passed off in silence. Trimp was lost in thought. He did not like the fact that Sir Robert and Ezekiel were friends. It didn't smell right at all. "Be careful here, Sammy," he told himself. "Be very careful."

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Morgues stink. It's a thing that takes some getting used to. Chemicals and rotting meat, housed in a cold and damp clime. It lines your lungs. Doctor Killeen was there to greet them. His usual cheery self.

"Hello Samuel. Hello Warner! Come in, come in. Well any news yet?"

"About what, Doctor?" asked Trimp, perplexed.

"I understand your wife is with child, man. Wonderful. Your third, eh, you rogue? How lucky you are."

"Yes. Yes indeed," said Trimp, trying to muster up some enthusiasm.

"To business. You are here about our 'whale' I take it?"

"Correct. I think this might help you. Warner?"

"Here y'are, doc." Warner hefted the sack up on the bench.

"Splendid," enthused the doctor delving into the bag with both hands. "Come out, come out whoever you are!" The head had taken on a greenish hue. The doctor took it over to the adjacent slab. "Sergeant, perhaps you could...?" He motioned with his head as his hands were full, for Warner to pull back the heavy canvas sheet that covered the corpse.

Warner pulled back the sheet revealing the huge naked corpse of Jonah.

"First things first," said the doctor, bringing the head round and offering it up to the neck twisting it round until... "There we go. It's a match alright. I'm not a betting man but I reckon that's a cert if ever I saw it!"

"Do me a favour, Doctor?"

"Certainly old, boy."

"Put the head down and put your hands under his shoulders."

"Very well."

"Warner, come with me down the other end and grab a leg."

"What? You are joking?"

"Have you ever known me joke?"

"Do I have to?"

"Yes, you do."

Warner tried not to retch as he touched the cold, loose flesh. He watched as Trimp took hold of the other leg.

"Right, on my count of three, lift. One two three!"

They heaved with all their might but could not lift the massive frame of Jonah an inch off the slab.

"Doctor, could his body still be full of water?"

"No, I've had him opened already and whipped out a few organs. He'll be lighter if anything."

"Right."

So there it was then. Not that he didn't already have his suspicions, but Mister Aaron Ezekiel was lying. There was no way two men could have disposed of that body. Trimp sighed. Like it or not, Garrideb was back in the frame again.

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Outside the Palace of Wonder, Stan delved down into his jacket pocket for his keys. His mind was a lot clearer now. He felt as if he'd just had a blast on his father's smelling salts. With clarity came a sense of urgency. He didn't have much time. A chain of events was about to wrap itself around his ankles and if he didn't look sharp he'd wind up on the bottom of the river. He should have been scared but he wasn't. He wasn't afraid of the living. He could hide from them. He couldn't hide from the dead though. They would always be there. Waiting. He took a deep breath. The dead could carry on waiting. He wouldn't stop them. As he turned the key in the lock he heard a sound from the darkness of the alley opposite.

*"Pssst!"*

Stan was no apple fresh off the tree. He knew better than to accept invitations from dark alleys. He ignored the sound and was about to step inside.

"Psssst!" came the sound again. "Psssst! Stan! Boss!"

It was Growler. Looking both ways up the street, Stan joined him in the shadows.

"What's up, Growler?"

"I need to lie low for a while. I think after what's happened to you recently you should come with me."

Stan almost laughed out loud at such a turn of events. "What do you have in mind?"

"I know a place that's perfect, no one will find us there, it's in Limehouse."

"Limehouse? I don't fancy addin' cholera to my problems, thank you very much."

"Come on boss. It'll be fine. All that cholera stuff's just a bit o' fakement they spread about to keep folks away from the place."

Stan thought for a second and nodded. "Fine. Come on in. I just want to sort a few things out. I'll be ten minutes."

"No, boss. I'll wait for you here. The last thing I need is my collar felt by that bastard Trimp. He's a fucker he is, you mark my words."

"I'll take your word for it. Wait here then, I won't be long."

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As the carriage sped along, Aaron Ezekiel allowed himself a small smile of satisfaction. Here he was on the way to his lawyers with another property under his belt. His portfolio was building nicely. It was amazing how far you could go on reputation, especially in these parts. Get the right 'staff' behind you and there is no stopping you. As the money pours in, you add one or two very influential figures to your payroll and you become virtually untouchable. He thought about Stanley Garrideb and his naivety. What a soft touch! Moving in from nowhere and opening a music hall and a successful one at that. Luckily, he didn't have the stomach for a fight and his signature had been one of his easier acquisitions. It only took a broken finger,

and a bit of wheeling and dealing. Shame on you, Mister Garrideb! Now, if he had shown more trust in the big eunuch, things could have been a whole lot different. Not only a divine talent but a powerful, brave and should he have chosen to be, extremely frightening man. With a man like that behind you...loyal too. But his attempts to lure Jonah away from Garrideb had met with failure, and Aaron Ezekiel did not take kindly to failure. Such a shame. He dabbed at his eye with a handkerchief.

"The world of music mourns for you, Jonah," he sighed.

\*\*\*

Samuel Trimp let himself into his house. Sergeant Warner was right, he did not live in the borough. He didn't want to bring his family up amongst those he policed daily. His savings afforded him something a little better and he aspired to drag himself as far away from the workhouse as he possibly could.

Clara was a clergyman's daughter, which probably accounted for the sport immediately after their marriage, all that pent up sexual frustration unleashed on a grateful Sammy. She had been so happy when she had seen the house for the first time in its quiet tree-lined street with a small front and back garden. Sam shook his head at the memory. Placing his keys on the hall table he allowed Jane, the nurse to take his coat.

"Oh what lovely flowers," she said, looking at the bouquet in Trimp's hand.

"Yes."

He wished that he could give them to Jane. He pictured her showering him with grateful kisses.

"They're for Mrs. Trimp," said Trimp, nipping the thought in the bud.

"They're gorgeous, sir. I'll take them through."

Affording himself a tortuous look at the retreating backside of his children's nurse, Stan wondered how he could have been so foolish as to employ such an attractive woman and have her live under the same roof. He knew he should look in on Clara but he couldn't face it. Entering his study he poured himself a stiff brandy, sank into his armchair and had a mull.

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Across town, Aaron Ezekiel was also settling into an armchair and puffing away on an expensive cigar. He withdrew the contract from his inside pocket. "Process this for me Gerald, would you?"

"My, my Aaron, another property. You are becoming quite the property baron."

Ezekiel beamed with pleasure. "I do my best Gerald. All work and no play makes Aaron a very rich man."

"Quite." Slipping on his pince-nez Gerald Morris started to give the contract the once over. "You saw this contract being signed, did you Aaron?"

"He was sat right next to me."

"So you read it?"

No he hadn't. So sure he was that Stan Garrideb was weak and frightened and helpless.

"I'm sorry, Aaron, but this contract would not stand up in a court of law. Or any court on earth for that matter." The lawyer pushed the contract over the desk towards Ezekiel.

Ezekiel leaned forward in his chair and read Stan's signature at the bottom. Three words, written very neat with a steady hand and perfectly legible. *'Go to Hell!'*

\*\*\*

Growler may have dismissed rumours of cholera in Limehouse out of hand, but Stan could smell the sickness in the air. He wished he were wearing a scarf to protect his face. Growler seemed unconcerned as he strode on down a steaming side road crammed tight with houses that leaned drunkenly overhead. Stan was grateful for the lack of wind. One gust would send them tottering.

They were near the river. The smell was overwhelming. Growler stopped beside a peeling black door. Stan looked up and down the street. It was empty save for a three legged dog who snarled at him. He would have been disappointed had it done anything else in an area like this.

Growler was about to rap on the door but thought better of it and kicked at it instead.

A hatch in the door slid open and a pair of rheumy eyes peered out. Growler muttered something in a foreign language and the hatch slid closed. A moment later the door opened and an ancient Oriental woman in a shabby robe bowed to them.

"Evenin' Tiger Lily," said Growler. "I've brought a friend."

The woman nodded and closed the door. She beckoned them to follow her down the darkened passageway to a stone staircase leading down. Stan wondered if they were about to descend into the bowels of hell itself.

"What is this place? Is her name really Tiger Lily? What's that smell?"

"It's the best lurk in London. No it ain't. Fuck knows what her real name is. The niff? Poppies."

"Poppies?" It didn't smell like flowers to Stan.

"Opium, boss. This crib's an opium den."

"Oh." He stumbled on the steps, crashing past Growler and Tiger Lily. When he came to a halt he was in a damp cellar. The atmosphere thick with the oily odour of opium. He felt hot and flustered.

"I wanna go home."

"And get a chiv in yer ribs? Don't think so, boss. Relax. Look on it as an education."

Growler helped him to his feet. There were cushions spread around the cellar and gentlemen of various walks of life in various states of awareness lolled on them, smoking, dreaming, sleeping, raving. Chinese girls knelt at the side of every customer, filling the pipes, smiling and chattering to each other.

Tiger Lily showed them to an empty space in the far corner of the cellar. Growler kicked off his boots and threw himself down onto the cushions.

"Come on, boss. Take the load off." He pointed to a mound of cushions across from him.

Stan bent to untie his laces and then sat perched on a cushion, watching as a beautiful young girl loaded a pipe for Growler. He caught a movement out of the corner of his eye and saw the old woman filling his own pipe.

"No disrespect or anythin' but how is it you get a gorgeous young dolly, an' I get Tiger Lily?" he asked.

"Age is greatly respected in the Orient," said Growler, inhaling. "She thinks you're an important man, so that's why you're getting the personal touch. The rest of us have to make do with amateurs. Such is life." He sighed happily.

"Lucky me." Stan breathed in the opium and coughed. He couldn't stop coughing. "Is there no water in this place?"

"There's plenty. Wouldn't drink it though. Cholera."

"But you said..." He coughed again.

"Just have another puff. You'll soon get used to it."

AT HOME WITH THE TRIMPS

Clara was sewing something for the baby. Trimp tinkered on the piano. She had taught him to play in the early days of their marriage. Now she wished she hadn't bothered.

"Do you have to do that? You'll damage the baby's eardrums."

He stopped playing and picked up a newspaper.

"You'll do anything but talk to me. Won't you?"

He put the newspaper down. "What do you want to talk about?"

"Nothing."

"Work's been busy. Hectic."

"Oh."

He didn't want to discuss the murders. They weren't the kind of thing you discussed with ladies. Leastways, not ladies in Clara's condition.

"Warner says the weather should clear up by the weekend."

"Does he now?"

The doorbell rang.

"It's nice being home early."

"Is it?" She grimaced and held her side.

"Is it the baby?"

"She's kicking."

"Oh."

There was a knock on the door and Jane stepped inside.

"There's a gentleman to see you sir." She wrinkled her nose on the word gentleman.

"Who is it?"

She handed him a card. Ezekiel.

"If you'll excuse me, dear."

Clara nodded wearily.

Mister Ezekiel stood in the hallway, examining a cheap painting of Southend on the wall.

"You an art lover, Inspector?"

"Not really, Mister Zachary. What can I do for you?"

"A social call. That's all."

" Please, come into my study."

"I'd rather like to meet Mrs. Trimp."

"Good for you. This way please."

He followed Trimp into the tiny box room that served as a study.

Trimp poured two glasses of whiskey.

"Your health, Inspector."

"Mud in your eye."

"Amusing."

"Now. What can I do for you? What's so important it couldn't wait until morning?"

"Nothing really. I was interested in seeing your home. You've done well for yourself.

This is a long way from the Lump Hotel."

"Hmm." Trimp said nothing, allowing Ezekiel to continue.

"It's about Garrideb."

"Stanley Garrideb?"

"Yes. It seems my man was mistaken. Poor eyesight. In the middle of a London Peculiar. He's pretty sure it was Garrideb he saw now. Covered in blood. Near the place where that poor woman met her maker."

"Interesting," said Trimp. "I thought there was supposed to be honour among thieves.

Had a falling out have you?"

Ezekiel's cheeks flushed red. "I beg your pardon?"

"Lies may change. The truth remains constant. Mister Zebedee."

"It's Ezeekiel!" Ezekiel snapped crossly.

"Of course. I believe Mister Garrideb to be innocent. He's not going anywhere."

"You disappoint me, Mister Trimp. I am going to inform Sir Robert of your singularly impertinent behaviour."

"Good luck. He's on holiday. In Switzerland. Won't be back for another month. In the meantime, may I give you a word of advice?"

Ezekiel said nothing.

"If one hair of Mister Garrideb's head is out of place. If I hear of any harm coming to him or his establishment I will be down on you like a ton of bricks. You can holler all you like to your rich friends. But in the end I think they'll listen to me. I'm an Englishman, Mister Ezekiel. And you... well. You tell me who they'll believe? I think they'd prefer to lose their tame money lender with his strange delusions of grandeur and his desperate desire for status, than kick up a scandal." Trimp was warming to his subject. "You've made such an effort to find out so much about me. Where I live, my upbringing in the workhouse, the fact that my wife is with child. Is that an effort to intimidate me, or are you an obsessive mandrake with designs on my person?"

"What?" spluttered Ezekiel.

"Little bullyboys like you were ten a penny in the 'Lump Hotel'. You may strike fear into other men, but me? Why man, I can sniff out your odious aroma from a mile away. I don't fear you, Mister Ezekiel, or your kind, and if you persist in taking me on, then I shall crush you like a bug under the heel of my shoe. Cheers." He downed the rest of his whiskey. "Now was there anything else?"

"You watch yourself, Trimp. You've just made a very serious mistake."

"Mrs. Trimp tells me I have a habit of doing that. Good evening, Mister Ezekiel."

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Whilst her husband attended to their visitor Clara sewed. She wished she could make her husband love her more. Ever since the children had come along she had constantly questioned herself as to how their marriage had fallen into a state of disrepair. Samuel was a good man and heaven knows, a fine catch. Her heart would soar with longing when they were courting and he would call round on Sunday for a perambulation around the park. They would steal a kiss or two and Clara longed for the day he would propose. When he did she felt she would burst with happiness. For the first year or so he was everything a woman could wish for in a husband. Loyal, friendly, funny, attentive and passionate. She flushed at the memory. It was hard for her to pinpoint the change. Was it the arrival of their children, two in quick succession, or was it Samuel's promotion to Inspector? He was very old fashioned around her and never discussed his work. She knew he wanted to shield her from the sort of people and situations his work involved. He had bought her the house of her dreams in an area that was genteel and pleasant. Then he had gradually withdrawn into himself, becoming more and more distant. Her father had tried to warn her in that kindly way of his. But what woman blinded by love heeds the advice of a parent?

"My dear Clara, Samuel is a fine man and a respected officer of the law but he won't make you happy in the long run. Workhouse children are unique. They are survivors. They have learnt that they don't need anyone. Abandonment at birth for whatever reason renders them emotionally cold and detached and dare I suggest, ruthless?"

"Oh come, come, Papa you are silly! The love he lacked will be more than made up for by me, by us. I can show him that there is love in the world and gradually he will see that not everything and everyone is similar to the environment he grew up in."

Her father had backed down and agreed to the marriage, but she knew he still harboured grave misgivings about Samuel. Until recently she had put it down to a doting father being over-protective of his only daughter. Now as she concentrated, needle in hand, on the baby's bonnet in her lap, she realised that perhaps her father had been right all along. She trembled.

Samuel had always treated her with respect, but lately something slightly sinister had crept into their relationship. Was it contempt? Perhaps. Since the children things had changed. He was no longer the centre of her universe. The children had replaced him. She no longer felt that intense desire for him. In fact it had reached the stage where she dreaded his advances. She could read the signs. The small gifts, his improved time keeping for a couple of nights, paying more attention to her and listening attentively to her conversations, and finally, if he bathed... look out! She always tried to be as gentle as she could when turning him down, hoping he would understand, and he never got cross with her or made a fuss. He would withdraw into himself and become absorbed in his work, not quite a sulk, more an air of mild disappointment which made her miserable. She had relented just once in the past two years and the result now resided in her belly.

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While Clara was deep in thought in the parlour, Samuel Trimp tweaked away at a nose hair in his study, mulling. His war with Ezekiel was unimportant. He needed to focus on bringing the killer of those women to heel. There was also the fat man. He doubted very much they were all done by the same person. He might have a little time to play around with. His superiors looked more kindly on mongrel dogs than they did on street girls, until they needed a 'service' from one that is. Their general opinion was that one murdered prostitute is one less woman spreading the pox and bringing another

unwanted workhouse orphan into the world. However, should this killer decide to be a bit less discerning and turn his attentions further afield, then that could create a wide spread panic and a need for the authorities to move fast. It was time to pull his finger out. Trimp pulled his finger out of his nostril and rose to his feet.

### GIRL TALK, MAN TALK, DREAM TALK

Stanley Garrideb had never taken opium before, and was lying there asking himself why the hell not? He had never experienced anything like it, and as he lay, totally relaxed and unable to move, one swirling thought after another pervading his brain he wondered if this was what being a fairy felt like. He knew that he should make an effort to get up and leave but every time he tried, Tiger Lily would offer him another toke and he would float off on a tranquil sea.. There was no concept of time in that cellar. It could have been hours, it could have been days, it could have been weeks. Stan had no idea what arrangement Growler had made with the management or indeed how much money had exchanged hands but they were constantly attended on until they slipped away into peaceful slumber, to find on waking, more of the same. After a while Stan decided that the best course of action was to leave it to Growler Griffin. He seemed to know what he was doing when it came to all things nefarious.

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Dawn's early light found Samuel Trimp at the location of the first murder. Knowing that a search might be fruitless, he felt obliged to start somewhere. Now, according to the notes, the body had been on the landing of the shabby tenement of George Yard. He stood at the entrance and tried to put himself into the mindset of the killer. Did he follow Martha Tabram into George Yard and then attack her? No, too risky, anybody could have been in the yard, he could have run straight into them. So he would have been lying in wait. Interesting. He would have been lying in wait because he knew these dingy little dwellings housed dollymops who came and went as the night progressed. It would be like spearing fish in a barrel. All he had to do was find a spot where he wouldn't be disturbed and when the opportunity presented itself... strike! Trimp took his time and walked round the yard. It was full of rubbish and discarded

barrels that the feckless just dumped rather than took responsibility for, and there in the corner, the remains of an old cart, the sort pulled along by one man, only this was long broken and neglected, where once were two fine wheels there remained only the broken wooden spokes of half a wheel, the main flat body had been propped up against the wall. Trimp noticed the piss stains against it. The perfect hiding place. He squeezed himself behind it and satisfied himself that this was where the killer had waited. He could feel it. From here he saw Martha stagger blind drunk into the yard and try and walk up the stairs to her room. He would have waited until she was halfway up and then seized his chance. He came to help her up the stairs, that way had anybody seen them it would not have looked untoward, a gay woman being helped along by a john. At the top of the stairs he would have had one last look around and then cut her throat. She had slid to the floor. The report said the woman had suffered thirty-nine stab wounds. Why stop at thirty-nine? Why not make it an even fifty? Could the killer have been disturbed?

With rising excitement Trimp returned to the cart propped against the wall, getting on his hands and knees he tried to ease himself into gap, the light was poor and the stink of piss was cloying. But taking his time and sweeping methodically with his hand just above the earth's surface he scoured for anything at all that could be useful, and then he found it. His hand touched upon a small object hard and metallic and he backed slowly out into the light for closer inspection.

As he turned himself about he found himself looking at a dainty pair of feet in black ankle boots. His eyes carried on up until on standing, he found himself lost in the prettiest green eyes he had ever seen.

"And who might you be sir?" she asked. "Pokin' about on your 'ands and knees at this ungodly hour o' the morning?"

"I beg your pardon," replied Trimp. "I didn't expect to find anybody about this early. Especially you Bess."

Bess's eyes widened in surprise. "How did you know my name?"

"I'm an admirer. I've seen you sing," said Trimp. He looked at her boots again. Garrideb was right about her feet. They were lovely.

"Admirer? Trouble more likely."

"Trouble? Me?"

"So, what are you doing crawling around down there?"

"A woman was murdered here, the body was found by a fat man called Jonah, police found him at the scene with Stanley Garrideb, Faye Kennedy and you. Now, less than a month later a Miss... oh blimey, what was it now? A Miss somebody or other, ends up dead in Buck's Row. Surprise, surprise she worked for Stanley Garrideb. We go round to see Mister Garrideb and there he is sat happy as a lark with the fat man's head in his lap. When asked why he was killed he said, and I quote, "To stop him singing." Did fatty know something we don't?"

"If you heard Jonah sing you would have understood the meaning of that comment."

"I have heard him sing. I understand you are stepping out with a Mister 'Growler' Griffin?"

"I'd hardly call it stepping out. I fucked him for a while. That's it."

The coarseness of Bess's comment made it all the way through to Samuel Trimp's loins.

"Are you fucking him now?"

"No, no. I'm not," said Bess, an edge of anger to her voice.

"Thank goodness for small mercies." Trimp smiled.

Bess smiled back and Samuel Trimp fell in love.

"You want to come inside?"

The way she said it conjured up delicious images. There was nothing he would like more. But he was an officer of the law. He was supposed to be above these things. Such pleasures as Bess offered were for the likes of Griffin and Garrideb. God curse them.

"I... yes. Yes, I would. Thank you."

He followed her back up the stairs, admiring the sway of her hips. She made climbing stairs look like a dance. By the time they reached the door he was unsure if he would be able to resist her charms, should it come to that.

She showed him into the parlour. A freckled redhead was sat at the table dressed in a flimsy shift, bathing her feet in a basin. Trimp swallowed as she looked up at him. He was in a poor man's heaven. He told himself to take control, to master his emotions.

He stepped forward. "And you would be Faye Kennedy."

"I s'pose I would be, unless I wasn't," replied the girl, drying her feet.

He looked away from her ankles, focusing on the threadbare rug.

"I'm sorry?" he was confused.

"You talk funny mister," said Faye. "Tellin' me what I would be. Isn't that one o' them conditional clauses? I would be Faye Kennedy if I wasn't Sue Hampton."

Trimp was surprised. His fingers went to his nose automatically. He forced his hand back into his pocket. "Then you aren't Faye Kennedy?"

"I never said that," said Faye.

"She's flammin' you," said Bess. "You want to watch that one."

"It's the way you speak," said Faye. "Don't say to a girl you would be... It's not friendly.

It's pompous. Only bluebottles talk like that."

"I am a bluebottle."

"I know. But there's no need to act the prick when yer off duty is there?"

"I'm not off duty." Did he really talk like a bluebottle? "Do I really act like a prick?"

Bess laughed behind him. "She's rattled your cage hasn't she?"

They both had.

"So tell me about this Mister Griffin, then. You're no longer seeing him?"

Faye laughed. "Don't go there, Mister."

Bess frowned. She looked angry and fragile. "No. I'm not."

"May I ask why?"

"Cos he's a bastard."

"Tell me something I don't know. Any other reasons?"

Bess smiled. Faye laughed.

"Yes. He..." She bit her lip. She was struggling with her emotions.

Faye stepped in. "We're good time girls, yeh?"

Trimp nodded.

"When Mister Garrideb took us on, we hoped that was over. Growler had other ideas. He's got a client he keeps trying to push on Bess. When she said no, he got in a strop and asked me. I told him where to get off."

"And this client would be?"

"There you go again," snorted Faye. "Talkin' like a porker. We don't know who the client is. He wears a mask. Goes around with two posh coves. Right snide they are."

"Hmm. And you didn't want anything to do with them?"

"No," said Bess. "Those days are over. I'm not a whore, Inspector. I was, I'll grant you but..."

"Leopards can change there spots, Miss," said Trimp, kindly.

"You reckon?" Bess looked hopelessly hopeful.

"I do."

Faye was looking out the grimy window. She shuddered. "Urgh. There he is again."

Trimp moved over to the window. He could see a plump man in the yard, looking up at them. He was dressed in a ridiculous white military tunic. A dozen medals glistened in the sunlight. He was carrying a small medical bag.

"Who is he?"

Faye shrugged. "Nobody. He gives us the creeps is all."

"Who is he?"

"What are you, a parrot?" said Bess with a twinkle. "He's a doctor. He treated Jonah once. He's not very nice. I don't think he likes us girls too much. I think he much prefers what someone like you might have to offer."

Trimp nodded. A lot of people didn't like girls like Bess and Faye. That alone wasn't a crime. It was a crime however when those people decided to do something drastic about their dislike.

"Has he bothered you?"

"No. He just looks."

Trimp wanted to look at Bess too. He knew it was hopeless. Still, if he could do something for these girls. Make them think of him kindly, that would be something.

"If you'll excuse me ladies, it's been a pleasure but I must be going."

Bess nodded and showed him to the door.

"See yer, Mister Bluebottle," grinned Faye.

"Goodbye Miss Kennedy/Hampton..."

Trimp raced down the stairs two at a time and emerged into the yard. The little man was still there, staring at him through his owlish spectacles. Trimp's nostrils quivered. Good God. Was he wearing scent? He must be a foreigner. French perhaps.

"You there. Move along."

"I'm sorry, Constable? I take it I'm committing no offence?"

He was right. The man was foreign. A yankee. He breathed in the scent. An effeminate one at that.

"Not that I know of," said Trimp. "Move along before you do."

"But it was you I wished to speak to."

"Indeed? Do I know you?"

"Alas, no. But I'm sure we shall become great friends. The name's Tumblety. Doctor Francis Tumblety." He offered a hand. It was cold and damp. "I have a great respect for your British policemen."

"Really? That makes a nice change."

"Care for a nip?" The American offered him a flask. It was new. The smell of leather made a pleasant contrast to the cloying perfume.

"No thank you."

"I'm interested in these murders."

"Really?"

"Any leads? Clues?"

"I'm afraid I can't reveal that sort of information, Doctor."

"Understandable, Constable."

"It's Inspector."

"Understandable, Inspector. No my interest is professional. I wondered if I may be able to examine the bodies? In the name of science?"

"I think not."

"A pity. Are you sure I cannot interest you in a drop? You seem a little tense."

It was true. He was tense. That girl. She had got to him. His marriage. Another child. A flood of murder.

"I'm fine."

"You weren't hoping to sleep with that trollop were you?"

Trimp flushed.

"Damn your insolence, sir. I'm a married man."

"Forgive me. You are also a man. With desires."

Trimp grabbed the man by the collar of his tunic and shoved him up against the wall.

"You keep yer filthy little thoughts to yerself, Doctor. Now, fuck off before I arrest you for indecency."

"But I..." The doctor's eyes were wild, with fear and excitement. "But I haven't done anything. I'm just being friendly."

"Fuck off and take your friendship with you."

He pushed Tumblety. The doctor stumbled in the rubbish, scrambled to his feet and was off with more speed than Trimp had thought possible. He glanced up at the window. Bess was looking out. He raised his hat and left, whistling. He was feeling better than he had in months.

\*\*\*

Stan awoke to find himself drenched in vomit. The cool soothing hands of the Sister of Mercy calmed him. She chattered away in tongues, urging him to take his medicine. He took a toke on the pipe. The Sister turned into the old crone, grinning and nodding approvingly.

He could hear a bear roaring nearby. He looked up. It was thrashing wildly less than two yards away. He blinked. It wasn't a bear. It was Growler. He was laughing and nodding at him. He was speaking in tongues too. Stan closed his eyes. Jesus was there. What was he doing here? He began to panic. Had the Gentiles got it right after all? It wasn't Jesus. It was his mother, wearing a beard. The beard had gone now. She was smiling at him. Her arms opened. There was a bloody wound on her breast where her

heart had been. Her sacred heart. He sobbed. His mother offered him the pipe and Growler laughed again. He was hungry but he didn't know how to eat. He didn't know if he had a mouth. Perhaps he could just breathe in sustenance from the womb around him.

\*\*\*

Trimp strode manfully through the lobby of the police station whistling a jaunty air.

"Mornin' Freddie," he boomed as he passed Sergeant Warner's desk.

Freddie Warner was shocked. He had never heard the Inspector whistle and seldom seen him smile. Grabbing the file he had been working on he followed Trimp into his office.

"Morning sir. Everything erm...Everything alright?"

"Never better, Sergeant. Why wouldn't it be?"

"Well it's just that usually yer a bit of a grumpy bastard. Morning's especially."

"I'm not that bad am I?"

Warner's face took on a grave expression. "Yes sir, you are, sir. Sorry, sir."

"Don't worry about it Frederick. Let's hope equilibrium is fully restored by tomorrow."

"Let's hope so, sir," replied Warner, sounding a bit more optimistic.

"Right then! To business. What have you got?"

"I've been poking about into the life of Stanley Garrideb as you requested, sir."

"And?"

"Not much to report, sir, Born here, well hereabouts anyroad, down in Whitechapel. Jewish, but doesn't attend synagogue or any Jewish clubs as far as I'm aware. I had a poke round his old manor, spoke to a few old neighbours. They said he lived with the old man and the two of them got on well. Would always stop for a chat and both would be only too happy to look after their more elderly neighbours, yer know, run an errand

or two, or fix a few things up for them. Nobody had a bad word to say about either of 'em, actually."

"Hmmm." Trimp was lost in thought, trying to stay focused, his mind kept straying to green eyes, bathing feet, feisty girls with quick answers and very kissable lips. "Go on, Sergeant."

"Right..." Warner looked down at his file. "Ah yes. Was pretty cut up when the old man died, but wasted no time after. Sold the family house, the business, the whole lot, investing it all in The Palace Of Wonder. Seemed he had no interest at all in continuing the family business."

"Which was?"

"Butcher's sir... They both ran it until the old feller shuffled off."

"So, our man would know how to cut off someone's head?"

"I would have thought so sir, yes."

"Or more to the point, not be squeamish around blood and guts and all of that."

"Yes sir, true enough."

Trimp thought for a long moment. He plucked a hair from his nostril but the sneeze never came. "You've not mentioned the mother, Sergeant. Where does she fit in to all this?"

"She doesn't."

"Go on."

"No. That's just it. Nowhere. I couldn't find anything about her whatsoever. No death certificate, nothing. Neighbours knew nothing either. Both men never talked about a wife or mother."

"Blimey Sergeant, if that's 'not much to report' I'd hate to see something that is. He's a personable feller this Garrideb but there's more to him than meets the eye. Let's pay another visit to his House of Pleasures and have another chat, friendly like."

"Right you are sir. There is something else."

"Oh Good. What?"

"I looked into it sir, and technically there's nothing you can do if a transported convict makes his way back to these shores uninvited. Not anymore, anyway."

"I know that Sergeant, but Griffin doesn't, and I don't see anything at all wrong with keeping him on his toes. Do you, Sergeant?"

"Couldn't agree more, sir."

"S'gonna be a lovely day, Sergeant. A lovely day!"

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Faye and Bess were hungry. They stepped out of George Yard, enjoying the rare morning sunshine.

"You gonna dab it up with the Inspector then?"

"Eh, What are you talking about, Faye? I've only just met him."

"And everybody else you've dabbled you've known for ages, have you?"

"Yes," said Bess getting serious. "At least twenty minutes. What sort of girl do you think I am? He is quite nice though, there is something about him."

"Give over Bess, he's a Jack. There are no nice ones and you know it. He's a bit weird, if you ask me. The way he looks at you.... t'ain't right."

"It's the way he was looking at me that I liked."

"Give over, he was just like all the others. Desperate!"

"Oh Faye," laughed Bess, "it wasn't like that, he had lovely sad eyes, all vulnerable."

"Gammon. Hard they were, and cruel. I bet he's a cold fish. Honestly he'll be just like the others. On the randy. When he's got what he wants he'll chew you up and spit you out. I bet he wouldn't even lend you a hanky to wipe yourself."

"Well we'll have to agree to disagree. I thought he was nice." It was strange, Bess found herself feeling protective towards the police inspector.

"Don't let yer boyfriend hear you talking like that. He'll get jealous."

"He's not my boyfriend, Faye and you know it."

"In that case you don't mind if I...?" Faye let the question hang in the air.

Bess sighed. "Be my guest."

"Thanks Bess. Now that's a man!" Faye was too lost in thoughts of Growler Griffin to notice Bess roll her eyes.

"I thought you were sweet on Stan?"

"I was. I am. But a girl can't wait forever."

They rounded the corner into Spitalfields and came across a crowd of stallholders cheering on a fight between two drink-sodden mollishers

"You keep yer fuckin' mitts off my man, yer cunt," roared one of the women, dragging the other by the hair.

"Your man?" screamed the other, tripping her assailant and kicking her in the ribs.

"Your fuckin' man is he? Let's see how he can fuck yer with my boot up your cunt!"

"Lumme," laughed Faye. "It's Dark Annie. She's gettin' a good kickin'."

"Who's the other mot?" asked Bess.

"Fuck knows."

Faye waded in and dragged the woman off Dark Annie.

"Oi! Lay off. She's had enough!"

"Ark at you, ginger snatch!" sneered the woman, pulling away from Faye's grasp.

"Yeh. Who asked you?" panted Dark Annie, kicking the girl's legs out from under her. A whoop of joy rose up from the crowd as Faye's skirts rode up over her thighs. She sprang to her feet and let rip with a powerful thump to Dark Annie's jaw that sent her sprawling in the mud. Then grabbing a box of fish from a stall she hurled it at the other woman. The fish flew, and the woman's heel skidded on one. She lost her balance and ended up crushing the wind from Dark Annie.

"You should be fuckin' ashamed o' yerselves. Carryin' on like a gang o' nobblers. Go on. Fuck off home."

A couple of stallholders helped the women to their feet. They staggered away, muttering. Dark Annie paused to be sick and then tottered off into the crowds. The stallholders began to applaud.

"All right! Show's over boys," laughed Faye, rejoining Bess. "Now who's gonna treat a couple o' poor girls to some grub an' ale?"

\*\*\*

Trimp leaned back in his chair, and was turning his attention to thoughts of food when he remembered. It give him a little thrill as he reached into his pocket and removed the hard metal object he had found in George Yard. He placed it carefully on his blotting pad and opening the top drawer of his desk took out a magnifying glass. He examined it thoroughly.

"Warner!"

After a few moments the sergeant came into the office.

"Sir?"

"What d'yer reckon?" He passed the glass over to Warner and indicated he should take a look.

Warner came over to the desk and studied the object. He picked it up with the tips of his fingers and brought it up close, turning it around.

"Well. It's silver and it's expensive. Where's the rest of it?"

"No idea. I found it at the scene of the first murder."

"Well whoever lost it will be well hacked off. One can't live without the other so to speak. I wouldn't have thought George Yard the sort of place to house such treasure."

"My thoughts too. It was dropped there in what could best be described as a hiding place by our killer, I reckon."

Warner whistled. "That's a big statement sir. A hell of a lot of men carry hip flasks. They're all the rage at the moment."

"Do you have one, Warner?"

"I do, sir."

"And where were you on the morning of August the seventh?"

"Eh?"

"Relax," said Trimp. "I'm playing you like a fish."

"Oh. Very good sir. Course, mine ain't a corker like this. This un's solid silver. Don't come cheap these. And if I'm not mistaken..." Warner spat on the silver flask top and rubbed it vigorously against his police tunic. The dust and grime of George Yard started to disappear. He held it back up to the magnifying glass. "Yes, I thought so... Look sir, That's a royal crest."

"It belongs to a member of the royal family?"

"Not necessarily. It's sold exclusively by a firm which makes 'em for the royal family."

"So it's possible."

"Anything's possible, sir. Don't make it true."

Trimp recalled Tumblety taking a swig from a hip flask. He remembered the smell of new leather.

"Have you run across that weird, perfumed, yankee quack yet Warner?"

"Care to be more specific, sir?"

"The name's Tumblety. Dresses like George bloody Washington."

"Heard a few rumours sir. Why what about him?"

"He had a brand new flask only this morning. I saw it just prior to giving his arse a good kick for pestering haybags."

"He probably liked it, sir. They say he's interested in all that Greek stuff. You know, in the back door an' up the nancies. We've had reports of him beating up young lads. There are whispers that he has female organs in jars at his lodgings."

"Good grief," sighed Trimp. "Looks like we better have a chat with him."

## THE VISIONARY

They say that it is only in times of adversity that we truly come to know ourselves, and during his timeless exile in Limehouse, Stan Garrideb was learning more and more about himself. The first thing he discovered was that he had an addictive personality. Not only was he addicted to the thrill of the Music Hall, but he could also see himself becoming addicted to opium. He loved it. The dreams, the nightmares, the nausea, the hysteria, the laughter. He loved it all. He wanted to stay there forever. Growler shared his enthusiasm. If anything was going to tear Stanley Garrideb away from his opium odyssey and back into the real world it would have to be a shock of monumental proportions.

\*\*\*

*'CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE'*

Warner stepped away from the sign nailed upon the door of the Palace.

"You don't think he's skipped town do you, sir?"

"No. He's born and brought up in Whitechapel, where's he gonna go?" Trimp cursed as the rain ran down the back of his neck. Why couldn't the sun shine for more than twenty minutes without another bloody deluge following hot on its heels? "Bloody weather. It's times like this when I feel like doing a runner abroad. You speak, French, Warner?"

"No, sir. So, what next?"

Trimp was tempted to suggest another visit to Bess and Faye's lodgings to see if they knew the whereabouts of Garrideb. He decided against it. "Let's go and see that perfumed quack. You got his address?"

Warner nodded.

"You got the silver top from the flask?"

Warner nodded again.

"Right, lead on Macduff."

"Such a lovely day, sir, d'yer want to walk?" It was all Warner could do to stop himself laughing.

"No I fucking don't," snapped Trimp, splashing off in search of a carriage.

\*\*\*

Someone was sucking at Stan's arbor vitae. He'd never experienced such pleasure. He looked down, his head too heavy for his neck. There was no one there. A rat scuttled off his lap, flashing a malevolent grin in farewell. Had the rat been sucking him off? If so it must've had a champion cakehole. He grinned and giggled. Growler giggled too from his berth across the cellar. So did the girls.

He was holding a feather. A glorious peacock feather. He was tickling a girl with it. She was laughing. It wasn't a feather. It was a knife. She wasn't laughing. She was screaming. He was screaming. He opened his eyes. The world was red. He accepted the pipe. He coughed until he was empty. A shell. A laughing shell.

\*\*\*

Settled in the back of the cab as they clattered towards Aldgate, Warner asked, "Do you really believe that silver top belongs to our killer?"

"There's a definite possibility. I believe the killer hid where I found it. Why?"

"It's just that George Yard is a right den of thieves. It's equally possible that the top came from a gang of nobblers sharing out their booty after a night's skulduggery."

"Mmm. I believe I may have to pay closer attention to this Palace of Wonder. It seems that all roads lead there."

"Just like Rome sir. Only without the Pope."

\*\*\*

He could hear Growler singing a sea shanty. The girls were joining in, singing in Chinese. He wanted to sing too but he had no voice. No mouth. The rat was back in his lap. He could feel it, lying there, a heavy weight. The singing stopped. There was silence, broken by moans and snores. Peace. The weight grew heavier. It was pushing him into the ground. He opened his eyes. It was painful. Had someone glued them shut? He raised a hand and wiped his face. The hand came away wet and slick. He sat up. Jonah's head lay in his lap. It was looking up at him. An inane grin on that big silly face. Another dream. More real than the others. He grinned back. Jonah winked. He began to feel uneasy.

"Growler?" he called.

"Mmm?"

"Growler?"

"What?"

"Can you see it?"

"What?"

"Look."

There was a sigh and a curse. Growler tried to sit up. He fell back. The girl helped him sit. He stared for a moment at Jonah. Then he stared at Stan, his eyes wide, suddenly cold sober. He looked a final time to see if he was really sure. This was no longer an opium dream.

"Hey, relax, *mon frere!* Here, have a blast on the flue," said the head.

Stan and Growler screamed.

The apparition didn't disappear. It jumped to its feet, blocking its ears with two fingers.

"Easy boys, the banshee reunion is next door."

Stan stared open-mouthed. Jonah's head had a body, but it wasn't his body. It was tall and thin as a whip. Maybe ghosts were allowed to improve their appearance? He wondered why he hadn't given himself some hair too.

"Jonah?" he whispered, feeling a little like Ebenezer Scrooge confronted with the spirit of his deceased partner Jacob Marley.

The figure looked over his shoulder. "Where? Hey, can you see him too?"

"You're not Jonah?" said Growler, staggering to his feet, incredulous.

"Give the man a cheroot," said the figure. "The name's Job. I'm his big brother."

"You're twins?"

"Nah. He's my baby brother. I'm a good three years older. Or is it four? I can't remember. Still, who's keeping count?"

"Wh-what are you doin' here then?" asked Stan. His heartbeat was beginning to steady. He refused the pipe offered by Tiger Lily.

"You angel," grinned Job, taking the pipe and inhaling deeply. "I'm looking for you, Rabbi. And of course the charms of Tiger Lily are always hard to resist. How about it, Princess?" He winked at Tiger Lily.

She lowered her eyes and smiled demurely. Growler was unsure if the old crone understood English, but she looked pleased enough. He couldn't resist asking. "Er... Job... you like Tiger Lily, eh?"

"Hey, *Mon Ami*, she's a real Molly Mumper."

"Then you're not... you know... like your brother?"

Job frowned. He took another suck on the pipe. "Hmmm. A nutless noggin?" He handed the pipe back to Tiger Lily. "I doooooon't think so boys. Feast your eyes on this!"

With one fluid motion he had undone his breeches and let them fall to his ankles. Job

stood proud and monumental. "Donkey Job at your service." He swung his hips and Stan staggered back, unsure if perhaps he was still hallucinating.

"Put it away, for fuck's sake! What you lookin' for us for anyway? How did you know where to find us? Fuck! Cover it up. For the love of God, I beg of you!"

Job laughed. Growler began laughing too.

"That's quite a talent, Job. So, out with it chum. Why you lookin' for us? Who told you how to find us?"

"Jonah told me," said Job, simply.

"Eh?"

"He thinks the world of you two. You especially, Stan." he said. "When he told me you were here, I thought, it's my lucky day. I meet you lads and get off my bonce all in one go. Fill her up, flower?"

Tiger Lily filled the pipe and handed it to him.

"Ahhhh! Aladdin's Cave!" He began to drift.

Growler looked at Stan. Stan shrugged. Growler smacked Job, hard across the face.

"Whoah! At ease, me old lag. What's up with you then? Didn't fancy life down under? What was it, the food or the weather? Oh I know! It was those bugs... millions of 'em!"

"How the fuck did you know that?" asked Growler. "He's been talkin' to Trimp."

"Who?" asked Job, dreamily. He grabbed Growler's hand. "Oh him. The workhouse snitch. Hmmm. He's a bluebottle now. You hate him don't you, or is it love? Hard to tell 'em apart, sometimes."

"What the fuck's goin' on?"

"I can see things," said Job.

"Eh?"

He turned to Stan. "The past. The dead speak to me. That's why I like this." He held up the pipe. "It's the only thing that shuts them up for a while."

"Ballocks."

Job shrugged. "Come here." He lay a hand on Stan. "Hmmm. A butcher's boy. Didn't like it. Did you? But you didn't want to upset Dad. Good lad. He says it's okay. You do what you want to do, son. You... Woah! Oww! I'm gettin' your Mam now. She's..." He frowned. Beads of sweat broke out on his skin. "She's... no. It's dark. It's red. It's..."

Stan snatched his hand away. Job was trembling.

"Gimme another pipe. There's a good girl."

"What? What did you see?" asked Growler all agog.

"Nothin'. Leave it alone," snapped Stan. "Give him another pipe."

Job smoked.

Stan and Growler refused refills. It was time to go. They were starving.

"So," said Stan. "Why did your brother tell you to find us?"

"He wants me to avenge his murder."

"Did he tell you who did it?"

Job shook his head. "He doesn't know. He was asleep at the time. He told me you would help."

"He could be just the thing we're lookin' for," said Growler. "I mean, now that Jonah's no longer with us. His brother'll pack 'em in. Can yer chaunt as well?"

Job took another puff on the pipe and began singing '*The Organ Grinder*' at the top of his lungs. It sounded like a man being tortured with red hot pokers.

"Not bad," Growler conceded.

"Not bad?" said Stan. "Not bad? Let's put him on with fuckin' Leather Apron an' we'll really bring the house down. Nah. I've got a better idea. I think this lad is gonna be like King Solomon's mine, Growler ol' chum. Listen, Job, you need a job, yeh?"

"Never say no to an honest day's work, a toke on a pipe or the chance to shoot your wad, that's my motto, *Capitano*," grinned Job.

"Admirable. So, howzabout you do what you do, for me, at the Palace of Wonder? We'll make you a star."

"Do what I do? Fuck an' smoke opium? I'm your man." He looked so like his brother when he smiled. It was uncanny.

"No, rusty guts, speak to the departed. The crowd'll lap it up."

Growler frowned. "Come off it. You don't really believe this do yer? It's gammon. He's a dimmick."

Stan shrugged. "Who cares? He's good at it. People'd pay good chink to see him."

"I don't know," said Job.

"Why not? You've got a talent, boy. What's the problem?"

"It hurts. The things I see. Talkin' to the dead. It hurts. That's why I come here."

"What about if I keep you stocked up on opium?"

Job's eyes lit up. "You're on."

Stan was about to offer his hand but then thought better of it. "So. Time to go?"

Growler frowned. "We've still got a problem. Ezekiel and Trimp. Trimp says I could be hanged for comin' back. And I don't think Ezekiel's the kind of bloke to let sleepin' dogs lie. Do you?"

"We can handle him," said Stan. "You like fightin', Job?"

Job grinned. "Who doesn't?"

"An' don't you worry about Trimp. I've got a plan, Growler. You leave it to your Uncle Stan. We can't just rot away in here forever."

Growler could think of worse places to rot away.

"Go on then. You've twisted me arm. But if that fucker Trimp tries to crap me, I'll kill him, I' swear."

"And we'll be right there with yer. Let's go."

As Growler headed for the exit Job, pulled Stan back by the arm. "Listen *Capitano*, I didn't mean to shock you. If you ever want to talk about your mother?"

Stan looking Job squarely in the eye replied, "No I don't, And I would thank you never to bring up the subject again."

"Don't you worry my fine new friend. I could do without the pain." He fixed Stan with a heart melting smile. "Your secret's safe with me."

## A MATCH MADE IN HELL

Aaron Ezekiel hadn't built up his empire by taking no for an answer. If people crossed him they had to pay. He had been in a foul humour all week. Two people had crossed him. Stan Garrideb and that jumped up policeman. He could not take Garrideb out of the picture without attracting the attention of his guard dog. Of course, they would both have to suffer. But sending David round to break their legs would not suffice. He had to be clever. It was like playing chess. He had to win, but more important, his reputation had to remain spotless to the outside world.

After much thought he decided that there was a lot of truth in the old saying 'all good things come to he who waits.' He would be patient. He would send Samuel Trimp a message. His carriage came to a halt outside the dingy boarding house in Aldgate. A mousey maid answered his summons. He handed her his card.

"Doctor Tumblety. Now."

She curtsied and ran up the stairs. He didn't wait for her to return. He followed her up, pushed passed her and entered the room. He crossed the drawing room and flung open the bedroom door.

A young blonde boy of fifteen or thereabouts was strapped face down, naked to the bed. His back and buttocks criss-crossed with livid welts. Tumblety red-faced and dripping sweat, dropped the belt.

"I... er... it's not what it looks like," he panted.

Ezekiel looked at the boy. "Get out."

The boy tried to obey but he was securely bound to the bed.

"Untie him and get rid of him," said Ezekiel with a sigh.

"Do I know you, sir?" said Tumblety.

"No. Just do it."

Tumblety released the boy and tossed him a coin. "Same time tomorrow."

The boy collected his clothes and ran for the door.

"Doctor Tumblety, I presume?" said Ezekiel.

"Yes. And you are?"

"Ezekiel. Aaron Ezekiel."

"Ah. The local philanthropist. Your reputation precedes you."

"As does yours, Doctor. I see the reports were not exaggerated."

"As I said, it's not what it looks like."

"I couldn't care less. What goes on behind closed doors is no business of mine."

"Quite. A brandy?" Tumblety took a swig from his flask.

"No. Thank you. Business."

"Oh? You are not ill, I hope?"

"If I were, you would be the last person I would come to."

Tumblety's cheeks flushed.

"No. I have a problem. A Detective Inspector Samuel Trimp."

"Ah. Him. A singularly rude fellow, if I may say?"

"You may. I concur."

"And? What about him?"

"I need to put the frighteners on him. And yet they tell me he is fearless."

"No man is without fear, Aaron. May I call you Aaron?"

"No. It's Mister Ezekiel. I am here to conduct business, not to have my buttocks flayed."

"Sir! I..."

"Save it. He has a wife."

"Ah!" Tumblety's eyes glinted with anticipation.

"Let us apply a little pressure to his beloved spouse. I think something like a dead cat on the doorstep should suffice. It'll terrify the little woman and it'll send a nice message to our dear Inspector. Don't you think?"

"Perfect," said Tumblety. "So simple. So statesmanlike. So..."

"Here. Your expenses."

Ezekiel tossed a leather purse onto the table. It landed with the pleasant sound of clinking money. "Good day, Doctor."

"And to you, sir."

As Ezekiel reached for the door, it swung open. He stood face to face with Inspector Trimp and Sergeant Warner. Ezekiel blinked in momentary surprise.

"Ah. Like attracts like I see," said Trimp.

"Good day to you, Inspector," snapped Ezekiel tipping his hat and pushing past.

"Well, Doctor. We meet again," said Trimp. "Have you met Sergeant Warner?"

"No. I have not had the pleasure. Please gentlemen, come in. Sit down."

\*\*\*

Mister Ezekiel heard the bells of Saint Botolph's chime eleven as his carriage rode on. He smiled to himself. Phase two of his strike back would now be in operation. Nothing big, nothing spectacular, but unless he had misjudged his man, it would hurt Garrideb deeply. He chuckled softly.

\*\*\*

Bess and Faye returned to George Yard from Spitalfield, laden down with fresh meat and they hadn't even had to put out for it. Passing the spot on the stairs where Martha Tabram met her end, Bess crossed herself.

"Ah come on, Bess, don't bother with all that mumbo jumbo," laughed Faye. The smile faded from her lips as she reached the door to their ken. It hung half off its hinges,

broken and useless. "On second thoughts, do it again. I think we need all the help we can get."

The girls lay the meat down in the hallway. Faye picked up a leg of lamb to use as a club. She handed a fish to Bess.

"Better than nothing."

They advanced into the room, expecting the worst.

"I smell whore!" came a harsh voice.

Sat at the table, drinking gin from a mug was John Pizer, Leather Apron. He scowled at the girls as they entered.

"About time. You girls been fucking all morning, is that it?"

"Get out," snapped Faye. "Get the fuck out of here."

"Not a very friendly welcome," came a voice from behind.

The girls turned. Standing against the wall, a cold smile on his lips, was David, Mister Ezekiel's trusted demander. He was paring his nails with a pearl-handled cut-throat razor.

\*\*\*

"I didn't realise you moved in such exalted company, Doctor," said Trimp, pushing his way into the bedroom. "Friend of yours, this Ezekiel then, sir?"

"I've never met him before in my life, Inspector."

"Of course not. I'm curious as to what a man like Ezekiel could want with a person such as yourself..."

Tumblety saw Trimp looking with interest at the ropes tied to the bed.

"Don't pay no mind to those Inspector. A little experiment I was conducting earlier.

Mister Ezekiel had no part in that, I assure you."

"Glad I am to hear it, Doctor." Trimp's sharp eyes were taking everything in. It was making Tumblety nervous. "I'm led to believe you are partial to the odd experiment."

"Meaning?"

"According to my Sergeant here, he's heard that you are amassing quite an interesting collection."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes, really." Trimp snapped the sentence out in such an aggressive manner it made Tumblety jump to attention. "Now look, you fucking rancid quack, my feet are soaking and you stink! I do not want to spend anymore time than I have to in your company. So let's cut this polite *pas de deux* and get down to brass tacks. Do you keep women's parts in jars?" Trimp pointed to a padlocked trunk. "In there perhaps?"

Tumblety smiled. "Yes I do, Inspector. Like it or not, I am a doctor and I am always looking into ways to advance medicine." From his waistcoat he removed a key, and moved over to the trunk. "I have nothing to hide Inspector Trimp. Everything is all above board." He swung the trunk open to reveal large jars full of strange shapes floating in liquid like some long lost creatures from the deepest ocean. Trimp stared, giving nothing away. "I came by these specimens through legitimate means," The doctor continued. "The ladies were dead already and I retrieved the parts from the morgue with full permission of the authorities."

Tumblety reached into his pocket and retrieved his flask, taking a hefty swig.

"Right. I've seen enough. Come on, Sergeant."

Warner headed straight for the door needing no second invitation.

At the door Trimp turned and asked, "You say you've never met Ezekiel before and yet he seeks you out specifically. Why is that?"

"That is a confidential medical matter between me and him, sir," replied Tumblety.

"Of course," said Trimp. "No doubt you and I will see each other again."

"No doubt we will, Inspector. No doubt we will."

As they descended the stairs Warner asked, "Did you do it, sir?"

"I did, Sergeant."

"Well done, sir. I didn't see you do it at all. Where to now then, sir?"

"Anywhere that doesn't conjure up aromas from the depths of Hades."

Trimp was feeling uneasy. Ezekiel and Tumblety. A match made in Hell.

\*\*\*

"What do you want?" asked Bess.

"You," said David. "Mister Ezekiel's your new boss. You're workin' for us now. How much you earned this mornin'?"

"You've got a nerve. Breakin' in, tellin' us who we work for. Think you're hard do yer?" sneered Faye. "You're just a jumped up Yiddish pimp. You're not even that, coz none of us girls are gonna work for you."

David sighed. "Oh dear. They told me you might act up. Well, naughty girls get a good spanking. Ain't that right, Leather Apron?"

"*Meshugena shikseh*," snarled Leather Apron, removing a hammer from the pouch on his apron. "This *schlooche* is mine!"

"Fuck you!" Bess hit him across the face with the fish.

Leather Apron staggered back under the assault and David laughed at the sight until Faye's leg of lamb caught him on the jaw, splitting his lip. He lunged at Faye, knocking the meat from her hands. Leather Apron pushed the table into Bess, catching her hip and making her lose her balance. He was on her at once, smacking the fish aside as he began to pummel her.

"Not the face!" yelled David.

Leather Apron went to punch her but she spat in his eyes, blinding him for a moment. David had backed Faye into a corner. His hands reached for her throat and began to tighten. She scratched at him like a hell cat, but David was strong. He laughed at her efforts.

Bess scrambled away from Leather Apron and jumped on David's back. He staggered back, still keeping his grip on Faye, smashing Bess against the wall. She lost her hold and fell to the floor. Leather Apron needed no invitation to leap on top of her, his hammer raised.

"Not her fuckin' face you idi..." David stopped in mid flow, speechless.

In the doorway was a man he had seen die. But there was something wrong. His body wasn't right. Leather Apron screamed in horror at the sight.

Job didn't know the two men, but he had seen one of them in his visions. He strode inside and pulled David from Faye. He flung him across the room as if he were a ragdoll.

Leather Apron tried to run, but the passageway was blocked by Stan and Growler. Growler saw Bess, her ripped skirt, her flushed face. He punched Leather Apron hard on the nose, sending him back into the room.

"What the fuck's goin' on?" yelled Growler. "You all right, Bess?"

Bess nodded. She pointed to Job who was using David as a punchbag, holding him up with one hand while raining ruthlessly efficient punches down on him with the other.

"You killed my fuckin' baby brother. Why? Why?"

"I didn't! I didn't!"

"Don't fuckin' lie to me!"

Stan kicked Leather Apron hard in the ribs. "You okay Bess?"

"They were waitin' for us. They say we've got to work for Mister Ezekiel from now on."

"Oh yeah?" said Stan. He crossed to Job. "Put him down."

"He killed my brother."

"You can't know that."

"I do. I can see it. I'm holding him."

"I didn't. Honest!" screamed David.

"Shut up."

"Let him go, Job. We don't need the bluebottles all over us."

Job released the battered and bloody David. Stan held him up.

"Now listen, we could kill you now, you know that right?"

David nodded.

"The girls don't work for Ezekiel. Understood?"

David nodded.

"You work for us. Got it?"

David shook his head. "I can't. He'll kill me."

Stan sighed. "Go on Job. Finish him off."

"My pleasure, *Imperator!*"

"No. No. Please."

"Okay. Get out of town. Take the next Mary Blane an' take a long trip to the Monastery.

Got that?"

David nodded, heading for the door. Growler helped him on his way with a kick.

Leather Apron tried to follow, but Growler held him back.

"What about this cunt?"

Stan went up to him. "You hurt my Bess?"

"She's a whore."

Stan slapped him hard. "You watch your mouth. You wanna finish this one off, Job?"

Job shook his head. "No. He didn't hurt my brother."

"He might have."

"He didn't. I'd know."

Stan pinched Leather Apron's cheeks. "Your lucky day. Go on. Fuck off. And don't let me see you again."

Leather Apron lurched away and down the stairs.

"Mister Ezekiel ain't gonna be too pleased is he?" laughed Growler.

"Nah," sighed Stan. "Looks like this is war."

"Hey, tigers, who gives a monkeys about this Ezekiel?" said Job, helping Faye to her feet. "We've got two deeelicious little dollies here in need of some tender love and affection. The name's Job, Miss. My close friends call me Donkey Job. Wanna know why?"

"Not now, Job, please," said Stan. "You sure you're okay Bess?"

Bess smiled. "I am now. God I never thought I'd be pleased to see you an' Growler again. And who is this?" She cast an admiring glance at Job. "Don't tell me you're a eunuch too?"

"Come an' have a feel, little lady," grinned Job. "Hey, nice feet."

## HOT WATER, SCENT AND VISIONS

Doctor Tumblety was upset. He didn't like it when the authorities began prying into his private life. It may be time to move on again soon. He called the maid and asked her to fill him a bath. That jumped up policeman had unnerved him. Telling him he stank. How dare he? Tumblety had no sense of smell. Because of this he always took care to make sure he was clean and then doused in the finest French perfume to mask any other natural bodily odours that may shame him in the course of a busy day.

"Do I smell?" he asked the mousey little maid.

"No, sir." She scuttled away. She did not like the American. He scared her.

As he lay in the bath he thought about Trimp and Mister Ezekiel. How fortuitous. It would be a pleasure to make that man's life a living hell. In a way it was a shame. There was something very attractive about Samuel Trimp. He was so masculine. He would love to have him tied to the bed. To un-man him. To make him scream. Ezekiel had made it clear he was not to hurt him. He was to go through the wife. A dead cat! How tame. He would much rather a dead wife. As he was on the payroll he felt obliged to follow instructions, more's the pity. Oh well, perhaps if he opened up old tiddles a little bit, reveal a few glistening innards? Yes that would probably shock a weak idiotic woman. He towelled himself dry and lay on the bed. This job would be a pleasure. He would raise hell and then disappear. He stood up and cursed as his foot came in contact with something hard and cold. He looked down and grinned with delight.

"There you are my little beauty!" He picked up the silver top of his flask. He kissed it.

"I thought I'd lost you."

He went to the bureau and pulled out his old flask. The one with the missing top. Then he filled it with brandy, took a swig, and screwed the top firmly in place.

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Bess, strangely, declined Job's invitation to have a feel of his proud manhood, deciding instead, to round on Growler Griffin and Stan.

"So you're back are you? Like a bad smell. You both disappear without a word to any of us, leaving us to cope with all these bludgers crawlin' outa the wood work."

"Sorry Bess," said Growler trying his best to sound contrite. "It was all Stan's idea! He needed to go into lavender for a bit an' he needed me to show him all the best places."

"Thanks, Growler," Stan sighed.

"No problem, boss," said Growler, missing the sarcasm in Stan's tone.

"Look girls," said Stan assuming control. "You're right. It was totally wrong of us to run out on you but the truth is, I had that Ezekiel character breathing down me neck, and Growler here was having some trouble with a copper from his past."

"Tell us somethin' we don't know," said Faye. "We had a visit from your copper fella."

"What!?" said Stan and Growler together.

Faye continued. "Poking his nose in where it weren't wanted. Seemed to know all about you Stan...And you Growler. Bess thought he was quite the dandy, didn't you girl?"

"Faye, the only thing your laycock has in common with your mouth is that it would take a bleedin' watermelon to fill both. As it happens I thought the Inspector was nice. A real gent, unlike some I could mention." Bess shot Growler a withering look.

"Come on Bess, you ain't still sore at me, are yer girl? I was only looking after yer interests?"

"By pimping me off to some sadistic nutcase who doesn't go anywhere without a mask? If it's alright with you Terry, I'll look after me own bleedin' interests in future"

"Hey, hey come on everybody, let's calm it all down. Now, I've got something important to say." Once Stan was sure he had captured the attention of the room he

continued. "We're sorry we had to leave in a hurry, but we're back now and the Palace is going to re-open with a flourish. You girls are going to be an integral part of proceedings from now on and Job here, just like his brother, is going to be the main man, the new headline act!"

"Ooo," cooed Faye. "Can you sing as well?"

"Can I sing? Stand back ladies, and watch in wonder." Job stepped forward puffed out his chest, cleared his throat and...

"No! No, Job, it's not the singing I was thinking about," said Stan. "It was the other thing."

"Oh...Right. Sorry *Imperator!* Right then, Stand back ladies, and watch in wonder!" Job proceeded to unbuckle his breeches and was just about to 'unleash' when...

"No Job, for fuck's sake! The other thing....you know.... the visions."

"Oh right, sorry boss."

"Ha! Visions," snorted Faye. "This should be good!"

"Ahh, I see the lady is a cynic. Very well. You shall be my volunteer. If you will step forward please!"

Stan could not hide his pleasure at the ease with which Job slipped into his 'act'. He was a natural showman. Faye took a tentative step towards him.

"From across the room I thought you were beautiful," said Job looking deep into Faye's eyes. "Up close I see I was sadly mistaken!" Just as Faye's face started to crease into a frown Job continued, "...because you are stunning! A woman of such beauty must surely have a beau?"

"No...er...well...No!" Faye was completely at his mercy.

"Oh How foolish man can be? Please give me your hand."

Faye held out her hand and Job clasped it in both of his. Closing his eyes he took a deep breath. After what seemed an eternity, Job opened his eyes. They were sad and filled with compassion. "You were right to run away, Faye. No man should do that to his daughter."

Faye flushed with pain, shame and anger. She saw the others. The concern in their eyes.

"Stop starin' at me!" she snapped. She tried to pull away but Job's hand held hers tight.

"Shhh! It's okay. There's no shame. That was him. Not you. He's dead now. He's sorry."

"He fucking should be."

Job hugged her. "You don't have to forgive him."

"Too bloody right I don't. I..."

Job stroked her hair as she sobbed. At last she pulled away. She gave him a faint smile.

"Thank you. Is he...is he in hell?"

"We make our own hell, I think. If that's true, then yes. He's in it, sweet cheeks. Hey, I love those freckles. Have you got them all over?"

"I..."

"That's enough, Job," said Stan. "Anyone else want a go?"

Job strode over to Bess, his hands open. They enveloped hers. Warm and strong.

He began to sing.

*"All the dames of France are fond and free*

*And Flemish lips are really willing*

*Very soft the maids of Italy*

*And Spanish eyes are so thrilling*

*Still, although I bask beneath their smile,*

*Their charms will fail to bind me*

*And my heart falls back to Erin's isle*

*To the boy I left behind me."*

Bess's eyes were brimming with tears.

"Me Mam used to sing that to me when we were little. *The Boy I Left Behind*. I love it."

"God, he really can't sing can he?" gasped Faye. "No wonder Bess's cryin'."

"You know you're only teasin' me because of the sexual attraction you feel for me," grinned Job.

"In your dreams, boy."

"Oh yes. That's one dream I'm looking forward to." He glanced at Bess. A tear trickled down her cheek. It was a tear of happiness. He wiped it with his finger.

"Thank you, Jonah... Job... I'm sorry."

"Don't mention it... I... boss?"

"Yes?" said Stan.

"You know you promised to keep me in... you know, opium?"

"Hmmm."

"I think I need some now. I've come over all funny."

Job staggered and collapsed to the floor. A smile on his face.

"I think he's havin' that dream, Faye," said Growler, noticing the growth in the front of the unconscious man's breeches.

Stan tried to wake him but it was no use. "He's out cold. We better get him his medicine."

"Leave it to me, boss," grinned Growler. "Back in two shakes."

## CATS AND DISGUISES

Trimp strode through the lobby of the police station with Warner trailing in his wake. He reached his office and after hanging up his dripping overcoat turned to the sergeant and said, "I need to think, Warner, see that I am not disturbed."

"Aye aye, sir."

Trimp closed and locked the door. Slowly and methodically he removed all his clothes. He reached into the wooden locker behind his desk and took out a clean towel to pat himself down. He placed the towel on the floor, then taking his chair he put it at the foot of the towel. He lay down on the towel with his feet and calves up on the chair and his back straight along the floor. With his arms at his side he started taking deep breaths.

\*\*\*

"Okay lovelies, I really want us up and running by tomorrow evening so that leaves us with loads to do. We need to find out who is available, and plan a show. We need to get the word out that we're reopening. We need to sort out the bar and the food and..."

"Shouldn't we open Saturday instead, Stan? Give ourselves an extra day?"

"I know where you're comin' from Bess and it's a valid point. To be honest I ain't too bothered about tomorrow being full. Once word gets round about Job we'll really start packin' 'em in. We've got to take the Palace to the next level. The sort of acts that will really give us a reputation. I'm relyin' on you girls to recruit some pretty dollies, some real head turners. I want everybody talking about this place from miles around. I'm seeing the next few days as an opportunity to rehearse and tweak until we get it right."

"What about this Ezekiel?" said Bess. "I mean, I don't wanna be dampenin' yer ardour but he's not the sort o' fella who'll just, you know, lie down an' play nice."

"Bang on the button again, Bess, so what do you want me to do about it? Cower in terror? I can't hide forever. We get on with it and then I face whatever comes my way and deal with it best I can."

Faye looked at Stan and felt her heart melting. It was his gentle, solid, stubborn bravery that had attracted her in the first place. He never went looking for trouble but he didn't let it scare him. Which was probably just as well because trouble loved him.

From the floor Job moaned with pleasure but didn't wake up. The bulge in his pants was enormous now, he was obviously in the throes of some erotic dreams.

"I tell you what Stan," said Faye, admiringly. "We should have a rethink about making that the headline act."

"Maybe he could do both?" said Bess.

"Oh aye," said Stan. "*The Incredible Dandano!! He can see into your mind...and he's got a massive prick.* Oh yes, well done, ladies, that's a winner alright."

"The Incredible Dandano?" Faye laughed. "What's that all about?"

"Job's got a special talent. Agreed?"

"Yes."

"So we can't just bill him as '*Job - He don't sing but he's just as talented as his brother.*' He needs packaging."

"I agree with that bit," said Bess. "It's the Dandano bit I don't like. Sounds stupid."

"Fine Bess, I just made it up on the spur of the moment," said Stan. "It's not set in stone or anything. What can you come up with, seein' as you're such a Music Hall expert all of a sudden?"

"I'll ignore that flippant remark Stanley Garrideb," sniffed Bess. "You've gotta agree that when Job does his thing it's dead spooky, right?"

"Definitely," nodded Faye in agreement.

"So he's got to dress up as someone scary and mysterious, real exotic an' all. The sort of person or race we don't know a lot about..."

"Niggers," said Faye, enthusiastically.

"Don't be daft, Faye," sighed Bess. "We see loads o' those."

"Chinkies?" suggested Stan.

"Nah, they're ten a penny, so they are."

"Mmm. You're not wrong," agreed Stan, remembering his sojourn in the opium den.

"I've got it! Indians," cried Bess.

"Shall we stick feathers in his head an' give him a tomahawk? He can pretend to scalp the audience. It'll be a hoot!" giggled Faye.

"Not Red Indians, yer daft gowk! Indian Indians. From India. Brown him up, put a turban on him an' some spooky music. Dim the lights..."

"Hmm, nice one Bess," conceded Stan. "I like it. You could be onto something. Right. Go round up the girls. I'll stay here with Job, till Growler gets back. Meet you later on at the Palace."

"Hark at him, givin' out orders," sniffed Faye.

"I am your boss."

"Tchh. Always gotta have the last word."

\*\*\*

It was the connection between Ezekiel and Tumblety, Trimp was trying to fathom. He knew Ezekiel was devious. He would not have the courage to challenge Trimp directly, but he would have no qualms about employing another to do his dirty work. Someone with no direct connection to him or his associates. Tumblety. But he had fucked up. Bumping into him at Tumblety's had been the last thing Ezekiel wanted. But would that stop him? Was he the intended target? Or was it Garrideb? The time had come. He got

slowly to his feet. An hour had passed. The deep breathing had calmed and refreshed him. He dressed slowly and opened his door calling Warner in.

"There is a police federation seminar I have to attend, In Manchester of all places. I shall need you to hold the fort."

"Hold the fort? For how long, sir?"

"God knows, Warner, two days? A week? A year? I really can't say."

"But sir what if...what if?"

"Calm down, Warner. You are a perfectly capable officer. I have every faith in you."

"What shall I tell people if they ask as to your whereabouts?"

"That I'm at a seminar in Manchester. Why Warner? Do you not believe me?"

"No, Inspector. You get that blush whenever you start spinning a flam. You're blushing now."

"I'm not blushing. I'm hot. That's all."

\*\*\*

Tumblety was fond of animals. They didn't judge you like people. He often wished he had been born a cat. Life would be so much more pleasant. He liked Trimp's street too. It was very nice. Genteel but not too showy. Just a respectable middle-class neighbourhood. Tumblety had positioned himself behind the garden wall of the house opposite and was biding his time. He saw Jane the nurse, put the cat out, bend to pet it and then go inside. He shook his head. Imagine keeping such a trollop under your roof. All sex and disease. He shuddered. Trimp was sick. He wished he could do something to the nurse. She was asking for it all right, parading around in her starched uniform, bold as brass. But he had his instructions. He had been paid in advance and he would not let his patron down.

"*Miaow*," he called. "*Pshhwsshwshhh!*" He had brought some sardines from Spitalfields. They were beginning to smell. He called the cat again. The cat came. A proud Ginger tom. He rubbed against Tumblety as he ate. Tumblety stroked the cat and rubbed his ears. He let the cat eat. He deserved a last supper. It wasn't the cat's fault. He sighed. He hated doing this. Poor little thing. He killed it as quickly and painlessly as possible. One quick fluid motion with his scalpel. The poor thing didn't even have time to cry out.

He wiped his eyes.

"I'm sorry, puddy-wuddy. Forgive me?"

He carried the cat across the road to Trimp's doorstep. He slashed open the stomach, and pulled, so that the insides were clearly visible to all. Then he went back to his hiding place across the street.

\*\*\*

Trimp hailed a hackney carriage. He wanted to get home. As they cantered down Dorset Street he saw the bill posters. He told the driver to stop. He got out and read the poster.

*'THE PALACE OF WONDER GRAND RE-OPENING, FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 7<sup>TH</sup>. DON'T MISS THE AMAZING SWAMI YOGINI, MOUTHPIECE TO THE DEAD! TINY PETE, THE HIGH-FLYING DWARF! THE NAUGHTY WONDER GIRLS! THE BRAND NEW TALENTS OF BARKER BIFFIN!'*

Trimp tugged at a nose hair and sneezed. "Very good," he mused. "Now that's a show I must see."

He climbed back into the carriage.

\*\*\*

Tumblety was drenched. Damn the British and their ridiculous weather.

"Why doesn't that fucking slut come outside?" he fumed. "When's she gonna find her present?"

He heard the hoofbeats on the cobblestones and ducked down. He could hear Trimp paying off the driver.

"Perdition! What's he doing home?" he thought to himself. He kneeled up to peek over the wall. It was a shame the females would not see his handiwork but it would be interesting to see Trimp unmanned by the sight of his beloved pet, laid open to the elements.

Trimp stopped at the doorstep and looked down at Ginge. The cat had been a wedding present from his sister-in-law. He had never taken to Trimp. He used to scratch him and tear his shirts to ribbons. Trimp shook his head.

"Was this the worst you could do?" he mused. He looked around, a smile on his face.

"You've done me a bloody favour you idiots," he chuckled.

He went down the side of the house to the shed and returned with a spade.

The ground at the bottom of the garden was soft and muddy. Ginge's remains would be good for his cabbages. He dug the hole nice and deep. He didn't want next door's dog digging him up. He placed the cat in the hole.

"Goodbye, ol' pal."

Wiping his hands, he went inside to change.

\*\*\*

Tumblety cursed. He emerged from the garden and went in search of a cab.

"Heartless, cocksucking, mother fucking, sonofabitch! Not one tear. Not one lousy fucking tear. The man's a monster. A monster. And monsters must be destroyed."

He had fulfilled his contract to Mister Ezekiel but now he was honour bound to go further. He had to put the fear of God into those people. He would not be satisfied until

Trimp was on his knees, broken and abject. He smiled. He plotted. He planned. In a way it was good. It was a challenge. Life had been too dull recently. This was just what he needed.

\*\*\*

Washed and changed, Trimp went into the parlour. There was no change in his wife's condition. The baby still showed no sign of arrival. The bonnet was still unfinished. He could hear the other children playing upstairs with Jane the nurse.

"Pleasant day, dear?" he asked.

"Quiet. Very quiet."

He kissed her forehead. "That's nice."

"Have you seen Ginge, anywhere?" asked Clara.

Trimp sat down by the window. "No, dear."

"I hope he's all right. He's usually in for his tea by now."

"He'll be fine, love. You know what these tom's are like. He's probably dabbing it up with that pretty little tabby down the road."

Clara smiled. "You are naughty, Sammy."

Trimp smiled sadly. "Fancy a cuppa?"

"Jane's with the children."

"Don't worry. I'll get it."

"Thank you dear. That would be lovely."

## SHOW TIME

Bess was glueing a big black beard onto Growler Griffin's face.

"Don't get it in me fuckin' mouth yer daft trollop," he complained.

"It's bloody nonsense anyway, if you ask me," laughed Bess. "Goin' around in a disguise. If that nice policeman was gonna arrest you he'd have done it by now."

"Nice policeman? It's down to him I spent twenty years in bloody hell," grumbled Growler. "He wants me to sweat it out. He'd see me hung if he could an' no mistake."

"So you really think he's gonna be fooled by a false beard an' a name like Barker Biffin? Couldn't you've chosen somethin' a bit different?"

"It was Stan's idea," sighed Growler. "He wanted to send a clue to my fans. Get 'em thinkin'."

"Your fans. You ain't got any bloody fans. Only that Doctor Tumblety."

"Fuck off!"

She slopped a gob of glue in his eye.

"You did that on purpose."

"Yeh well, you wanna watch your mouth. Talkin' like that to a lady. All done. Not bad neither."

Growler looked at himself in the mirror. He nodded. With a big bushy beard hiding half his face, he would be pretty hard to recognise. "Good girl. Give us a kiss."

"Get away you're all sticky."

\*\*\*

Stan was thrilled. The crowds were assembling outside already. He went to check on Faye and Job. She had done a remarkable job in transforming Job into the Amazing Swami Yogi.

"God! You'd never know you weren't an Indian," he grinned.

"Yes, Massa. Dat's me," grinned Job.

"Wrong bloody nationality," he sighed. "You're not a comedy act. Indians don't say 'Massa'. Jus' talk deep an' mysterious an' add in a few sahibs when yer talkin' to a feller an' mem-sahibs when yer talkin' to a judy. Got that?"

"Mem-sahibs. Gotcha. I quite like this look, Faye. Does it make me look dashing do you think?"

"It makes me wonder if you're brown all over, love."

"You can paint my Hampton if you like. Go on. Fer a laugh."

"Are you sure we've got enough paint?" Faye giggled.

"Cut it out, you pair," sighed Stan. "Don't paint his prick. That's a company make-up brush that is. Tiny Pete'll be usin' it later to touch up his eyes. He doesn't want some nutter's cock cheese on it."

Growler came into the dressing room. Job began roaring with laughter at the sight of Growler's thick black beard.

"What are you, Blackbeard the Pirate?"

"You can talk, Sinbad. I'm Barker Biffin. Shall I put on a different voice?" His normally deep growl rose into a shrill squeak.

"No," said Stan. "The audience'll think yer a bad male impersonator."

"Boss, there's someone I'd like you to meet," said Bess, hovering at the dressing room door. At her side stood a buxom blue-eyed strawberry blonde. She flashed a smile at the men.

"And who might you be, my luscious lovely?" asked Job, standing and kissing her hand.

"Mary Kelly," said Bess. "She needs a job."

"They call you Ginger too, don't they?" said Job. "And Fair Emma and Black Mary. You speak Welsh like a miner and you're seein' a muckrake called Joe Barnett. I'd dump him if I were you."

Mary looked at him startled. "What are you a Jack? You been spyin' on me?"

"It's okay, Mary love. This is the Amazing Swami Yogi. He sees stuff," said Bess.

"Hmm. Well he got it wrong. Joe's a good lad. Thinks the world of me."

"That's not what your Auntie Eileen says."

"My Auntie Eileen? She's dead, stop muckin' about."

"I know she's dead," said Job. "She says hello, but she wants you to take care."

"I'll take care of you, girl," grinned Growler, spitting out hairs from his beard.

"Leave her alone, boys," said Stan. "Okay, Mary. What can you do? We need a cleaner."

"I was hopin' for somethin' in the show."

"She could juggle her jugglies," laughed Growler. "I'd pay good money for that."

Bess nudged him hard in the ribs. "Stow it, you."

"Can you dance?"

"Yes. An' I can sing. All the Irish stuff."

"Alright. You can go on first. Give us a song or two. Growler, you can play the Irish stuff can't you."

"Loike a natural ter be sure, ter be sure," grinned Growler.

"Great. Then, if you like you can join the dancin' girls when Bess an' Faye do their songs. Okay?"

"But she doesn't know the moves," said Faye. "She might muck it up."

"I wouldn't," snapped Mary, her eyes flashing.

"Keep in the background," said Stan. "Keep out of trouble an' don't knock the scenery over. Right, are we ready, boys and girls? It's showtime!"

"Boss, any chance of another smoke before I go on?" asked Job.

Stan frowned. "Do you need it?"

Job nodded. "It's this place. Gives me the creeps. It's like a graveyard. The dead. They're everywhere."

Stan nodded. "Go on then."

\*\*\*

"Whores! Whoremongers! *Shandoiz!*"

Stan peered out from behind the curtains.

"Fuck! It's that idiot Leather Apron! He's been on the lush again. I thought we told him to get out of town?"

"That was David, boss," said Growler. "You want me to have the lads give him the rush?"

"Yeh, fuck it. Go on."

After Blue Skin had finished laughing at Growler's beard, he stormed into the crowd and grabbed Leather Apron by the scruff of the neck.

"Give it a rest, Jew Boy. I'm tellin yer nice. Do one, before I lose my temper."

Leather Apron just stared at him glassy eyed. "*Kish m'in toukhes!*"

"I don't know what that means but guess what?"

"What?"

"I've lost my temper."

Blue Skin smashed Leather Apron's head against the tabletop, spilling the drinks of a couple of fish porters.

"Oi!" yelled one.

"Fuckin' get another one an' shut up," snarled Blue Skin. He grabbed the dazed Leather Apron by the seat of his trousers and hauled him out into the street. "And never, ever let me see you or your stupid fuckin' apron around here again. Got that?"

*"Schvuntz!"*

"Yeh. Same ter you." He gave him a kick up the backside and went back inside. A spot of violence always worked wonders on his moods. He went to the bar and ordered drinks for the fish porters. "Nothin' fer me, luv. I'm performin' in a minute!"

\*\*\*

The shabby, shaven-headed docker had entered the Palace and taken a prime seat at the bar. Stan didn't like the look of him. As he got closer he found that he didn't like the smell of him either. He looked at the man's scarred face and the dirty leather patch that covered his left eye. Everything about him spelled trouble.

"Make sure he's got enough fadge before you give 'im a drink," Stan told the barmaid before making his way to the stage.

"I got plenty o' fuckin' fadge ter go round, yer cunt. Who wants a drink?" roared the docker.

"Mine's a gin!" grinned Dark Annie Chapman taking the seat beside him. "You lookin' fer fun, sweetheart?"

"Who can say?," The docker patted the empty seat next to him, "You sit there my lovely an' get that down yer neck."

\*\*\*

"Laydeeez an' Lowlife! Lords an' trollops! You know who you are! We welcome you back to the Emporium of Delight, the Citadel of Mirth, the one and only Paaaaalace of Wonder!"

Cheers, whistles and cat-calls rose up from the crowd. Stan was in his element.

"Most Music Halls will save their meager best until last. Not here. Here, every act is world class. Now, all the way from Tipperary, we give you the darlin' of the Irish, the inimitable Gaelic Angel. The one, the only, Miss Mary Jane Kelly!"

Mary Kelly came on to a chorus of cheers and whistles as the bearded 'Barker Biffin' hammered away at '*As I Roved Out*'. Mary swayed a little. She had been drinking. Her voice, while pleasant, was weak and she struggled to make herself heard.

"Do you know this judy?" the shaven-headed docker asked Dark Annie.

"Sure. Whatcher wanner know about her for? She can't do what I can do?"

"Where's she from?"

"I dunno. Ireland. Wales. Who cares? She lives round about here someplace. You don't like her do yer?"

"Nah. It's you I like. Want another?"

"Ooh. You are a charmer!"

Mary's voice gave out all together and the crowd went wild, hooting and laughing as she fled the stage.

Stan was furious. With the exception of Growler he never allowed his acts to drink before a performance. He was about to lay into her but Bess restrained him.

"Leave it Stan. She fucked up. She knows it."

"I can do better, Mister Garrideb. Give me another chance tomorrow," said the girl. "I'm desperate. My man's lost his job. I need the money."

"All right, but learn this. I'm not a fucking charity. I gave you a chance, an' I don't expect you to take the piss. So, no dancing tonight. I don't want you makin a pig's ear of the girls' routine. You can do the opener tomorrow, and promise me one thing?"

"Whatever you like, love."

"No drinkin' before the show. You can drown in it after if you like. But not a drop before."

"I swear. On me Mother's grave. Not a drop. I don't normally drink anyway. It was probably a dodgy pie I ate."

"Sure. And listen, come round early tomorrow. I'll get Grow... Barker to give you a singing lesson. See if we can get you to project a bit."

"Anything you like, Mister Garrideb."

As Stan went on stage to introduce the next act, Mary flashed two fingers up at his back.

"Cheeky fucker. Thinks he's the bloody Prince of Wales."

"He's givin' you a lifeline, Mary. Be thankful," snapped Bess. "Anyone else would've slung you out in the street with Leather Apron."

"Oooh! Hark at her, Miss Lardy-fuckin-daa!"

\*\*\*

"Aaaand now, to tickle your funny bones and rattle your rib cages, we have a newcomer to the Palace of Wonder. All the way from Stepney. It's that hilarious and soon to be world renowned master of comic patter, the crown prince of chuckles... Barker Biffin!"

Thankfully Growler did not attempt a funny voice during his act. Instead he handed his scrawled sheet music to Stan and began singing "*I'd pick up your hanky but me trousers are too tight, Then you might have to spank me, if me botty sees the light.*"

The song went down well with the crowd, who roared as one when Growler bent to pick up a lady's hanky and his trousers did split to reveal a pair of lady's silk bloomers.

"He's a card that one," laughed Dark Annie.

"Yeh," nodded the shaven-headed punter. "I ain't seen him round these parts before. Have you?"

"Nah. But Stan's attractin' lots of interest from all over town these days. He could be a big star over in Stepney."

"Hmm. No doubt. Getcha another?"

"Wunt say no. Here, you tryin' ter get a gal drunk? Why ain't you drinkin'?"

"I am love. I jus' like to take me time. That's all."

\*\*\*

"And now, back by popular deeeeemand. I give to you Tiny Pete, the incredibly miniscule flying dwarf!"

Tiny Pete arrived on stage riding high on the shoulders of Blue Skin.

"Let's see yer fly then," roared the shaven-headed bruiser.

"Yeah! C'mon Pete! Fly!" roared Dark Annie in his ear.

Blue Skin then hoisted the dwarf from his shoulders and flung him with all his considerable might into the audience. Tiny Pete flew high over their heads and came to land, graceful as a ballerina on top of the bar.

"Mine's a brandy. Make it a double," he said winking at the barmaid and downing his drink in one.

The audience were howling with laughter and begging for more. They could have watched Blue Skin throwing his little friend all night long, but then it was time for the Naughty Wonder Girls!

As Bess and Faye came on stage accompanied by a chorus of the best looking girls they could find, three men took their places at the bar next to Dark Annie and the stranger.

As the girls began their Growler penned duet called "*Bath Time is Fun Time With My Best Friend*," the shaven-headed mumper looked at the newcomers with interest.

"Hey, what's the mask for?" he asked.

The masked man stared at him for a moment and then looked away. One of his companions, an elderly toff looked down his nose at the man. "It's for his health. The light is bad for his skin."

"Gammon! What light?"

"Keep your nose out, there's a good fellow," said the other man, a tall, barrel-chested cove, whose evening clothes barely contained his muscular form.

"No need to be like that pal, I was jus' makin' conversation."

"We've come to watch the ladies. Not talk to a stinking kanurd like you," sneered the masked man.

As Dark Annie began to laugh, the shaven-headed stranger felt his temper rise. He would have socked him on the jaw but Annie chose that moment to fall off her stool.

"Are you okay, Miss?" asked the older of the three men. "I'm a doctor."

"Oooh! It's me breasts doctor...They need a good squeeze!"

"She's drunk!" said the masked man.

"Brilliant deduction," snapped the shaven-headed stranger.

"Oi! Get yer girlfriend out of here will yer?" asked Stan, striding over to see what the commotion was. "The girls are tryin' to sing."

"She ain't me girlfriend," said the stranger.

"You were the one, givin' her drink weren't you?" asked Stan.

"Yeh. So?"

"Just take her out. The fresh air'll prob'ly do her good." Stan realised a decision had to be made quickly regarding the shaven-headed docker. He erred on the side of caution. The man looked like he could handle himself, and had the scars to prove it. "Then come back an' have a drink on the house."

"Fair enough, guv."

The stranger nodded curtly at the masked man and his friends and picked Annie up from the floor.

"Ooh! He's tryin' to touch me up, so he is! Yer dirty bugger."

\*\*\*

Out in the street, the docker asked her where she lived.

"I ain't tellin' you."

"I want to take you home."

"Do you now?"

"Yeh."

"You mucky..."

"Nah, nothin' like that. It ain't safe out here. That's all."

"Ooh. Not good enough for yer am I? Yer dirty sod."

She slapped him hard, and staggered away towards Spitalfields.

"Come back! It ain't what you think."

"Fuck off! I'll call the police!"

## DON'T WORRY, I'M A DOCTOR

Doctor Tumblety knew Mick Harrison well. He was rougher than his usual sort and he preferred to beat rather than be beaten but variety as they say is the spice of life. He also had his own horse and carriage and could be relied on to keep his mouth shut if the price was right. He had paid Harrison half the money Ezekiel had given him. It was more money than Harrison made in a month. Now the carriage pulled up outside Inspector Trimp's house.

"Wait here," whispered Tumblety.

He climbed down and went up the path to the door.

The nurse answered the door.

"Yes?"

"Your mistress at home?"

"She's in bed. Why what is it, sir?"

Tumblety hit her hard with his cane. She stumbled and he kicked her in the side of the head. She stopped moving. He knelt down and listened. She was still breathing. It was a shame he couldn't spend more time on the pert little chit in her starched uniform. He could show her a thing or two about pain. He stood up and entered the house.

"Jane," came a voice from upstairs. "Who is it?"

Tumblety followed the voice up the stairs and along the hallway. Before entering the room he placed the bird-like plague mask over his face.

Clara stared at him as he entered.

"Sammy?"

"Don't worry dear," said Tumblety, his voice echoing inside the mask. "You're in good hands."

She tried to scream, but the hand with the chloroform-drenched handkerchief smothered her cries. She grew weak. He waited, and then bracing himself, lifted her up. She was too heavy. He went to the window, opened it and called down to Harrison.

"Mick! Here! Now."

He watched the muscles in the cab driver's back as he carried Mrs. Trimp down the stairs. He licked his lips. Maybe later. This really would be a night of mixed pleasures.

\*\*\*

"Aaaand now, ladeees and gentlemen, prepare to be astounded, bamboozled and befuddled. Shipped in for your express edification and delight, I am proud, I am honoured, I am humbled and forever indebted, to introduce to you that paeon of Phantasmagoria, the bombastic brave of Bombay, the cougar of Calcutta, the ear piece to the hereafter, the emissary of the Departed, the mystic mage of those mongoose-filled Indian lands, the amazing Swami Yogi!"

Job, looking every inch the Indian mystic appeared on stage as the lights dimmed. He bowed.

"Sahibs and Mem-sahibs. Will I be having a gracious volunteer please?" He looked about for the most attractive females and fastened his gaze on a gorgeous buxom dolly-mop sat on the lap of a young meat packer. "You my dear. Take my hand if you will?"

The girl looked to her beau. He nodded and laughed. The girl took Job's hand.

"Oh goodness gracious me!" he said, frowning. "Please to remove the gloves, please, most desirable mem-sahib. A thousand thankings."

The girl did as she was asked. Job held her hand.

"Ahhh. You have a sister. Sadly no longer with us. She was two weeks old when she die, no?"

The girl nodded.

"You call her Mabel? Yes? Your parents they have fears because she did not do the baptising thing? You know with the water?"

"That's right." The girl's lip trembled.

"She say do not worry. She is happy. She is dancing now. Well not now. Now she is talkings with me. But soon she will be dancing again. Dancing in the womb."

"The womb?"

"Yes. The living womb? Your womb. You are with child, no?"

The girl nodded.

"She is your sister."

A gasp went up from the crowd.

"No no no," said Job. "Her father is good man. He not making dirty beast with daughter. No. But daughter of father is coming back. In womb of sister."

"Rubbish," cried someone from the back of the hall. It was the masked man.

Job strode through the crowd to the masked man. "I am loving these English doubting Tommies. Let us see if we can convert you, yes. Your hand please?"

The man in the mask looked anxiously at his friends. The younger one tried to block Job's passage but Job shouldered him aside. He took the man's hand and shuddered.

"You are Victor, yes? Ah no... Albert Victor. Your friends call you Eddy. I see a... ah... forgive me." He stepped back and bowed. "I think you prefer I say nothing right now. No?"

The masked man nodded. "Come on," he said to his companions. "Let's go."

"Anyone else, please? Ah yes, you my dear. My what a lovely dress. And the green goes with your eyes. Ah. I have a Montague to speak with you. A Monty? Yes. Your husband." He turned to the man beside the woman. "Do not worry. He is dead. He is asking me to take you outside and give you a bloody good thrashing. Have no fears. I

won't. Ooh. He say you make love to his Suzy? Suzette, sorry, four times this afternoon? No wonder you look tired. Someone please give the gentleman a brandy. He deserve it."

The audience were lapping it up. They had never seen anyone so amazing or personable as the great Swami Yogi.

\*\*\*

Clara came to with a headache, feeling dizzy and faint. She was propped up in the back of the carriage, Tumblety, still wearing the plague mask, placed a hand on her knee.

"Who are you?" she gasped. "Where are you taking me? My husband is a policeman."

"Yes, I know."

"Please. I am with child. My baby."

"Shhh. Don't worry." Tumblety produced a scalpel. It glinted wickedly in the gloom.

"I'm a doctor. We'll soon take care of your baby."

\*\*\*

Job had brought the house down. Any skeptical punter who took it upon himself to voice his doubts, soon had Swami Yogi bearing down on him, grasping a hand and revealing some embarrassing skeleton better left in the cupboard, much to the delight and hilarity of the crowd. They soon realised that it would have been impossible over the course of his act to have planted 'ringers' and were completely won over by Job's unique gift.

After the big finale and three encores, Stan couldn't recall there ever being such an excited buzz about the place as the audience filed out onto the streets. He was thrilled to hear their chatter all the way down Dorset Street. Job had set his pipe up in the wings so that he could take surreptitious tokes at regular intervals "to keep the demons in check Stanley, old chum!" Stan had seen at first hand how much his visions took out of him.

Job had left the stage to tumultuous applause, hunched, haggard and completely drained, which the audience loved, thinking it was all part of the act. Stan realised that he would have to really look after him and make sure he got everything he wanted. To lose another ridiculously talented brother would be nothing short of tragic. Making his way down the dingy backstage corridor he decided to stick his head round the dressing room door. As he walked in he saw Job reclined on a chaise longue, hands behind his head, a big contented smile on his face as two of the Naughty Wonder Girls took it in turns to service his Nebuchadnezzar with their mouths.

"Oh! Sorry, Job...I was er...just...er...I'll come back later."

"Do not worry Bwana!! Plenty of room for a little un if you wanna join us?"

"No that's okay, Job...er you carry on... And it's Sahib remember? You're not African."

"What ever you say, boss."

Stan retreated, closing the door. "God. Not like his brother at all."

## LABOUR PAINS

News travelled fast. Ezekiel had been waiting too long now to find out if Tumblety had accomplished his mission or just taken his money and done nothing. He hoped for the doctor's sake it wasn't the latter. When one of his informers came round with information he assumed it was about that. The last thing he wanted to hear was how the grand reopening of the Palace had gone down a storm. He was even more perturbed by what he was hearing about the new headline act.

"What the fucking hell do you mean 'he's just like that singer, only brown?'" he raged.

"What the fuck are you trying to tell me?"

"He looked just like him, sir...I swear," quivered the lackey. "Only he was a darky, an' he was skinny."

"Get Out! Before I have that fucking face of yours rearranged."

Ezekiel was fuming. He thought he had this situation under control and now he realised he was being undermined, and nobody did that and lived to brag about it. That fucking detective and the little music hall upstart were becoming more irritating by the hour. A stain on a favourite shirt that he couldn't seem to get out. The American better have something for him soon, otherwise...

\*\*\*

Clara had never known real fear up until this moment in her life. As she looked into the crazed eyes behind the bird mask, she knew she was looking at death incarnate. It was too much for her; the rocking motion of the carriage, the alcohol on her abductor's breath coupled with the stench of his cologne, the after-effects of the chloroform and the sheer desperate fear that coursed through her veins made her throw up violently.

"You fucking dirty whore! You bitches are all the same!" Tumblety slapped Clara hard across the face. "Well my dear, I see that I am going to have to teach you a lesson you

are never going to forget. I was going to put you to sleep for my little experiment, but on second thoughts, in the name of science, I think you may find it fascinating. I know I will. Now, shall we meet this little baby of yours?"

Tumblety ripped the front of Clara's vomit stained nightdress revealing her huge pregnant belly and taking his razor sharp scalpel brought it down to her flesh, ready to make the first cut. His hand was trembling with excitement.

"They say the first cut is the deepest, let's see if they are right, shall we?"

\*\*\*

"Cheers!"

"Cheers!"

"Well done everybody! I think we can safely say that that was a good night all round don't you, boys and girls?"

Stan was addressing the company at the bar. It was drinks all round and the general mood was one of euphoria and relief at a job well done.

"How did we do at the bar then, Faye?"

"Record takings, boss. I reckon they needed ter calm their nerves after Swampy Yougo's act."

"Swami Yogi! For fuck's sake Faye, how hard is it?" said Stan, laughing.

"Not hard enough in your case," muttered Faye.

Job emerged from the wings and jumped into the auditorium looking well pleased with himself.

"That's better! Is there a better feeling in the world than straight after you release a load and you've got that slight wobble in yer legs?"

Faye and Bess exchanged a look and burst out laughing and then they all joined in giving Job a spontaneous round of applause.

Growler, still wearing his beard had a suggestion. "Hey, come on girls, let's take this party round ter your place, eh? Whadaya say?"

"Well I'm sure we're up for it if you are?" replied Bess.

"What the fuck are we waiting for?" said Stan. "Let's go!"

\*\*\*

As they were locking up, a figure emerged from the darkness. It was the stranger with the patch.

"Eye-eye," said Faye. "Things are looking up."

"I'd keep an eye on him, if I were you," grinned Growler.

"Scuze me," said the stranger. "I come back for that drink you promised."

"Fuck off, mush!" said Growler, pushing him. "We're closed."

"Easy, Gr...Barker," said Stan. "It's okay. You toddle off. I'll catch up with you later."

"You sure, boss?" said Job, looking at the man.

"Yeh. I'll be fine. Go on an' enjoy yourselves."

The others departed. Stan opened the door and beckoned the stranger to follow him inside.

\*\*\*

The carriage was turning into the top of Dorset street as Clara let out a blood-curdling scream. "Noooooooooo!"

Mick Harrison had seen and heard a few things in his life but even he felt obliged for just a few moments to take his eyes off the road and try and find out just what that doctor was doing.

"Hey, doc, what's going on in there?"

At that moment a huge rat, darted from an alleyway, two hungry cats hot in pursuit, desperate not to lose their supper. The startled horse reared up and turned sharply to one

side, eyes rolling with fear. One side of the carriage left the road, tipping Mick Harrison off his perch and spilling him onto the cobbles. Without the driver's weight, the carriage overturned completely, coming to land on Harrison's legs, crushing them beneath its weight.

\*\*\*

Stan turned up the lights and looked at the stranger. He was a sorry sight. Even rougher than Growler after an opium binge. But there was a hardness about him.

"Thanks for gettin' rid of that dollymop earlier. Sorry you missed the rest of the show."

"Yeh. Mine's a rum if yer've got it."

Stan had plenty of rum. The locals didn't care for it much but it went down well with sailors on leave. He wasn't keen on it either but he helped himself to a glass too.

"Down the hatch."

"Yeh."

They drank.

"You want another?"

"Won't say no."

"You don't talk much, do you?"

"What d'yer want me to say?"

Stan shrugged. "Do you work for Ezekiel?"

"Who?"

"Never mind. What do I call you?"

"Anythin' you like, so long as you pour another drop."

Stan poured. They drank.

"My names Wallers, Jack Wallers but folks call me Patch."

"Oh. Why's that then?"

Patch looked at him with his one eye. "Coz I used ter have this little doggy called Patch that followed me everywhere. Why d'yer think?"

"Oh. Right. Sorry. It's been a long night. How d'yer lose yer eye?"

"In a fight. "

"You look like you can handle yourself."

"I can."

"You want a job?"

"Depends. What is it?"

"Keep the riff raff out. Sort out any bludgers who try to get heavy. I could use a dabeno like you."

Jack frowned and shrugged. "All right."

"Good man. You wanna come to a party? We're havin' a bit of a do round one o' the girl's."

"I ain't dressed fer it."

"Don't worry about yer dunnage, squire. It's come as you please."

"All right."

"Good. Drink up an' we'll be on our way."

"One fer the road?"

Stan sighed and poured. "Between you an' fuckin' Gr... Barker you'll drink the place dry."

"Aye. Well, we'll see."

\*\*\*

Had Growler not had his wits about him things could have been a whole lot worse. Faye and Bess were crossing the street, cackling hysterically at a ribald comment from Job as he regaled them with tonight's shenanigans with the two Wonder Girls. Growler

grabbed them both by the scruffs of their necks and hauled them back off the road and out of the way as the carriage overturned crushing Mick Harrison's legs. Harrison let out an almighty cry of pain before passing out. Everything came to an eerie standstill and a strange quiet descended on the street, the only sound the spinning of the carriage wheel. Suddenly a door pushed up and open, landing with a crash. From within came the cry of a woman in agony. Growler and the others instinctively took a step back as the man in the plague mask stuck his head out and saw to his horror the crash had drawn witnesses. He pulled himself out of the carriage clutching a leather medical bag and with surprising dexterity, vaulted down onto the road.

"Please somebody help me! He tried to kill me! Oh God have mercy," came a woman's cry from within. Turning on his heels the man in the plague mask ran for his life.

"I've seen you, you fucker! I know who you are," yelled Growler, rushing over to the opening. "God Almighty," he said reacting to the sight within.

The commotion had brought Stan and Patch Wallers onto the street.

"What the fuck is going on?" asked Stan.

"Have a look, boss."

Stan and Wallers moved over to the carriage and looked in.

"What the f...?" was the best Stan could come up with.

Jack Wallers sprang into action. "Right, this woman is in shock. Looks like she's in labour too." He jumped on to the carriage. "Listen lady, yer gonna be fine....." His sentence tailed off as he saw the scalpel glinting on the floor of the carriage.

"That man, that horrible man," said Clara. "He was going to..."

"Calm down....we're here now."

"Maybe I should get in there and help?" suggested Job.

"Show her your prick," said Faye helpfully. "It'll take her mind off the pain."

"Don't be stupid, Faye," said Bess. "She's already had enough shocks for one night."

"Girls, go back into the Palace and bring me whatever you can find that's clean, towels, water...anything, oh and bring some brandy."

"I don't think you should be giving her brandy," said Bess.

"Who said it was for her?"

By this time Job had squeezed in beside the one-eyed docker and had taken Clara's hand. "Hello, pretty Clara. Think nice thoughts now. Hey remember that time when the summer seemed to go on forever and you and your cousin Abigail found that rope swing across the river?"

"Yes," said Clara.

"And when naughty Herbert put the toad in Nurse's picnic basket. What a proper herbert, eh?"

Job's soothing tones were working a treat as the girls reappeared with towels and water.

"Thanks," said Wallers.

"Here, how come you know how to deliver babies then?" asked Faye

"There's a lot about me miss, that you don't know." He said it in such away it made Faye blush to her boots, something she didn't think was possible.

"I'd watch him, girl," whispered Bess in her ear, "He's got his eye on you!"

"Pack it in," laughed Faye, digging her in the ribs with her elbow.

Clara's frowned and tried to get up. "My babies...The nurse. He..He..."

"Don't worry," said Job, "we're taking care of it."

Job poked his head out of the carriage and said to Stan and Growler. "Listen you need to hot foot it round to this little lollipop's house. Her children could be on their own."

"Right," said Stan. "Where is it?"

Job gave him the address. "She thinks her husband is away...but he's not."

"Is he at the house then?"

"I can't be sure...I can't see that bit."

"Do you know who her husband is?" asked Stan.

"Trimp. Inspector Samuel Trimp."

"Fuck that," said Growler. "I ain't going there. Fer fucks sake, why don't I just put my head in a noose and hang myself?"

"Best idea you've had all night, Fido," said Faye.

"Don't be ridiculous, if he's there we don't need to do anything do we?" said Stan. "I knock on the door, he answers, I tell him about his missus, job done. If he's not there and there's all sorts of fun and games happening then I don't want to go in alone. Fair enough?"

Curiosity got the better of Terrence Griffin. He really wanted to see what the straight and narrow had done for 'Workhouse Snitch'. "Fine. We better get a move on."

\*\*\*

Trimp had not taken his eye off Ezekiel for a second. Wherever he had gone Trimp had followed discreetly and unseen. Trimp was very good indeed at passing unnoticed. With a change of clothes and a few subtle changes nobody but his nearest and dearest would be able to pick him out and even then they would have to be up close. He was pleased he had decided to shadow Ezekiel. Something was happening. The last few hours had seen a flurry of activity. He also saw at first hand just how the little shit operated. He had a team of 'runners.' Rufflers that came and went, acting as his eyes and ears, bringing information and then taking instructions. Trimp ascertained that in this way nothing incriminating could be ever pinned on him, unless you were to get the ruffler to talk of course. He had seen one such lowlife give Ezekiel the information regarding the night at the Palace, he had heard the conversation as it took place on the doorstep. He

saw the lackey depart and twenty minutes later two tough looking rogues arrived. Then Ezekiel emerged and they went off into the night. The more Trimp saw of the man the more he detested him. Obviously he felt he couldn't go anywhere without an escort. He was in furious conversation with the rogues. Trimp couldn't hear a thing and did not want to, for fear of breaking his cover. They walked for a good twenty minutes at a brisk pace. Moving now into a more desirable area of London. Eventually they came to a stop outside a respectable town house. Ezekiel stepped up to the door and rapped confidently. After a few moments the door opened and Trimp heard the occupant say "I thought I told you never to call on me here?"

"Yes, well this is important," snapped Ezekiel. "And it can't wait."

Ezekiel walked into the house without waiting for an invitation. The man closed the door and the two rogues took sentry duty at the foot of the steps. Standing in the shadows, Trimp was shocked. He knew that man. It was Abberline, his immediate superior.

\*\*\*

Outside Trimp's house, Growler was grudgingly impressed. As was Stan. "Nice street," he whistled softly.

"Yeah but who wants to live somewhere like this?" said Growler, "it's too snooty. It'd drive yer mad."

"I wouldn't say no. Are you jealous then Growler?"

"Course I fuckin' ain't," said Growler, his cheeks flushing red.

"All this could have been yours if you hadn't been such a naughty boy and had eaten all your vegetables."

"Yeh, alright, boss, shouldn't we get down to business?"

"We better be subtle about this. If the nurse is fine, she ain't gonna open the door, an' she'll be worried sick about her mistress, but she can't get to the police because she can't leave the children, well not until the morning anyway, so, here's what we do..." Stan took a crayon and some paper from his jacket and wrote a message. "Growler sneak up to the house and see if you can see anything. If you see the nurse and she's alive, then stick this through the letterbox." He gave Growler the note.

"Right you are boss, see you in a minute."

\*\*\*

Dark Annie had wandered the streets all night. She had no money to pay for her lodgings. She wished she hadn't given the john in the Palace the elbow. He didn't look minted but he obviously had enough fadge to pay for drink at least. She was lucky it wasn't cold. There was a backyard she knew in Hanbury Street that would be as good as any to spend the night. A shadow fell across her as she turned into the yard. A man was breathing hard. Maybe her luck was in. Maybe she would be able to afford a decent breakfast in a few hours.

"Hello deary? You want some company? Come down here, flower. It's nice and quiet."

A hand clasped across her mouth. A blade slashed at her throat. She was pushed into the yard and as consciousness slipped away, she could hear somebody whistling. The knife tore into her again.

\*\*\*

After fifteen minutes, Trimp saw Ezekiel emerge, the rogues stepped into line behind him and they set off back towards Whitechapel. When they reached Ezekiel's house, another ruffler was on the door step waiting. A few words were exchanged before Ezekiel flung his hat down on the wet pavement and roared at his man, shaking him by the lapels of his coat.

"He did what? I told him to only kill the fucking cat," Ezekiel stopped himself and looked around to check his raised voice hadn't attracted any unwanted attention. He bundled the ruffler inside. The other rogues followed. From his hiding place in the shadows Trimp's heart was pounding. He feared the worst.

\*\*\*

"It's a girl, Madam," said Jack Wallers. "Congratulations. The girls will clean you up and then someone will take you home."

"Thank you," whispered Clara.

"Don't mention it."

Waller lifted himself out of the carriage and jumped onto the street. Looking at Faye and Bess he said, "Can I leave you two to finish off?"

"Yes, sir," said Faye. They had watched the whole thing in wonder.

\*\*\*

"It seems to be alright in there."

"What did you see?"

"Two kiddies asleep downstairs in makeshift beds and the nurse asleep in an upright chair, looks like she's barricaded themselves in."

"Good. That's a relief. Did you stick the note through the door?"

"I did."

"Right, let's fuck off, sharpish."

\*\*\*

When the ruffler emerged, Trimp was waiting. As he walked passed Trimp grabbed him round the neck pulling him into the shadows. "Right you fucker, I want you to tell me everything you just told that cunt in there."

"I can't! It'd be more than my life's worth!"

Trimp removed the sharp blade from his pocket and held it up to the boy's throat pressing hard. "That's just fine, boy, cos your life's worth fuck all to me."

"Wait! Please! He was mad at a doctor feller."

"Name?"

"Tumblety. He's American. I think."

"Go on."

"He was supposed to put the spooks up this bluebottle by killing his cat and leaving it on the doorstep."

"And?"

"Turns out the bluebottle didn't give a shit and this made him mad. So he took the feller's wife and tried to kill her an' 'er baby."

"And did he?" Ice cool.

"I dunno, honestly, mister. There was a crash on Dorset Street. The doctor did a runner. I came to tell Mister Ezekiel. He weren't best pleased!"

"That makes two of us."

"Please mister, don't hur..."

Trimp was gone.

## OFF THE CASE

The police had finally arrived at the scene although at first they did not know what to make of a mother and newborn child lying within an upturned carriage in the middle of the street on top of a crushed dead man. They started to move pretty sharpish once Faye and Bess told them who the lady's husband was.

"Who delivered the baby then?" asked one of the bluebottles. "You?"

"Nah, it was..." Faye turned to point out Jack Wallers but he was nowhere to be seen. Faye wondered what it was that the mysterious Wallers had to hide from the authorities. His attraction factor went up a few more notches in her eyes.

It wasn't long before a second carriage arrived and Mrs Trimp was transferred from one to the other with care and courtesy, the bluebottles thinking that there could be a commendation in this, maybe even a promotion.

"Nice and easy Madam," said one. "We're taking you to the hospital."

"You'll do no such thing, constable," said Clara. "Take me home, immediately! I have my children to attend to. And see that word is sent to my husband. He's at a conference in Manchester...of all places!"

The policemen wasted no time in taking her home, leaving a small team to remove the upturned carriage and dispose of Harrison's body.

Bess and Faye returned to the Palace to wait for Stan and Growler and to have a few stiffeners to calm their nerves after the night's drama. They found Job crashed out in Stan's office pipe still in hand.

"So many men, so little time," sighed Faye.

"Who are we onto now?" asked Bess

"I've got to admit there is something about that stranger that don't 'arf push my buttons."

"Jesus, girl," said Bess. "I wish you'd make yer bleedin' mind up. First it's Stan, then it's Growler, now it's old one eye. I reckon if we wait another few minutes you'll be movin' onto someone else!"

"Don't forget Job and his mighty pork sword! Satisfy any girl in an emergency that would!"

"Why don't you go and have your fill then, so to speak?"

"No way! I'm scared of what he might 'see.'"

"It's a prick, Faye, not a periscope."

"I'm not having that Bess, look what he sees when he just touches yer hand, can you imagine the visions if he was properly plugged in! Makes me shudder just thinking about it." Faye shivered and helped herself to another drink.

"Your a real queer sort, you are Faye," said Bess laughing.

"Anyway, It's still Stan for me, but sadly I don't think it ain't never gonna 'appen. His heart lies elsewhere." Faye looking pointedly at Bess. "Or has your head been turned by that wierdo detective?"

"My head ain't turned by anyone Faye," said Bess with a smile.

The conversation was brought to an end when they heard Stan and Growler bustling through the door.

\*\*\*

Trimp did a lap of the house, checking everything was quiet and in order before moving to his front door and putting the key in the lock. After opening the door he found it wouldn't budge.

"Jane?" he called. He heard movement in the corridor.

"Oh, sir! Thank God!"

Trimp heard the scraping and shuffling of heavy furniture being moved out of the way and then finally the door opened and Jane stood sobbing pathetically.

"I'm sorry sir, so sorry."

"Nonsense Jane. This has nothing to do with you. There was nothing you could do, I'm sure." Trimp had hold of Jane's shoulders and was looking at her direct, calm, firm and reassuring. "The children?"

"Fine sir, absolutely fine. They slept through the whole thing."

"Good. Now we just have to wait for news of Clara."

"Sir, someone put this through the letterbox. It must have been in the dead of night for it was here this morning."

Jane handed Trimp the piece of paper, it was written in crayon and read, '*PLEASE DO NOT WORRY. LADY IS FINE.*'

Trimp felt a wave of sheer relief flood through him. "Jane, I think a strong cup of tea might be the order of the day. I need to freshen up."

"At once, sir."

As Jane retreated to the kitchen Trimp made his way down the corridor to look in on his boys. He was not a maudlin or a sentimental man. The workhouse had made sure of that, but when he looked into the peaceful, sleeping faces of his two small boys he realised just what a stupid bloody fool he had been.

\*\*\*

"Well that was quite the drama! Well done girls, well done Growler."

"What are you thanking Growler for?" said Faye. "He did fuck all!"

"Apart from saving your freckly arse from being crushed under the carriage along with the driver you mean?"

"Oh yeah... Thanks Growler!"

"Think nothing of it, Treacle."

"Where's our man of mystery?" asked Stan.

"Fuck knows, boss," said Bess. "He scarpered pretty sharpish when the bluebottles arrived."

"I knew he was dodgy," said Growler.

"Oh yes Terry?" said Faye with a twinkle. "Could you see it in his eye? It's not everyone can deliver a baby."

"Ballocks," said Growler. "How hard can it be? You've got a hole and you've got gravity, and you've got time. All she's doing is squeezing out a mammoth turd. Basically you stand there shouting encouragement and that's it. Job done!"

"Thank you, Doctor Griffin," sighed Stan, shaking his head.

"My pleasure boss."

"Speaking of doctors," said Bess. "It was that horrible creepy yankee in the carriage, wasn't it?"

"Aye," said Growler. "He is one sick fuck."

"Well he is one sick fuck in one big load of trouble once that Inspector gets his teeth into him,," said Bess.

"Yer not wrong there, girl," muttered Growler. He knew just how ruthless Trimp could be once his blood was up.

"Right folks! Let's change the subject," said Stan. "And talk about tonight's show."

The suggestion was met with a chorus of groans.

\*\*\*

Trimp vowed to always remember what he felt when the police carriage pulled up outside the house and Clara was carried into the house and up into their bedroom. The

nurse took the new baby. Trimp thanked his colleagues and then went upstairs to attend to Clara.

"I promise this will never happen again."

"Sammy, it's not your fault. The man was a monster."

"It is my fault, Clara. I know who it was. I have been dealing with him. I tipped him over the edge. I should never have put you in danger like this."

"Stop Sam, you weren't to know he would do this. Do not punish yourself over the actions of a mad man."

"The carriage crashed?"

"Yes, I thought I had died and descended into hell itself. I must have passed out. When I came too I was screaming hysterically, then these people...these kind people..."

"Go on?"

"There was this man. He looked like the toughest villain you could ever have the misfortune to meet. Gruff, disheveled, unshaven, had a scar and one eye. He was so kind. He took control... He..."

"The baby?"

"Yes. Then another man came and held my hand. I felt warm and peaceful. He told me things about myself. Comforting memories...How did he know?"

"Shh. You're safe now. Try to sleep." Trimp stayed with Clara, held her hand and mopped her brow until she fell into peaceful slumber.

\*\*\*

"Come in."

The two rampers entered the office of Aaron Ezekiel. "You wanted to see us, boss?"

"Indeed I do, Saul. Go to this address and bring me that fucking doctor. Now!"

\*\*\*

The station was in uproar as Trimp made his way up the steps. His immediate superior, Frederick Abberline was on his way out flanked by four uniformed bluebottles.

"I heard about your wife, Trimp. Bloody awful business. I take it she's recovering?"

"Yeh. Thanks."

"An' the baby. A girl I hear?"

"That's right. What's going on?"

Abberline stared hard at him. "There's been another one."

"What? Who? Where?"

"Another bloody dollymop. Hanbury Street."

One of the uniforms tapped Abberline on the shoulder.

"Carriage is here, sir."

"Tell 'em to wait. Won't be a minute." He turned back to Trimp. "So what's going on, Sam? Where've you been the last few days?"

Trimp stared at Abberline. "I've been workin' on the case."

"Not hard enough, evidently."

Trimp was stung. He hadn't slept in two days and he had almost lost his wife and child. He could feel his anger rise. He decided to take his shot. "I didn't know you knew Aaron Ezekiel, sir?"

If he was looking for a reaction from Frederick Abberline, he didn't get it. Abberline played it back with a straight bat. "Why wouldn't I know him? He's a well known pillar of the community. Does a lot for charity. Look, if you had been doing what you're paid to do, instead of harassing one of our most promising businessmen, this Annie Chapman might still be alive, gettin' drunk and passin' on the clap to some other poor sod. But no, you have to go about pickin' on local Jewish leaders. This isn't a fucking game. He told

me all about you, last night. The threats. The abuse. I had hopes for you, Sam. High hopes. Local lad. Like me. You've let us all down."

"But he's a fucking killer. He killed my cat. He..."

"Oh right. Let's hang him shall we? We've got a fucking maniac killing ladybirds and you wanna waste time on a fucking cat killer? You're off the case."

"What? You can't..."

"I just did. Pass your files onto Sergeant Warner. In the meantime, you can sort out the files in my office. They're a mess. Go on. Earn your fucking pay for once."

"But..."

"Take it up with Sir Robert if you want. Oh, that's right. He's in Switzerland! Come on lads." He climbed into the carriage, leaving Trimp fuming on the steps of the station.

"Fuck. Fuck. Fuck."

He went inside the building and walked down the corridor to his office. He thought about quitting. He couldn't. There were three kids to support now. He sat back and reached for the tweezers. It had taken almost losing her and the baby to make him realise how precious they really were. He had been a shit of a husband. A shit of a father. He was going to change. He plucked the hair from his nose and sneezed. He thought of Bess. He thought of Clara. He thought of Ezekiel and he thought of Tumblety. And decided to kill him. He pulled the knife out of his pocket and cleaned his fingernails with it. It had been a long time since he had used a blade in anger. Would he still be able to do it? He pricked his thumb and watched the blood well up. Oh yes, it would be easy.

## NO PEACE FOR THE WICKED

Francis Tumblety drained the last drop of brandy from his flask as he soaked in the tub. He was sore all over and his heart was pounding. He wanted to cry. He had failed. They had recognised him too. The bastards. It wouldn't be long before the police came calling, demanding explanations. Or money. Perhaps it was for the best. He was sick of his Aldgate lodgings. Perhaps with the rest of Ezekiel's money he could move into rooms more suited to a man of his stature. He wished he hadn't given Harrison so much money. He would hardly be able to spend it now.

He stepped out of the bath and towelled himself dry. He had to get moving. He hated leaving his cabinets behind but time was of the essence and there were always opportunities to obtain more specimens. He was descending the stairs when two heavy-set Jews stepped into the hallway, blocking his path.

"Good morning, boys," he said, cheerily.

The men climbed the stairs and taking him by the elbows, escorted him back into his rooms.

"Wh... what is this?" he asked.

"Mister Ezekiel ain't too 'appy wiv you," said one of the men, pushing him hard so that he fell back onto the bed.

"Wh... why? There must be some mistake. I... I did as he asked. I killed the cat. He said to scare the wife. I did. I really scared her."

"He din't say noffink about killin' her."

"Is she dead?"

"No. No fanks to you. Now he's gonna have bluebottles buzzin' all around him. He don't need the aggravation."

"Hmm. Well, you tell Mister Ezekiel I'm very sorry. Will you do that?"

"Nah. You tell him yerself. We're takin' you to him. He wants ter make an example of yer."

"Oh. Oh dear. Most inconvenient."

"Yeh. Now we can do this nice an' easy or we can kick the shit out of yer. Which d'yer prefer?"

"Oh, well. Let me think."

"You 'avin' a laugh?"

"No. Not at all. I'll come. Heh. I'll come." Tumblety stepped forward and as one of the men reached out to take his arm, he slashed out with a scalpel.

A thumb flew across the room. The man screamed.

Tumblety waved the weapon in front of him. "You want more? I've scalped Indians I have. I can sure as hell scalp you two fucks."

The man stared at his thumbless hand in shock. His companion was already out the doorway and running down the stairs.

"Get out. You're ruining the carpet."

The man looked as if he were about to faint, but he mustered up the strength to hurl himself out the door.

\*\*\*

Trimp stepped out of the cab. The door to Tumblety's lodging house was open. He noticed bloodstains on the floor, leading out into the street.

"Hello?" he called.

The maid poked her head round a corner.

"Yes, sir?"

"Is he in?"

"I... I don't know sir. I... it was awful sir. Fighting and everything. I..."

Trimp ran up the stairs and shouldered open the door. The cabinets were still there. Tumblety wasn't. Neither was his doctor's bag. He stopped by the bath tub and stuck his hand in. Still warm. There was something floating in it. He picked it up and grimaced in disgust. A thumb. A man's thumb.

He noticed the flask lying on the floor. He picked it up and saw the silver top. It was the same one he had left on his last visit. He looked at the flask. Nice. Must be worth a fair few guineas. He put it in his pocket and looked out the window. He saw the familiar military jacket. It was Tumblety rushing across the street away from the house. He must have been still in the house when he rushed up the stairs.

"Damn."

By the time he was back on the street the doctor had vanished from sight. He went back inside and called for the maid.

"If he comes back you get word to me. Understood?" He handed her a card. "It's important."

He set out towards Thomas Street. The time for diplomacy was over. It was time to pay another visit to Mister Ezekiel.

\*\*\*

The others had gone. Stan couldn't see the point in returning home. He decided to catch an hour or two's kip in his office. Job was snoring like a pig. Stan sighed. He went out into the theatre, swept the bar clean of glasses, and stretched out on the sticky surface, using his jacket as a pillow. It wasn't the comfiest of beds but at that moment he was so tired he could have slept on a razor blade and not complained.

He was drifting off when a fierce pounding at the door brought him back to his senses.

"No peace for the wicked. What about the fucking good? Bloody hell."

He unlocked the door.

"Patch! What the fuck do you want?"

"At a loose end, thought I'd start work," said Jack Wallers.

"Oh. Right. Fancy making a start and cleaning up the bar?"

"Fine."

Stan retrieved his jacket and went to sleep in the prop box back stage. After telling Jack to stop his infernal whistling, he was just beginning to doze when more blows rained down on the door.

"Shall I gerrit?" bellowed Jack.

"Nah. Don't worry about it. I'm up now."

A shabby man in a bowler hat, with a sandy moustache stared at him as he opened the door.

"Yes?" said Stan.

"Yes?" said the man. "Mister Garrideb please."

"Who wants him?"

"Who wants him? I want him. Tell him Joe Barnett wants to see him."

"Who's Joe Barnett when he's at home?"

"At home? I'm Joe Barnett. I'm Joe Barnett here as well! Where's this Garrideb feller?"

"I'm him."

"I'm him. You're him. Right. Well. A word or two please."

"What about?"

"What about? It's about our Mary."

"Mary who?"

"Mary who? Mary Kelly. My Mary."

"Oh. You're the boyfriend."

"The boyfriend. Yeh. That's me."

Stan was unsure if the man was playing some kind of practical joke, taking the piss, or was just another lunatic.

"You wanna come in?"

"Come in? Yeh. If you don't mind."

Barnett followed Stan into his office. Job was still snoring happily in his chair.

"Don't mind him," said Stan, pointing to an empty chair.

"Mind him. Right you are." He sat down.

"So. What about Mary?"

"About Mary? I'm her agent see."

"Her agent? I thought you were her boyfriend."

"Her boyfriend. Mmm. That too. I don't want to see her taken advantage of right?"

"Go on."

"Go on. She tells me you want her to open the show for you."

"It's not really that I want her to. I said I'd give her a try out."

"A try out. Right well, she'll want payin'."

"Of course."

"Of course. Five sh... Eight shillin's should cover it."

Stan laughed. "You've got a nerve. You're forgetting one thing Mister Barnett. She's shit! Eight shillings? You're out of your mind."

"Out of your mind. Our rent's four an' six."

"Well, she'll need another job then. I'm not a bleedin' charity, Mister Barnett."

"Mister Barnett. Yeh, well, how about givin' me a job?"

"Are you playin' silly buggers?"

"Silly buggers? How d'you mean?"

"All this repeatin' what I say. What's the idea? If it's supposed to be an act it stinks. It ain't funny. I don't get it."

"Get it. No. What d'yer mean?"

"What you just did. Repeatin' what I say."

"I say. I didn't."

"Have it your way. Look mate, we don't need anyone else right now. If she wants ter make a couple o' bob she can come in an' clean in the mornin's too. That's the best I can do for yer."

"For yer. Right. Well. Right. I'll send her round."

"Not today. Send her over this afternoon to rehearse. She can clean tomorrow. We're covered today."

"Covered today. Yeh. Right. Thanks Mister Garrideb."

"Don't mention it. See yerself out."

"Yerself out. Tara then."

"Cheerio."

\*\*\*

"He ain't seein' anybody."

"He's seeing me, sunshine," snapped Trimp, pushing past the bludger on guard at the front door. He stormed down the passageway and threw open the doors of the study.

Ezekiel had company. He was pouring his guest a large whisky from a cut glass decanter. He wheeled around as the door slammed open.

"Ah, Inspector Trimp. Good day, sir. I trust your wife is doing well?"

"You f..."

"Trimp! What the bloody hell are you doing here?"

The man by the window turned to face him. It was Abberline.

"Sir, I..."

"I told you, you're off the case."

"But he... it was his fault."

"My fault?" Ezekiel smiled. "I'm sorry. I'm at a loss."

"You sent Tumblety after my wife. You told him to kill the cat. You..."

"Trimp," Abberline raised his hand to cut him off.

"No. He..."

"Mister Ezekiel was just expressing his concerns for your wife, Trimp. He's posted a very generous reward of twenty pounds for this Tumblety's capture."

"I..."

"Of course. We can't have madmen like that terrorising innocent ladies. It's the least I can do." Ezekiel smiled.

"But..."

"He's been doin' our job for us too," said Abberline. "Some of his contacts say they've seen our killer."

"Killer?"

"Yes. The bloody killer. The one who topped Annie Chapman. Martha Tabram and Polly Nichols. It was one of his lot."

"Please," Ezekiel smiled indulgently, "There are rotten apples in every community. The majority of my people are upright law abiding citizens. This one though... well..."

"Who is it?" asked Trimp.

"John Pizer," said Abberline. "A bootmaker. Folks call him Leather Apron. Nutcase apparently. We've had reports that he hated these women. He's been had up for assault before. Mister Ezekiel's got his lads looking for him. Once we have him, it's case closed."

Trimp had interviewed Leather Apron. He was a nutjob, that much was true. But he was all noise and no substance. He might not be above smacking a girl, but killing them? He doubted it.

Abberline turned to Ezekiel. "Aaron, I'm really sorry about this. If you wish to press charges I will of course fully under..."

Ezekiel waved a hand in the air. "No. No. No. Not at all. Your colleague has obviously been under a lot of strain. It's quite understandable. Imminent parenthood. These ghastly murders. That horrible doctor. There's no hard feelings on my side." He held out a hand. Trimp took it, reluctantly.

"Thank you, sir."

"Quite all right. We're all on the same side, Inspector. These killings can't go on. Bad for business."

"Oh by the way, one of your men might be missing this." Trimp removed the thumb from his jacket pocket and placed it on the corner of Ezekiel's desk. He left with Abberline close behind him.

"Trimp. I'm going to let this pass. Just this once. I like you. You're a good man. But you need a rest. Take a month off. Enjoy your family."

"But I can't. Ezekiel's lying he..."

"Enough! I'm trying to help you. Ezekiel's a crook. Fine. But he wants this killer just as much as I do. Let's use him. After we've got our man, we'll think again. Fair enough?"

"Pizer didn't do it."

"Stop it. We'll pull him in. We need results Trimp. Now take that break. A month. Start again in October bright and breezy."

"I..."

"You've got no choice. It's an order. Go home, Sam."

\*\*\*

Jack 'Patch' Wallers had wasted no time in cleaning up the bar so Stan turned a blind eye to the generous ration of rum he had downed.

"Thanks, Patch. I wasn't expecting to see you until later. Thought you might have gone and grabbed some kip."

"I did."

"Oh, Right. Thanks for last night, not sure how any of us would have coped with a lady in labour."

"Yeh."

The pause told Stan Garrideb that no more conversation would be forthcoming.

"D'yer think it'll ever stop raining?"

"Yeh."

"Right."

"Will there be anything else, Mister Garrideb?"

"No, Patch. That's all for now. Why?"

"Someone I gotta see."

"Right. Off you go then. Can you be back here for seven-ish?"

"Yeh." Jack Wallers drained the last of his rum and headed for the street. At the door he turned and said, "Wednesday."

"Wednesday?"

"Yeh, Wednesday. It'll stop rainin' Wednesday."

"Right you are, Patch. Morning? Evening?"

Jack had gone.

## THE NUNS OF CONSTANTINOPLE

Trimp didn't return home straightaway. He headed for the nearest park. He needed to sit on a bench, undisturbed and have a mull. Too late to be cross now. He'd backed the wrong horse but got away with it...just. He had been sure the action would all centre around Ezekiel. He had disregarded Tumblety as an eccentric quack. Damn. If he had watched that stinking psychopath all this could have been avoided. It was then that he couldn't stop an impulsive chuckle because 'all this' had done something vitally important. It had made him realise just how precious Clara and the boys were to him, and now a girl too. Being brought up in an environment of rough tough boys, the thought of his very own daughter brought a smile to his face. Someone to take care of him in his dotage! He made a mental note that when he finally caught up with Tumblety, he would thank him. And then kill him. Oh what a tangled web we weave, he mused. The nefarious tentacles of this particular case were reaching into so many dark crevices, with Ezekiel right at the epicentre. A puppetmaster, controlling everything. Trimp could feel his blood boiling and forced himself to calm down. Time to control that anger now. Ezekiel had Abberline in his pocket. How many more figures of authority had he bought off? What about Warner? Could he be trusted? Yes, he decided. Warner could definitely be trusted. He would look a right fool if he couldn't. Good, he was going to take this month off. A month's paid holiday! He'd be a fool not to. It left him holding all the aces. It gave him the chance to work on the case without fear of anyone looking over his shoulder. It also gave him the chance to start on his new quest to be a good husband, spend some time in the garden and be a father to his children. Trimp spent a good two hours on that bench stacking his thoughts, carefully. A day of reckoning was coming. He was looking forward to it.

\*\*\*

It took a while for Jack Wallers to convince the nurse to let him in. Jane refused point blank to open the door and at first was greatly fearful that the nightmare had returned. She told Jack to wait by the garden gate where she could see him whilst she consulted the master of the house. She had not wanted him to think there were just two women at home. She then went upstairs to see her mistress.

"What is it Jane."

"A man at the door, ma'am. Wanting to know how you are."

"What sort of man, Jane. A policeman?"

"No ma'am, a ruffian. Scary looking. Scruffy and..."

"With a patch over one eye?"

Jane blinked in surprise. "Yes, ma'am."

"Show him in at once! Bring him to me I wish to talk to him."

"Yes, ma'am." Jane curtsied and went downstairs to the front door. She opened it and gestured for Jack to come inside.

\*\*\*

Trimp felt surprisingly lightheaded as he approached the house. He was aware that there was a deranged killer to find, but he was confident now that without the formal constraints of the police station he could make some serious inroads. Jane looked anxious when he came through the door.

"Hello, Jane. I trust you are well?"

"Yes, sir."

"The boys?"

"Fine, sir."

"Clara?"

"Fine sir, upstairs with...with a visitor."

"A visitor. Upstairs?"

"Yes sir. A man."

Trimp ran up the stairs. He paused outside the bedroom door. He could hear the murmur of conversation. Clara's light sing-song voice and a gruff husky one. He opened the door to find Clara sat up in bed and Jack Wallers at her bedside perched on the edge of a stool.

"Ah, Sammy. This is Mister Wallers. This is the man I... Well I should say 'we' owe our life to. Mister Wallers this is my husband, Mister Samuel Trimp."

"Sir," said Wallers gruffly with a slight tip of his head.

"Mister Wallers. How very pleased I am to meet you. I don't know how I can begin to thank you."

"Don't," said Jack. "I was just in the right place at the right time."

"And mighty glad I am that you were. Perhaps I could offer you a drink and a cigar?"

"It's a foolish man who refuses another's kind hospitality," said Jack rising to his feet.

"Ma'am," he said bowing slightly to Clara before following Trimp out of the bedroom.

"Let's go into the study Mister Wallers. We will not be disturbed in there."

Jack followed Trimp into the small study, closing the door behind him. He was somewhat taken aback when Trimp embraced him in a big hug.

"I don't know how I can ever make it up to you. I owe you so much."

"It was nothing sir, Honestly. I really was in the right place at the right time."

"But one thing really does puzzle me, Sergeant Warner, where on earth did you learn to deliver babies?"

\*\*\*

*'LEATHER APRON WANTED FOR WHITECHAPEL MURDERS!'*

The headlines and the newsboys screamed for the neck of John Pizer. As night drew in, armed gangs of men patrolled the streets, searching for the Jewish bootmaker. As Stan announced Mary Kelly to the house, he could hear the chants from the street, calling for the Jew to be hanged.

"*A violet from Mother's grave,*" she sang. Her voice cracked. Mary was drunk again. She had been drinking all evening. The crowd booed. She left the stage in tears. Enough was enough.

"Mary, I don't think this business is suited to you, love," said Stan, conscious of the watching Bess and Faye and not wanting to bully the girl.

"It is," she assured him. "They jus' don't recognise talent."

"Yes, well, neither do I love. Look, if you need some fadge, the cleanin' job's still yours. But no more singing. Deal?"

She spat at him. "Fuck you. You and Leather Apron. Yids! You're in this together. You just hate us girls."

"Right, that's enough," snapped Faye, stepping forward and twisting Mary's arm up behind her neck. "Listen to me, you slush bucket. He's been a fuckin' saint to you an' this is how yer repay him. Yer can't sing for shit. Yer pissed as one of Growler's farts and yer a fuckin' pain in the arse."

Growler, still disguised as Barker Biffin, tried to take charge of Mary, but Faye shook her head.

"You leave her to me, Fido."

Faye dragged her through the wings and hurled the drunken Mary into the back alley, where she crashed against the bins.

"And don't bother coming back for that cleaning job, either."

She slammed the doors.

"Don't you think you were a bit hard on her, Faye?" said Stan, astonished.

Faye, eyes flashing and cheeks flushed rounded on him. "Oh yeh? You got a thing for her have yer? You wanna go call her back?"

"No. I was jus' sayin'."

"Men. You're all the bloody same. She's not even that pretty. I don't know why I bother."

"Hey, don't lump me in with those dippy dabenos, hot stuff," grinned Job, poking his painted head out of his dressing room door. "You're looking a bit fried round the edges, you want me to give you a breast rub? Get your equilibrium back on kilter. It'll do you good."

"What the fuck are you on about, Job?" she snapped.

"It's a scientific fact. A breast rub before a performance releases all this energy. The nuns in Constantinople do it all the time. They say it's better than prayer. Come on, I'll show you."

"Well... okay."

"Faye, don't..." The jealousy Stan felt gnawing in his belly surprised him.

"Oi! Are you gonna announce me or what?" said Growler.

"Oh. Sure," sighed Stan.

He waited for Blue Skin and Tiny Pete to leave the stage and then bounded on.

"And now, back by popular demand... the one... the only... the inimitable Barker Biffin!"

\*\*\*

Samuel Trimp was restless. He should be out on the streets. He thought about Sergeant Warner. The man was a marvel. He would have to be careful though, Warner had taken the news of Dark Annie's death badly. He had insisted on blaming himself.

"I could have saved her. Stan... Garrideb, he told me to take her home. She wouldn't have it though. She told me to... well she told me to shove off. I should've followed her. Made sure she was safe."

Trimp had given him a whiskey. "Don't. If you had, then it would be Clara in the mortuary and not her. God forgive me, Sergeant but if one of them had to die then I'm glad it was her and not Clara. Or the child."

Warner had then filled him in on events at the Palace, telling him all about Growler Griffin and his ridiculous disguise.

"For some reason he thinks by sticking on a big false beard and changing his name cunningly from Growler to Barker nobody will recognise him."

Trimp had been puzzled. "Why's he done that?"

"Scared you're gonna send him back to Australia."

"The silly cunt. Well let him think that. It's always good to keep somebody like Terry Griffin looking over his shoulder. It might keep him honest for ten minutes."

Warner had then expressed his belief that Stanley Garrideb and Griffin were innocent.

"If we should be lookin' for anyone it's that Tumblety feller. Griffin was sure it was him we saw climb out of the carriage."

"I know. But Abberline's gonna waste resources going after Pizer. The fool. Ezekiel's set him up. He wants business back to normal but he don't want us catching Tumblety."

Warner had been quick to put two and two together. "I suppose he's afraid Tumblety will spill his guts if he gets caught. Tell us all about Ezekiel paying him to go after you. Could be embarrassing."

Before he had left Trimp had pressed him again about his expertise in delivering babies.

"You never did tell me. Where did you learn?"

Warner had chuckled. "Trial and error sir. Mrs Warner, bless 'er is on 'er sixth now. God love 'em. Anyway, Harry, he's number four, was in a bit of an 'urry. I'd 'ardly taken down Mrs Warner's breeches when out 'e popped ter say hello to the world. The midwife was no where to be seen so..."

## I PREDICT A RIOT

Mary Kelly staggered off to the Britannia where she soon found a young soldier to buy her a drink. As she drank, her rage grew. The soldier wanted to take her outside for business but Mary refused.

"I'm too shook up, deary. It's that bloody Jew at the Palace."

The soldier was confused, but the other drinkers, eager for gossip perked up their ears.

"He's protectin' Leather Apron. They're all in it together. Those yids."

It was a lie, she knew it was a lie but it served her purpose. She wanted revenge on Garrideb and that whore Faye. Within minutes a crowd had gathered around her.

"Yes. I seen him. Leather Apron. Bloody monster. Tried to rape me. They both did."

The crowd became a mob. They had heard enough.

They left the Britannia, baying for the blood of Leather Apron and Stanley Garrideb.

\*\*\*

"Go knock on Job's door, They're on in five minutes."

"Yes, boss." Bess wandered down the corridor towards Job's dressing room just as Faye emerged, red and flustered, a huge grin on her face.

"Blimey girl, you look happy," said Bess.

"I should say. That breast rub was the best thing ever! As for the rest..." Faye fanned her rosy cheeks with her hand in an effort to cool herself down. The smell of sex came over Bess in a wave, assaulting her nostrils.

"No longer worried by what he might see then?"

"Fuck what he can see. It's what I can feel that's the main thing! I tell you girl, I'm no stranger to a bit of cock but he certainly knows what he's doing with it. He's a bloomin' marvel!"



would be a hero. He would be lionised. He would also be performing an incredible service to his people. He knew that incriminating Leather Apron was bound to have an effect on people's attitudes to the Jews in the neighbourhood. It was a shame but it couldn't be helped. It wouldn't hurt him. He was protected. However, if he or his men killed Tumblety, a non Jewish Yankee and a homosexual to boot, then it would be a massive coup for Jewish relations in the East End and he as a leader of the community would be on hand to reap the rewards.

He drained his glass of claret and farted with abandon. The door opened and David hobbled in, his face still bruised and battered from his encounter with Garrideb and his cohorts.

"What do you want?" he snapped, conscious of the pungent smell filling the room.

"Dez a riot ada Palace."

"What?"

"Dez a..."

"Write it down you mumbling moron."

David tried to write but his hand had been badly sprained in the fight and his literary skills had never been too much to begin with.

"Oh for fuck's sake."

Ezekiel stormed out of the room. A ruffler was waiting in the hallway.

"What is it?"

"There's a riot going on outside the Palace of Wonder," said the runner.

"What?"

"A riot. Some shikse's been tellin' everyone Leather Apron's holed up in the Palace. They're gonna storm the place."

Ezekiel grinned. "Good man!" He tossed the man a handful of coins and went inside.

He sat down and helped himself to another glass. He began humming softly. Things really were going well. With a bit of luck the mob would tear Garrideb apart. Then he could step in. The Palace would be his.

\*\*\*

Sergeant Warner, in full disguise as Jack 'Patch' Wallers was worried. He was supposed to keep the bludgers and dippers out of the Palace, but as he saw the crowd marching down Dorset Street he knew that an army of policemen would not be enough to hold them back. Without notifying the patrons he barred the doors and prayed they wouldn't firebomb the place. If they did, they would be cooked. He made his way backstage to the wings.

"What's goin' on out there, Patch?" asked Growler.

"This 'n' that."

"Oh."

"Where's the boss?"

"Right here." Stan was standing in the shadows, watching Job work his magic on the audience. "What's the row?"

"A mob."

"A mob?"

"Yeh."

"Fuck. What'll we do?"

"I locked the doors."

"Will that keep them out?"

Patch shrugged. "Buh."

There was a banging on the doors. The audience began to grow restless.

"I'm sensing an angry presence," said Job on stage.

Some of the audience laughed.

A window shattered at the back.

"Can we open the doors please!" Job called.

As if on cue the doors shattered and the mob surged into the auditorium.

"Bring us the Jew!" they roared.

The regular audience were in uproar.

Bess, Faye and the rest of the Naughty Wonder Girls hid behind Job. Job smiled, his painted face glistening in the gas light.

"Your attention please!" His voice echoed around the theatre like the voice of a Biblical prophet.

The mob fell quiet.

"May I ask what you require of us?"

"The Jew!" called one of the ringleaders.

"Ah," Job held his hands apart in apology. "Perhaps you could be more specific. There are many Jewish people here. Surely you don't want all of them?"

"Garrideb!" yelled one. "He raped Mary Kelly."

"Rubbish," snarled Faye, stepping forward. "He never touched her. He gave that girl a chance an' she paid him back by gettin' drunk. Anyone says different can answer to me."

"What about Leather Apron?" yelled another. "We want Leather Apron!"

"He's not here," said Job. "I promise you."

"He's a performer. Course he's here," called out another.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhoooooahhhhhhhhh." Job let out a long trance-like sigh and rolled his eyes as though visions were coursing through him. The audience who had been watching his act in rapt attention before the interruption turned back to the great Swami

Yogi. The baying mob were confused, not knowing whether to stick or twist, they too were caught up in Job's act.

From the wings Stan and Jack watched in admiration.

"My friends, you are wise, but alas misguided," Job continued. "The man you know as Leather Apron was here for a while, but my friends... he was shit! As you see our girls are beautiful, our singers can sing and our comedians are funny. Why would we want him playing here? But wait. I see something. Yes. I know where he is. The spirits are telling me where he is."

There was a shocked gasp. Many of the mob had seen Job performing and were in awe of the man who could speak to the dead.

"He is with his friend and master. Aaron Ezekiel."

"How do we know you're not pullin' a fast one?" roared one drunken guardsman.

Job shrugged. "You don't. But let's ask the people who know shall we? Ladies and gentlemen, you have had the good fortune to see all our fabulous acts this evening. Was Leather Apron on the bill?"

The crowd chorused a resounding "No!"

"I'm sorry," said Job whipping them up. "I didn't quite hear that, Was Leather Apron on the bill?"

This time louder. "NO!"

The wind had been taking out of the mob's sails, and with a few of the audience chuntering, "Go on....Piss off," they began heading for the exit.

Job saw his chance. "Ohhhhhh," He exclaimed as though hit by a sharp pain. "I see them! Sat round a table drinking At 100 Thomas Street. They are laughing. Wait! They are laughing at you! 'What stupid fools they are,' they are saying. 'They couldn't catch a cold!'"

There was silence for a moment and then the crowd surged out onto the street.

Stan heaved a sigh of relief as he bounded on stage and embraced Job.

"You saved my neck, Job."

"Mmm. And I've paid Ezekiel back for Jonah too, with a bit of luck."

\*\*\*

Aaron Ezekiel was celebrating, alone. He loved his own company. He reclined on the chaise longue, an opium pipe beside him. He didn't normally indulge but tonight was special. Tonight that jumped up Garrideb was going to meet his maker.

The bay window shattered. The half brick landed on the floor in front of him.

He shook his head. Bloody opium. Was he dreaming. He must be. No one would dare attack him here in his inner sanctum sanctorum.

"Bring him out!" came a roar from the street. "We want Leather Apron!"

"Shit." Where was Abberline when he needed him. Why had he dismissed David earlier? Things suddenly went from bad to worse when another window shattered only this time it wasn't a brick but a burning torch. It landed at the base of the heavy velvet curtains. To Ezekiel's opium influenced brain it felt like the flames had seen the curtains and latched onto them with relish. It would not be long before the whole room became an inferno.

## THE FIRE AND THE FURY

Doctor Tumblety set foot on the platform of Liverpool's Lime Street Station and breathed a sigh of relief. He had escaped the clutches of both Trimp and Ezekiel. He would miss the East End of London. He still had so much work to do, but perhaps in a week or two he would return. A lot could happen in a week. He knew that more than anybody. You could go from being alive and in love to being alone, unloved or even dead. He looked at the porter and wished he had some luggage for him to carry. He would enjoy 'tipping' him. He took a sip from his flask and left the station. He glanced around. It was late. The whores were still on duty. He grinned as he approached one. Perhaps he had time for one little experiment before finding a hotel for the night.

\*\*\*

It was after midnight when Sergeant Warner arrived at Trimp's house, banging on the door. Jane refused to answer it. Trimp, in dressing gown and slippers rushed to the door. "Who is it?" he called before drawing back the bolt.

"It's me, sir," said Warner.

Trimp opened the door. Warner was red-faced and panting, still dressed in his Jack Wallers disguise.

"Blimey. You been in a race, Warner?"

"Ran all the way, sir. Thought you should know, sir. There's a bloody riot. They nearly tore down the Palace."

"Eh?"

"They were after Pizer, sir. They've got it in for the Jews. They think it's some kind of Hebrew plot. Ritual murders an' all that guff."

"Bloody hell. Here, come in. You look like you need a stiff one."

"Never say no to a stiff one, sir, as Little Bess likes to say."

"Eh? Oh. Hmm. Yes. Quite." Trimp felt his cheeks flush as his thoughts turned to Bess.

He poured the whiskey with a steady hand.

Warner necked it in one. "Job, the dead fatty's brother. He was bloomin' amazin'!

Turned 'em all round. He was like one o' them mind controllers. He sent 'em away."

"Good for him. Is it all quiet now then?"

"Not really. He sent them to Ezekiel's. Told the mob, Leather Apron's hiding out there."

Trimp snorted whisky out his nose and bellowed with laughter. "No? Better and better! Priceless. Bloody brilliant."

"They're all at Ezekiel's now. Abberline's got a detachment of men round there to protect him."

"Let's go take a look. shall we?"

"As you like, sir. I love a good riot meself."

\*\*\*

Ezekiel cowered back from the flames. He hated firearms but he kept a pistol in his bureau. He took hold of it and cocked it, ready to fire. He went to the door, but was met by a barrage of threats, insults and rocks.

"There he is! That's Leather Apron!"

"I'm not," he cried, but he could not make himself heard. He ran back inside, slamming the door.

The flames were spreading. He ran to the back. There were people in the yard. He ran upstairs. He was shivering. He was terrified. Ever since his childhood he had held an inordinate fear of death by fire. It wasn't how he wanted to go. He thought about shooting himself. It would be quicker than the flames or being torn to pieces by the mob. He brought the gun to his temple. He couldn't do it.

The police and the fire carriage arrived, forcing their way through the crowd, truncheons working overtime. Ezekiel could see Abberline addressing the mob. The bluebottles forced them back. Ezekiel couldn't go down the stairs. The flames were too high. He took a step back and ran to the window. He couldn't do it. He was scared of heights. He stood at the window. Abberline gestured to him to jump. He shook his head. A team of firemen pushed their way forward, carrying a ladder. Within minutes one of them was standing beside him.

"You best climb down, quick, sir," said the fireman.

Ezekiel shook his head.

"No. No."

The smoke was filling the room.

"No choice about it, sir. We've got to get out of here."

"No."

The fireman hit him hard on the jaw, then hoisted him over his shoulder like a child and descended to safety.

"Do you know who I am?" gasped Ezekiel when his feet were safely upon the ground.

"Yes, sir," said the firefighter.

"I shall have you dismissed. This man struck me." He turned to Abberline.

"Shut the fuck up. Sir. He saved your bloody life."

Ezekiel shut up.

\*\*\*

Trimp and Warner pushed their way forward just as the roof collapsed. He could not hide the smile on his face.

"Oh dear. Quite a blaze there, sir," he said to Ezekiel.

"You! This is harassment. Abberline!"

Abberline said nothing.

"Harrassment? Surely not, sir. I'm just out for a nice stroll. Saw the commotion, wanted to check you weren't dead. What happened? Playing with matches? Tut, tut. Very dangerous, sir. Very dangerous indeed." He sauntered away, chuckling.

\*\*\*

She was lucky to get away with her life. Tumblety had built himself up to a frenzy. His sexual excitement had him reaching for his trusty scalpel. A new city, a new whore, a new victim. Just at the point of making the first incision he stopped himself. It took all his discipline to do so. He reasoned that a grisly murder in a new city might draw unnecessary attention, when his purpose was to hide for a week or so, but oh, how her terrified eyes thrilled him. He released his grip on her. She needed no second invitation as she ran for her life. Reaching down, Tumblety sexually satisfied himself in the time honoured fashion. Once spent he felt a wave of relief come over him. He had bought himself some time. He consoled himself with the knowledge that there would be more whores and more blood.

\*\*\*

A week passed by. John Pizer was arrested after being chased all through Whitechapel by an angry mob. The bootmaker felt safer in a police cell even if he did have the prospect of the gallows looming over him. He protested his innocence but the police needed a scapegoat. They weren't about to let him go. Not unless they had no choice.

\*\*\*

Trimp was angry. The authorities weren't even looking for Tumblety. He had given a description of the man who had attempted to murder his wife but Abberline seemed unconcerned.

"We're up to our necks, Sam. You taking a bloody holiday doesn't help matters either."

"Eh? It was you who ordered me to take one."

"Don't get clever. Look, Sam. This Tumblety didn't kill anyone. He just wanted to scare you. We'll get him. Don't worry. Just wait for all this fuss to die down. When Pizer confesses, I'll give you all the men you need."

"But Pizer's innocent."

"We don't know that."

\*\*\*

He met up with Warner. Things were going well at the Palace. Nobody suspected a thing. Trimp expressed his frustrations about Tumblety.

"We'll never catch that rat. Not while they think Pizer will confess."

"You leave it to me, sir," said Warner. "I'll sort it."

\*\*\*

A few days rest had worked wonders on Clara and the baby, both of whom were blooming with health.

"I want to go out this evening, Sammy," she said when he returned, red-faced and shivering. The summer, such as it had been was officially over. Now the rain was accompanied by an icy north-westerly wind.

"Where would you like to go? It's filthy out."

"I want to go to that music hall."

"Eh?"

"The music hall. I want to thank those lovely people."

"Lovely people? For Heaven's sake, Clara. Be reasonable. I've always tried to shield you from that sort of scu...person. They aren't really your kind of folk. I..."

"Those people saved my life, Sammy. They saved your daughter. I want to see them. I'm not the shrinking violet you think I am, you know? Papa used to have all sorts over

to the rectory. He used to say if the society of sinners was good enough for the Lord it was good enough for him."

"Yes, but..."

"No buts. I want to do this."

Trimp sighed.

"And stop fiddling with your nose. It's a filthy habit. We don't want the boys copying you."

"Very well, dear."

\*\*\*

It took two hours for Warner to scrub himself clean of his Patch Wallers disguise. Then in his freshly laundered uniform he made his way to Bethnal Green Station to speak with Abberline.

"Pardon me sir, but you have to let Pizer go."

"Oh yes, Sergeant. Been talking with Inspector Trimp have you?"

"No sir," Warner lied. "He's innocent."

"Yeh. A real saint. You can tell just lookin' at him."

"He didn't do it, sir."

"And how do you know that?"

"Coz I was with him the night of the Nichols murder."

Abberline went pale. "What? Why? What?"

"We were watchin' the fire over at the docks. He was there all the time."

"He never mentioned that when we questioned him."

"I can't help that, sir. He ain't the brightest firework in the box, is he, sir?"

Pizer was dragged out before them.

"You're in luck, Pizer," said Abberline.

"How's that?" growled the bootmaker.

"Sergeant Warner here says he was with you on the morning of August 30<sup>th</sup>."

Pizer glared at Warner. "It's a lie. *Gai in drerd arein!*"

"Relax, you bloody fool. You're not in trouble. We watched the fire together. At the dry dock. Remember?" said Warner.

Pizer frowned. "Oi... oi... yes. Yes. Now you mention it. Yes. I remembering. Now. Yes."

Abberline shook his head. "I hope you know what you're doing, Warner?"

"Just speaking the truth. That's all, sir."

"Let him go then."

Pizer was terrified. "No. The people. They try kill me."

Abberline sighed. "Fine. Wait. We'll call a conference. Let everyone know you're in the clear."

Warner smiled. "Sir... about that Tumblety feller. He's our main lead."

Abberline nodded. "Yes. I know. Get me a likeness of him. We'll print up posters. We'll get the bastard. And then maybe you can let me know why you didn't tell me about Pizer's alibi before?"

Warner shrugged his shoulders. "Didn't want to ruffle any feathers, sir. Make waves. I thought it best to keep quiet but in the end my conscience... I had to speak up, sir."

"Yes and I'm a bloody Chinaman. Get out, Warner and pray you're right about this Tumblety feller."

\*\*\*

It was a fact that no fledgling crimelord would care to admit, but Aaron Ezekiel was holed up seeking shelter at his mother's. As he lay on the bed in his old bedroom, his dear old mum having just put biscuits and a glass of milk on his bedside table, he

decided that maybe the best thing might be to find somewhere else. He hadn't told his men where to find him, and was getting his information from his rufflers at pre-arranged locations at fixed intervals throughout the day. The latest reports told him that the time may have come to move back to his own home regardless of the fire damage. Competition in his game was fierce and unless he was on hand to show a presence and to strike fear into his competitors then it wouldn't be long before he lost his empire. Learning of Pizer's release made him very unhappy. Tumblety still at large and nowhere to be found did nothing to improve his mood. Ezekiel hated loose ends. Not being in control of the situation was driving him mad. He was paying that fucking Abberline handsomely and receiving nothing in return. Trimp, despite being given a month's leave was making his presence felt and to have Pizer in custody and then to release him was the equivalent of a two-fingered gesture right under his very nose. Paranoia gnawed at his guts. When all was said and done he would always be a Jew. These people were happy to take his money but... He rose from his bed with purpose and charging down the stairs, grabbed his coat and opened the front door.

His mother called from the parlour; "Arra, are you going out? Will you be back later for your supper?"

"No, Mamma." He stepped out into the street and almost collided with Trimp.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"Well I never," said Trimp. "Mister Marsupial, what an amazing coincidence. So what brings you to this less than salubrious location?"

"I...er..my..er mother."

"Well, well. You have done well for yourself haven't you? To drag yourself away from this... shithole. Anyway, I mustn't keep you. Toodle-oo!"

Trimp tipped his hat and strode away.

## THE RETURN OF NED SHERKIN

Trimp told himself he was simply double-checking for clues when he walked down Dorset Street on his way back from his encounter with Ezekiel. He would have another look at George Yard and see if he had missed anything. He was fooling himself. He was too professional not to realise that any potential clues would long since have vanished or been spotted. His real reason for visiting George Yard was to see Bess. He couldn't stop thinking about her. He hated himself for it. What was it about her? He had been around pretty girls before but none had drawn him in quite like this. "I won't do anything about it but I can't help looking," he reasoned with himself. "People can admire a beautiful painting in a gallery. It doesn't mean they have to steal it and hang it on their parlour wall." Just one look, one smile and he would be happy. Of course, he was lying. He wouldn't be happy. He would be tortured with guilt. His duty was to Clara. He loved Clara. He would never leave her. He knew that. He believed that. But Bess haunted his thoughts. The smell of her. The sound of her. The sight of her. He needed to see her again. He was out of luck. As he approached the Palace, he saw a crowd of bluebottles gathered around the tenement opposite the theatre. A crowd was milling around them, buzzing with excitement.

"What's going on?" he asked one of the on-lookers.

"They've found a body," said the young man. "Can't you smell it?"

He couldn't smell anything apart from the man's sweat. He waved to Sergeant Houghton who was talking to his constables in the doorway. Houghton didn't look pleased to see him.

"What have we got?" asked Trimp.

"Body, sir."

This was the trouble with Houghton, he never offered any more than was asked.

"Another girl?"

Houghton shook his head. "Nope. Old friend of yours I believe. Come and have a look."

Trimp followed him inside. He felt a moment's dread. An old friend. Warner? Surely not. They walked down the dingy passageway towards a broken door that led down into the cellar. A stench rose up, making Trimp feel sick. He turned away and took a handkerchief from his pocket.

"Smells like its been here a while."

"Looks that way too, sir," said Houghton. He descended the steps.

There were three uniformed policemen in the cellar, one of them holding a gas lantern that cast long shadows over the peeling paint on the walls. The cellar had flooded recently and in one corner he saw the remains of a body. It was male. One boot was missing and it looked as if the rats had made a meal of his foot.

Trimp remembered an old trick of Doctor Killeen's for dealing with the smell of ripe corpses. He asked Houghton for a smoke.

Houghton offered him a cheroot.

"Have one yourself, Houghton. Give one to your men too. It'll help with the smell."

Houghton looked put out at being asked to share his smokes with the men but he did as requested and soon the smell of rotting corpse was at least partially masked by the reek of cheap tobacco.

Still Trimp was reluctant to step forward. He was sure the dead man would be someone he knew and cared about. He turned to Houghton.

"Who found the body?"

"Landlord, sir. The place has been empty for months. He's leasing it to a new tenant next week. Wanted to check everything was fine before he handed over the keys."

Trimp looked around him. "I don't suppose he was going to clean the place up?"

Houghton looked at him strangely. "I doubt it sir. Let the new tenant do that if he's that way inclined."

"Let's have a closer look." He had put the moment off for too long. He bent down, and almost laughed with relief.

The body was decomposed but he could still recognise the features. Ned Sherkin, the nobbler. So this was where he had ended up. It looked as if the authorities could cross another name off their list of possible suspects. From the look of him he had been dead for weeks. He moved aside the dead man's shirt collar and swallowed deeply. His throat had been cut. He could see maggots crawling in the blackened wound. He felt his head spinning and then he fell forward across the corpse.

"Give him some air!" Houghton was yelling when he came to. He had been moved to the foot of the stairs. Houghton smiled down at him. "Weak stomach, sir? I'd've thought you'd be used to everything by now."

Trimp nodded. Let Houghton believe what he wanted to. It was easier that way. He had seen similar wounds a long time ago. The memories had been too much. His brain had chosen to shut itself down rather than deal with it. That was why he had fainted. He swallowed. His mouth dry. He needed to clear his head.

"I'm going outside. Have the body taken to Doctor Killeen."

"Very good, sir."

As he went up the stairs, he could hear the policemen laughing. He didn't care. He hurried out into the street. He would have to hear back from Doctor Killeen but it didn't look as if there were any other signs of violence on the corpse. That ruled out the killer of the women. He walked into George Yard and sat on the steps in the entrance to Bess's building. He closed his eyes and remembered.

He was in his teens. Still in the workhouse. Growler Griffin had just started hanging around with that Fenian mob. Trimp had made his disapproval known and consequently the two of them didn't spend as much time together. Growler had always hated people taking the moral highground with him. Then, one morning Growler hadn't shown up for his work detail. Trimp still didn't know what had made him go back to the dormitory to look for him. One of those hunches, most likely. The dormitory was empty but he could hear raised voices coming from the washrooms. Trimp had gone to his own bed and rummaged under the mattress for the knife he had stolen from a butcher in Spitalfields two days earlier. He had then followed the sound of the voices. He had walked in to find Jerry Sheldrake, the oldest, toughest and nastiest boy in the workhouse. Sheldrake was start naked. He held Growler over the bath tub, forcing the boy's head under the dirty water while he attempted to rape him. Growler was struggling but he clearly couldn't last much longer. Sheldrake was laughing, his face red with rage and lust. He looked at Trimp, standing in the doorway.

"You're next," he said with a wink. "Come here and hold him down."

Trimp walked over, the knife behind his back. Growler's struggles were getting weaker. He would have to be quick. He stepped quickly to one side, dodging behind Sheldrake and slashed out with the knife across the older boy's throat. Sheldrake's hands had gone straight to the wound, as it gushed red into the bath water.

Trimp pulled Growler out of the bath and shoved Sheldrake in. Sheldrake didn't struggle. The strength had gone out of him. He was dead before Growler had finished coughing up the soapy water.

Growler had been horrified. So had Trimp. Neither of them had killed before. They stared at the body.

"You killed him," said Growler, still gasping for air.

"Yes. He would have killed you. "

Together they had washed the knife in the bloody water, then wrapping a towel around the blade they had placed it in the dead boy's hand. Together they lifted him into the bath. Trimp noticed he had some bloodstains on his shirt and trousers. He decided to roll in dirt as soon as he could to disguise the stains.

"You go and get dressed. I'll see you outside."

They had completed their work detail in silence. It was lunchtime before the announcement was made about Sheldrake. The boys pretended to be shocked. It was easy. They were shocked. The authorities seemed to think it was suicide. There was no investigation. Sheldrake had been a bad lot. Nobody would miss him.

Later, once he had calmed down and realised nobody was going to arrest him for murder, he tried to use the fact that he had saved Growler's life as leverage to stop him from mixing with the Fenians. Growler, contrary fucker that he was had refused.

"What'll you do if I don't? Kill me too?"

That had hurt. "Terry. I did it for you."

"Did I ask you to?"

"You couldn't ask me anything. Your head was under the water."

Maybe it was shame at the memory but something inside Growler had snapped. "You cause me any grief an' I'll tell 'em all what happened to Sheldrake."

Now, with years of experience behind him, Trimp knew in his heart that Growler had been bluffing. He would never spill his guts to the bluebottles. At the time he didn't have the luxury of giving Growler the benefit of the doubt. It was then that he decided once and for all to shop him. He would wait for the right moment and then get Growler Griffin, the ungrateful bastard, out of his hair for good.

Trimp opened his eyes. He was soaking wet. He looked up into the darkening sky. He had done many bad things in his life but handing his friend over to the law had been the worst. He had tried to block out the memory, to tell himself he had done it out of patriotism and a love for law and order, but that was ballocks. He had done it to save himself.

Now Griffin was back. He knew it was his old friend that had murdered Ned Sherkin. He had copied Trimp's own method and made a better job of it too. He plucked a hair from his nostril and the sneeze turned into a spasm of coughing. Could he do it again? Could he bring Growler Griffin up on charges of murder? He shook his head. No. Not this time. Ned Sherkin was similar to Jerry Sheldrake. They had both asked for it. He looked up at Bess's window, hoping to see her, to be invited in out of the rain. He wondered whether he should knock on her door but decided against it. Better to go home where he was wanted. Turning his collar up he turned and left. Bess watched him go from the upstairs window.

## FRIENDS REUNITED

"*I've got a pound o' sausages tucked up in my pocket,*" sang Growler Griffin. He stopped mid-verse as he noticed the couple taking their seats in the third row. It was Samuel Trimp and his wife. "My disguise'll fool the big dope," he told himself, He recovered before anyone noticed his discomfort and continued with his act, which tonight included a drunk policeman routine and an impression of Queen Victoria having a shave.

"Shame on you, sir!" came a voice from the back. It was the old doctor that hung around with that masked toff.

The masked man and his younger companion told him to calm down.

"No. It's a disgrace! Where's your respect, sir?"

"Right here, guv!" Growler turned round and showed his arse, blowing a big raspberry, much to the delight of the crowd.

The old man spluttered in indignation.

"I'll give respect where it's due, Grandad," said Growler. "I don't see our gracious Sovereign showin' much respect for them poor dead girls. Do you? If she did, she'd get the govermint ter offer a reward fer that monster."

"Here, here!" came a cry from the audience.

The man stormed out, followed by his colleagues.

"Here," yelled one young dock worker. "Why's he wearin' a mask? How do we know he ain't the killer?"

Stan, standing in the wings cursed Growler and his temper. The last thing he needed was another riot. He had spent a fortune replacing the doors and broken windows from the previous week. He leaped onto the stage.

"Now, now, ladies an' gents! That ain't no killer. He...he... he's..." He was thinking on his feet here, desperate to stop a lynching in his own auditorium. "Aw... I'm sorry guvnor. He made me promise not ter say noffink, but he's a representative of the government. He's..."

"He's not the bleedin' Home Secretary is he?" yelled the same dock worker. "Let's scrag him, lads!"

"No!" roared Stan. "He's not. He's part of a special committee. Sent to observe life in the East End. To try an' gather clues an' that. Undercover. He has ter wear a mask coz he's got a problem wiv his skin. Ain't that right, Cap'n? It looks worse 'n it is, but he don't wanna frighten anyone. An' it's catching too."

The crowd backed away from the masked man and his friends.

"Sorry guv. I had ter tell 'em."

The masked man nodded. "Of course. Good night to you all."

He left with his friends.

Trimp excused himself and followed the three men out onto the street. He recognised the carriage and groaned. Only one family used carriages like that. He approached the men as they were climbing inside.

"Your Highness? Prince Albert?"

The masked man turned, his eyes wide.

"Do yourself a favour, don't come back here. It ain't seemly."

The man stared at him.

"Drive on!"

Trimp watched the carriage disappear and then went inside to enjoy the show. He returned just in time to see the Incredible Flying Dwarf land in Clara's lap.

"Good God, man," he bellowed, elbowing his way to his seat. "My wife has just had a baby."

"It's quite all right, dear," laughed Clara. "He's as light as a feather."

The audience howled with laughter, as did Tiny Pete as he doffed his cap and bowed.

"Thankee very much, Mum. An' a very soft landin' you made too." He turned to Trimp.

"Don't worry sir, I'm only a little un. She won't 'ave felt a thing!"

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Clara loved the show. While Trimp could barely bear to watch Bess, Faye and the Naughty Wonder Girls singing about the vicar who came to stay, Clara laughed until the tears ran down her face.

"I don't know what poor Papa would say if he heard that song," she giggled.

"Let's hope he never has occasion to," said Trimp. "Are you sure you haven't seen enough? It's getting very late."

"Nonsense. I could watch it all over again. It's wonderful. Besides, we haven't said hello yet." Trimp was amazed at Clara's reaction and realised he didn't know his wife as well as he thought.

During Job's act, the Swami Yogi decided to have a little joke at the Inspector's expense. He approached Clara who did not recognise him in his stage makeup.

"The spirits tell me you have recently given birth to a beautiful baby girl."

"Th... that's correct," gasped Clara.

Trimp discretely plucked a hair from his nostril. Warner had told him of Job's assistance at the birth. If he wanted to use it in his act it was a small price to pay.

"You have an admirer, my dear lady. May I tell you that a wonderful man is about to come into your life. My apologies *effendi*," he said with a nod to Trimp. "He is named after an unlucky person from your Holy Bible. I am afraid more than this I can not say."

"Oh..." Clara blushed. "Do go on."

"No. No, I think that's quite enough, dear," said Trimp. "We mustn't tax the spirits."

"Quite right, *effendi*. Very wise. He is very wise man. Remember. A man from the Bible."

Finally the show ended with a good old cockney singalong. It came as a great surprise to Trimp who at best could be described as awkward, that not only was Clara joining in but she seemed to know all the words. He also got a thrill when he saw Bess staring at him. When he looked back she didn't look away but carried on staring and gave him a little smile that seemed to promise so much and then, maybe, nothing at all. Luckily for Trimp, Clara was oblivious to this. The last thing he wanted was to explain to his wife why some East End dancing girl was giving him secret smiles.

Another successful and popular show came to an end and there was a real buzz from the crowd as they headed for the exits.

"Come on then, my dear," said Trimp. "Let us go and meet your new friends if that is your wish."

"It is, Sammy. If you do..." They were interrupted by Stan, who had come from the backstage area.

"I've told everybody you were here, Miss and that you wished to meet everyone and express your gratitude. They are just getting changed and will be along in a minute. Now, may I offer you a drink.?"

"No, I think perhaps..."

"Nonsense Sammy! I would love a drink. You must ignore my husband, Mister..?"

"Garrideb."

"Mister Garrideb. Sometimes he doesn't know when to stop playing at policemen. I'll have a nice big gin please!"

"Right you are, Mrs Trimp. Inspector?"

"The same please, Mister Garrideb. Thank you." Trimp realised maybe it was time to relax and let himself go a little. He had been nervous that Clara might have found these surroundings intimidating but she had proven him wrong. She was more at ease here than he was.

They were soon joined by Job, Faye and Bess. The girls introduced themselves to Clara who gave a delightful giggle when Faye curtsied.

"What are you doing, Faye?" she laughed. "I'm not royalty."

"Well...I..." She looked round flustered as everybody around her curtsied and then burst out laughing. "All right, all right yer bastards! Ooh sorry, Miss Clara ...No offence?"

"None taken, Faye. None taken."

"Hello, Miss," said Job, coming forward, his face freshly scrubbed. "I'm Job."

"Job? But...the man....Swami...?" The penny dropped. "You!"

"The very same, Miss, But better looking in this light, surely?"

"Oh, yes," said a giddy Clara and then immediately blushed at her indiscretion and looked with apprehension at Trimp who gave her a kind smile. He was genuinely glad to see his wife so happy.

"Ah, there you are," said Stan, gesturing for Growler to step forward. "Inspector. Mrs Trimp may I introduce our 'engine room'. Barker Biffin."

Growler stepped forward.

"Barker Biffin? Good God, Terry," laughed Trimp. "Is that the best you can come up with? And as for that disguise. Where on earth?"

Trimp never saw Growler's fist coming. It hit him square on the side of the head. Workhouse kids are made of stern stuff though and Trimp reacted like he had been punched by a butterfly. In an instant the years rolled away and they were back in the

lump hotel again, as Trimp, like a savage, launched himself onto Growler, punching him hard in the face and body. No holds were barred as they threw themselves at each other body and soul. The assembled crowd were shocked at the savage ferocity. Clara had never thought it possible that her mild-mannered, intelligent husband could resort to such violence. Job found himself sprayed with blood as Growler's nose burst open. Growler was quick to reciprocate. The fighters ignored the Queensbury rules completely, they had their own. Survival, at all costs. Low blows, kidney punches, eye gouging, head butts, anything went until Warner who had arrived late, waded in and tried to separate them. Even he struggled, so Job and Stan stepped in too, and eventually, breathless, battered and bruised, the combatants allowed themselves to be dragged apart.

During the scuffle, Job's hand had come in contact with Warner and he had stepped back, shocked. Now he smiled.

"Well, well, well. Jack 'Patch' Wallers."

"What?" said Faye and Bess together.

They looked carefully at Warner. They recognised him now. Faye was furious. "You! A fucking bluebottle. You sneaky prick. We trusted you."

"I didn't do anything to betray your trust," pleaded Warner.

"Then why didn't you come here as the copper you are?"

"Because we're trying to catch a killer. We thought that he might be picking up girls here. He's not gonna come anywhere near a bluebottle now is he?" said Warner. He felt ashamed.

"Well It's not right. We liked you. We trusted you," said Faye.

"It's not Warner's fault," said Trimp, spitting blood. "I told him to do it. We were close. Really close. If Annie Chapman hadn't been so stubborn and refused Warner's invitation to take her home, she'd still be alive. Any chance of a drink, Stan?"

Stan nodded.

Trimp turned to Growler. "What d'yer smack me for, yer silly cunt?"

"Samuel," said Clara shocked at her husband's coarse language.

Trimp shot her a 'not now' look. Clara liked it. Faye and Bess liked it too.

"I thought you were gonna send me back to Australia."

Trimp sighed. "For fuck's sake, you thick bastard. I can't send you back there. It's fuck all to do with me."

Growler smiled. "I gotta hand it to you, Sammy. The soft option hasn't made you any softer."

"Nor you," said Trimp. He laughed. "It was good that, wannit?"

"Just like old times," said Growler.

They stared at each other as Stan poured the drinks.

Growler raised his glass. "To the old days."

Trimp raised his glass and brought it up to Growler's. "To the old days. May they never return."

Growler laughed. "Too bloody right. May they never come back." He swallowed the gin, and turned to Stan for a refill.

Stan, grateful that the hostilities had ceased poured both combatants another healthy measure, then he raised his own glass. "To friendship."

## REAL MEN

Tumblety had checked into his hotel in Hope Street, Liverpool, under the name of Frank Townsend. Gone were the medals and military jackets. He had adopted a quieter more sober attire, so as to go unnoticed. A part of him hated the anonymity of it all. It seemed so sordid to be hiding like an animal at bay.

"If I were an animal," he mused, "I would be a peacock, proudly showing off my plumage for all to admire."

He viewed his Liverpool sojourn, philosophically. He would look upon it as a vacation from work and toil. He would give the slatterns of the city no more thought. They were beneath him. Much better to celebrate his rest and recreation with a boy. A cheeky boy, with curly hair... and a uniform.

The hotel's 'boots' boy was fifteen, a little old for what he had in mind, but he looked a lot younger. His hair was a soft golden brown and he wore it down to his collar. He had a freckled nose and an air of mischief about him. He would do nicely.

Before summoning the boy into his suite he emptied his trouser pockets of change and deliberately left two sovereigns amongst the pennies on the writing desk.

He invited the boy into his rooms.

"Yes, m'boy. I have a pair of riding boots here and I want to see my face in them. Can you do that for me?"

"Course I can."

"You prodigious boy. You Emperor of shoe-shiners. Excuse me one moment while I fetch them."

Tumblety went into the adjoining bedroom and watched through the keyhole as the boy waited. The boy stood, twiddling with his belt, then the desk caught his eye. He moved

over to it and saw the coins. He saw the sovereigns. He ignored them. He picked up two pennies instead and put them in his jacket.

Tumblety returned. He noticed a becoming red flush spread across the boy's cheeks. He went to the desk.

"Why it seems as if I'm two pennies short. You wouldn't know anything about that would you, child?"

"N... no. Honest."

"Hand them over."

"It wasn't me, mister."

"Shall I call the police? It could cost you your position."

The boy handed over the coins, tears in his eyes.

"Oh dear. We still have a problem."

"What? I give 'em back."

"Yes. But what about punishment? I cannot in all conscience let a thief go unpunished. Now, shall we let the authorities punish you? Or shall I take matters into my own hands? The choice is yours."

"What d'yer mean, sir?"

"I mean, do I punish you, or do I allow the police to punish you?"

"Oh." Tears were streaming down his cheeks now.

"Well?"

"You, sir."

"Me what? What do you want me to do?"

"Punish me, sir."

"Louder."

"Punish me, sir."

Tumblety, sighed. "As you wish. Drop your trousers."

The boy obeyed.

"And your undergarments. That's it. Now bend over against the desk."

Tumblety chose his favourite riding crop, the one with the ivory handle, took three steps back and then launched himself upon the boy, thrashing him until the blood streamed down his legs and he could barely stand.

At last, exhausted, and spent, he stopped. The boy was sobbing.

"Remove your clothes."

"But."

"I'm a doctor. We have to treat those wounds. You don't want an infection do you?"

He led the boy into the bathroom where he drew a bath of cold water and emptied a packet of salt into it. Swirling it around he directed the boy to get in.

The maid heard the boy's shrieks and went for the manager. He knocked on the door. There was no reply. He heard the boy wailing. The manager called for one of the porters and then used his master key to enter the room.

The cries were coming from the bathroom. The manager and the porter opened the door and saw the boy in the reddened water, sobbing as their guest hurried to cover himself with his hands.

"Good God!" gasped the manager.

"It's one o' them sodomites," said the porter.

"It's not what you think," said Tumblety. "This boy is a thief."

"We'll see what the police have to say about that," said the manager. "This is a respectable hotel. Stay there. You boy, come with us." He handed the boy a towel to cover himself. "Tom, get the rozzers. Now."

The porter ran for help. The manager took the sobbing boy by the shoulders and led him from the room, locking it behind him.

Tumblety cursed. He hurriedly packed his bag. He tried the door. It wouldn't open. He raised the window and looked out. The rain was lashing down. There was a fire escape leading into the yard. He crawled out of the window and slowly descended, slipping twice on the wet rungs. He made it to the street and turning his jacket inside out and pulling his wide awake hat down over his face made his way to the station. Damn these Northern Philistines. It was time to return to London.

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Jane was bathing Trimp's wounds with warm salted water and cotton wool swabs and was silently amazed at how Trimp just sat there seemingly impervious to the pain. Just how she liked her men, she mused... Tough.

"I'll take over, Jane if you don't mind," said Clara entering the room.

"Not at all, ma'am," said Jane.

They sat in silence for a few minutes until Clara said, "Boys will be boys, eh?"

"That sort of thing is to be expected at those places."

"You didn't have to retaliate."

"And let a man strike me for no good reason?"

"He seemed to think he had a reason. He was your friend once?"

Trimp nodded. He felt ashamed.

"And you had him transported?"

Trimp looked away. "It was for the good of the nation. He was mixed up in all sorts of things. He's no angel, Clara."

Clara nodded. "Neither are you. I... I didn't think you capable of such... savagery."

"Clara, what is it you think I do when I leave this house every morning? Help old ladies across the road? Assist in the finding of Lady Baverstock's lost poodle? I deal with these people every day. People who see violence as a habit, who would sooner stab a man as look at him."

"You're missing the point, Samuel. You are a respectable member of the community. An officer of the law. It is expected of you to set an example. With that coarse language and mindless brutality you debase yourself. You lower yourself to that level."

Trimp's face flushed with anger and shame. "That is my level! It always will be. It's fine for you. Miss Clara, with your loving Mamma and your dear old clergyman Papa giving you the warmth, love and security only a family can provide. I'm the product of what? I'll never know my mother or father, chances are I'm the result of some grubby little poke in a dirty dark alley between a sailor and a whore. If not that then something equally unseemly. I could rise to become the richest man in England, friend to royalty and the famous, but deep down I am and always will be workhouse scum. Don't mistake me Clara, I am not asking for sympathy, or any special prizes. I am more than happy to take you to places like the Palace of Wonder if that's your wish. But I will not apologise for myself or my behaviour. That is what I am."

"Papa was right," thought Clara. "Workhouse boys are a breed apart. There will always be a part of them forever feral, they know exactly what it takes to survive." She opened her arms to her husband and Trimp fell into her embrace willingly.

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"Well my money was on that dashing Inspector," cooed Bess. "If you hadn't have been pulled apart I reckon he would have put you down."

"Ballocks," snorted Growler. "He's a pompous ass these days. I had him just where I wanted. I was on the point of dropping him."

"In yer dreams, Fido," said Faye. "You were chasing shadows. All your punches were going wide."

"Yeah, well, he's got those little feet like a girl, all dancey-dancey tippy-tappy. A proper man would have stood toe-to-toe," Growler complained.

"He looked like a proper man from where I was standing," said Bess, much to the annoyance of both Growler and Stan.

"Come on, leave it now and get this place cleaned up. It's bad enough having bloody mobs smashing the place up without my own staff chipping in," said Stan, irritably.

"Why does Bess fancy every other fucker bar me?" he thought to himself.

"Little feet?" Faye whispered in Growler's ear. "Is that the best you can come up with?"

"Shove it, Faye," Growler grunted. "I'm not in the mood."

## HOUNDS UNLEASHED

Morning came, grey and wet. The police were introducing bloodhounds to the area in an experiment designed to track down the Whitechapel Murderer. Stan had tried sleeping but the constant baying of the hounds made it impossible.

"Hurry up an' catch the fucker, or give up for fuck's sake," he groaned, dragging himself out of bed.

After a cup of rancid coffee he decided to head over to the Palace. He opened the door and stepped out into the dank, wet fog. He saw shadows looming as the howls of the dogs grew louder. Four figures approached. A policeman, two dogs and their handler. The dogs jumped up at him, licking his face.

"Hello, who's a beauty?" he grinned patting the dogs.

"Don't touch the dogs, sir," snapped the handler. "They're highly dangerous."

One of them was nuzzling into Stan's crotch.

"I can see that," he said, squirming away.

"May I ask your business, sir?" asked the constable, taking out his notebook.

"I'm on my way to the theatre."

"Bit early for a show, ain't it?"

"I own the place. Stan Garrideb. At your service."

"Oh. Yes. Of course. The Palace. I saw that fat feller you had on there. The singer. Bloody beautiful voice. Terrible tragedy, sir."

"Yes. I know. You should come along again. We've got some great new acts."

"Don't mind if I do, sir. Will it be on the house?"

Bloody bluebottles. Always on the take. "Course. Anything for our fine constabulary. Good day to you, gentlemen."

He pulled himself away from the dogs and continued on his way. He was passing Miller's Court when a man accosted him.

"Mister Garrideb. Is that you?"

"Who wants to know?" He peered through the gloom. The man was standing against a wall, his face hidden in the fog.

"Wants to know? It's me. Joe."

"Joe who?"

"Joe who? Joe Barnett."

The name rang a bell.

"Mary's feller."

"That bitch?"

"That bitch? Yeh. That bitch. No...I mean, now steady on, sir. No need to take on like that."

"She sent a bloody lynch mob after me. She wrecked the Palace. She's lucky I don't press charges."

"Press charges. Mmm. Yeh. Don't look on it that way. She's a good girl is my Mary."

"A good girl? Oh yeh. One of the bloody best!"

"Bloody best! Yes, sir. I knew you'd see reason."

"See reason?" Fuck. The mad bastard had got him at it now. "What do you want Mister Barnett?"

"Mister Barnett? Yes. The job. The cleanin' job. Mary's sorry. Ever so. For the misunderstandin' an' that. Can she come an' work for you? Cleanin'? She don't have ter sing if yer don't want her too. But yer missin' out. Got a bloomin' lovely voice has our Mary. Ever heard her sing *A Violet From Mother's Grave*?"

"Yes. Sadly. It was fuckin' awful."

"Fuckin' awful. Hmm. Well yer in a minority there an' there's no accountin' fer taste.

Anyway. The job? Is it a goer?"

"No. It fuckin' isn't. Fuck off!"

Barnett grabbed Stan's sleeve. "Fuck off! Please guv. Please. She's desperate so she is.

She's gonna get evicted. She ain't got a penny. 'Ave a heart."

Stan sighed. "You can have the job."

"The job. Me? A cleaner?"

"Take it or leave it. I've nothin' against you."

"Against you. Alright. I'll take it. Very 'andsome it is of you, sir. I'll start now if you like."

"Great." He handed Joe some change. "Get us a couple o' chops an' somethin' to drink.

We've got a busy mornin'. We'll need fortifyin'."

"Fortifyin'. Mmm. Very wise. Thank yer very much, sir. Very 'andsome. Very 'andsome."

"I'll see you there, then."

"There then. Yes sir. I'll see you there then."

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Aaron Ezekiel was feeling uneasy. The fire and water had caused a lot of damage. Some rooms were beyond salvaging. Others could perhaps be made comfortable. He sat in his office at the back of the house. Apart from the smell, the blackened walls and the sodden carpets it was hardly damaged at all. A structural engineer had been round, tut tuted and hummed and ahhed and then told him the repair work would cost more than the house was worth. He sat there in his office and tried to work out just how he could regain his hold over the community. He knew he was losing his grip. When Garrideb had first crossed him he should have stamped on him hard, but before he knew it that

bloody Trimp was on the scene like a bad smell and the opportunity had slipped through his fingers. Damn him! Damn them all! He glanced over at the clock. David should have been here by now to get instructions, and where were his rampers? It was too damned quiet. A nasty thought hit him and he sat bolt upright. Jumping out of his chair he moved it to one side, bending on one knee he peeled back the corner of the rug. Reaching up to his desk for a letter opener he jammed it down the side of the floorboard and prised it up, reaching into the hole below, he felt about for the keys to his bureau. Gone! Fear, dread and a rising feeling of nausea swept over him as he got to his feet and shuffled over to the bureau. He knew the outcome before he opened it. Yes, some of the paperwork was intact, but he saw the huge spaces where his most important documents had been taken. Bonds, shares, contracts, bank details and all the deeds to all his properties...Gone! For a minute he thought his heart would stop and he gripped the back of his chair for support. Think man! Think! All might not be lost. His lawyer, Gerald Morris would have duplicates in his office. There wasn't a moment to lose, grabbing his hat and coat he charged out into the street.

"Well I never," said Samuel Trimp, "Mister Ebullient! What are the chances? An unbelievable coincidence!"

"Why don't you just fuck off and leave me alone?" snapped Ezekiel.

Trimp's tone suddenly changed. "Don't you talk to me like that, or I will beat you to the floor."

Ezekiel had one more stab at outrage. "Well don't you dare talk to me like that either. I think you are forgetting who you are dealing with."

Trimp smiled. "I know exactly who I'm dealing with, you little shit. It's over Ezekiel. You're nothing now. Look at you, standing there, all five foot nothing. Where are your men? That's right. Gone. You're a toothless tiger."

"I'm sure Abberline will have something to say about this."

"Oh, really? What do you do for water when the well runs dry?"

Ezekiel looked puzzled.

Trimp continued, "I'm sure Abberline was happy to take your money. What idiot would turn it down? Trouble is the power went to your head. You thought you were bigger than all of us. You are an arrogant arse and your biggest mistake was to think you were untouchable. Abberline was happy to turn a blind eye to the odd indiscretion but that business with the singer and then my wife. I'll wager any stake you like that Abberline will take his water from another well from now on and will deny all knowledge of you."

"I had nothing to do with your wife. That wasn't my doing."

Trimp stared at him, just long enough for Ezekiel to start to feel uncomfortable."It seems I am holding you up. I too have more business to attend to. Tchh! This was supposed to be a holiday and here I am running hither and thither! I won't take up anymore of your time. Good day, Mister Ezekiel."

Trimp stepped to one side allowing Ezekiel to pass. As he drew level Trimp said quietly, "Take your time Mister Ezekiel, there's no rush. I think you will find that what you are looking for may no longer be there."

## THE RATS AND THE SINKING SHIP

Joe was a good worker. His whistling helped drown out the constant baying of the hounds from the streets and Stan actually managed to get round to some paperwork for a change. He was totting up the week's takings when Joe knocked at his door.

"Some folks to see yer, sir."

"Who is it?"

"Who is it? Din't give names, sir. Din't like the look of 'em."

"Why what's wrong wiv 'em, Joe?"

Joe sneered. "Wiv 'em, Joe? Yids sir. Or I'm a monkey's uncle."

"I'm a yid, Joe. Show 'em in."

"Show 'em in. Yes sir. Course sir. Sorry sir. No offence sir."

"Show 'em in, Joe."

It was David, Ezekiel's former right hand dabeno. He cut a sorry picture, but the bruises from their last encounter had faded. He was flanked on either side were two equally desperate characters.

"I thought I told you to visit the country, David," said Stan, trying to stay calm. Where the fuck were Growler and Job when he needed them? He doubted Joe Barnett would be much help against these three.

David looked embarrassed. "I came back. Look, Gar... Mister Garrideb, me an' the boys, we want to talk."

"I'm not stoppin' you."

"This here's Israel Lipski, an' Joshua Schwartz."

The two men nodded gruffly. David snatched the hats from their heads.

"Sorry 'bout that, sir. No manners."

Stan shrugged. What the fuck was going on? "Don't worry about it."

"It's about Mister Ezekiel, sir."

"I thought it would be. He knows The Palace ain't for sale."

"Glad to hear it, sir."

"Eh?"

Israel Lipski spoke for the first time, his voice like gravel and oil. "We've bin 'earin' all about you."

"Yes?"

"Word gets out you know, about how when Ezekiel came to take the Palace you saw him off. We 'eard about the policemen yer've got in yer pocket looking out for ya's. An' 'ow yer got that mob on yer side an' torched his 'ouse."

"Oh, Yeh?" said Stan trying to sound menacing and warming to his theme. Whatever Chinese whispers these men had picked up he had no intentions of putting them right.

"We din't realise you 'ad such a big firm."

"Really?" Stan was at a loss as to what they meant. "Go on..."

"Well, David told us about that kickin' he got and well, to be honest, it's all goin' wrong with Ezekiel. It's like a ship without a whatcha call it?"

"Anchor?"

"Nah."

"Sail?"

"Nah."

"Oars?"

"Nah."

"What then? Portholes, rudder..."

"That's it. Rudder. People is takin' liberties. Not payin' their dues, so ter speak. That business with the copper's wife and...show 'im yer thumb, Shwartzzy"

Joshua gave Stan a thumbs up gesture only without the thumb.

"Well that was the final straw. We needs a figurehead. A strong figurehead. People are talkin' about you."

"Right."

David mistook Stan's response for indifference. "Look Mister Garrideb. The way you turned it all on Ezekiel, you done him in you have. He was top o' the pile. Then he messes wiv you an' it all goes ter shit. People respect you. We wanna work for you. Use your name. You get a percentage then. Of everythin'."

"What's everythin'?"

"The girls. The insurance programme. The poppy. The market. You name it. All that was his."

"Right. What do I have to do?"

"Noffink. Jus' leave it to us. If people know we're workin' fer you, they'll cough up."

"It's good for 'em sir," added Israel. "We keep 'em safe. Make sure no other bludgers come in."

"Hmmm. You're right boys," Stan bluffed. "I've got a good thing going on here, business is good and everyone's happy. Look, I like you, lads. You're just the sort of men I need. But... Ezekiel was a snake who made a living on people's misery. That's the one thing I'm not too happy about. We are, after all, the same race and I don't ever want to make my profit on the back of another man's misery. I'll take you boys on, but what I say goes. If there's something going on I ain't happy with, then it changes. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

"Good. Take this," Stan opened the drawer and withdrew some money. The effect on the men was what he was hoping for, their eyes lit up. "Get yourself some clobber and

have a few drinks and something to eat on me, then come and see me in two days time.

I'll have a better idea of what's what then. Oh and boys..."

They looked at Stan expectantly.

"Welcome aboard! There is one more thing."

"What's that then, sir? You name it."

"You see that American mandrake, bring him to me alive."

The three men looked at each other and grinned.

"We can live with that," said Joshua, standing up and shaking Stan's hand. "Nice doin' business wiv a genulman fer a change."

"Can you see yourselves out?"

"Righto, boss."

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Aaron Ezekiel could think of nothing more than Trimp's last comment as the carriage took him to the offices of Gerald Morris, his lawyer. As it rounded the final corner Ezekiel's heart sank as what he saw confirmed his fears. A uniformed police officer stood guard outside the building. The same policeman stopped Ezekiel when he tried gaining entrance.

"Sorry sir, nobody's allowed in or out pending further investigation."

"Why, Constable? What's happened?"

"Seems like an attempted robbery gone wrong, sir. A man's been killed. It looks like he might have stumbled upon the thief and paid a heavy price. Wrong place at the wrong time."

"The dead man...?"

"The lawyer, sir, whose office it was. Morris I think his name was."

"What....erm...What was taken?"

"Sorry sir, you are?"

"Forgive me, Constable," said Ezekiel trying to sound calm. "My name is Mister Goldstein. I am one of Mister Morris's clients."

"Oh right, Mister Goldstein, well like I say it seems the thief was disturbed. He didn't get away with much though. A few files and that. Mostly paperwork."

Ezekiel didn't need to ask anything else. He already knew all the answers.

## SETTING THE TRAP

Growler woke late, hungry and sore. He stretched and winced. A good dabbing would soon iron out the aches and pains. He thought of Bess. No way, not after she'd been going on and on about Trimp lately. Let her fuck him, then we'd soon see who was the real man. His thoughts turned to Faye. She was cute but what a gob she had on her. She'd only start winding him up and put him in a bad mood. Nah, he'd take plum luck today and then have a slap up breakfast in the Britannia.

She approached him on Commercial Street. Youngish. Not great looking, but not bad either. She had a strange accent. Sort of sing-song up and down. Well, that was good. He liked up and down.

"You looking for company, Mister?" she asked.

"You must read minds, darlin'. You oughtta take to the stage."

"I've seen you at the Palace," she confided. "You're a naughty one, aren't you?"

"Yeh. I need takin' in hand. Growler Griffin at your service."

"Liz. Long Liz."

"Why long?"

She raised her dresses to reveal a long shapely thigh.

"You like?"

"I like. Where you from Lizzie?"

"Sweden. I... I don't usually do this."

"Course you don't."

He led her into a courtyard.

"I lost my husband on the Princess Alice. My kids too."

"Blimey. You know how to get a feller's juices flowing."

"I'm sorry. I was only saying."

"That's fine. You carry on sweetheart. I love that accent."

She carried on talking all the while until their business was concluded.

"I'm famished. Want something to eat?" he asked.

"Something to drink'd be better."

"A gal after me own heart. I like you, Lizzie."

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They were tucking into a plate of eels and beer when Trimp sat down beside them.

"Mornin' Terry."

Growler looked at him. "What?"

"Who's your friend?"

"Liz."

"Mornin' Liz. You wanna give me a moment with yer boyfriend?"

The woman, recognising a police officer when she saw one was quick to take her leave.

"Thanks a lot, Sammy boy. You always did frighten off all the birds. You should've got a job as a scarecrow."

"Are we good?" asked Trimp.

"Eh?"

"Mates?" He offered his hand. Growler looked at it and shrugged.

"You've got some brass. I'll give yer that. We were mates, Sam. You dobbed me in. Cost me twenty years. Bloody Australia. It was fuckin' awful. Why'd yer do it, Sam?"

Trimp shrugged. "The twenty years weren't just for that though and you know it. I'm sorry. I had to. It hurt me too. You don't know how much it hurt."

"Not half enough, I'm sure."

"Look, I wanted to get out of the bloody workhouse just as much as you. But not your way, Terry. You were mixin' with bloody Fenians. It was treason. Didn't you have any love of country?"

"I had a love of me, Sam. God knows, no other fucker did. Those Paddies paid me. They put food an' drink in me belly."

"I know. Looking back, I see that now but it was a way out for me. Doin' what I did. It was wrong. I know it. But it got me started in the force. I love this country, Terry. I won't see anyone try an' destroy it. Not even you."

Growler nodded. "I'd thump you again, but it ain't worth it. It's done now."

"Now there's someone else tryin' to destroy this country. Destroying it with fear and blood. Hurting the helpless and the weak. The poor and..."

"Well it ain't me. So fuck off an' leave me alone."

"I know who it is. So do you."

Growler looked at him. "Tumblety?"

Trimp nodded.

"You sure?"

Trimp nodded.

"Fuck. Yeh. I knowed it too. I've seen him kill a man."

Trimp sneezed.

"God, you still do that thing with your nose. Pack it in. It's disgustin'. I'm eatin'."

"Suddenly you're sensitive? Tell me about this man."

"Nothin' to tell. He killed a feller. I saw it."

"Why didn't you go to the police?"

"Why do you think? Prick. I thought you were gonna send me back. Anyway, I couldn't.

He would've done me too."

"You? Scared of that weasel?"

"You ain't seen him move. He's like fuckin' lightnin'. Inhuman he is."

"We need to get him. Will you help me?"

Growler shrugged. "I don't know. I don't get on with bluebottles."

"I know about Ned Sherkin, Terry. It was you, wasn't it?"

Growler pushed away his plate. His face flushed with anger. "Was it? I heard it was the same feller what killed Jerry Sheldrake all them years ago."

Trimp shook his head. "Don't bring that up again. Nobody would believe you."

"Shit sticks," said Growler. "People might start askin' questions. Watching you. Carefully. They may not make you swing but it might queer things for yer." His eyes suddenly opened wide as a thought struck him. "That's why you did it, ain't it? That's why you sang to the law. You didn't want me tellin' tales about what happened to Sheldrake."

Trimp shook his head and stared into Growler's eyes. He forced himself to remain calm.

"Of course not. I knew I could trust you. It had nothing to do with it. Forget about Jerry Sheldrake."

"I bet you wish I would," said Growler.

"And I'll forget about Ned Sherkin. They were filth. Both of 'em. Our killer is different. He's a monster. What if he did it to Bess? Or Faye?"

"I'd fuckin' tear out his eyes an' piss in the sockets."

"Well, you help me catch him, I'll let you do just that."

Growler grinned. "Yeh? What've I gotta do?"

"Help me draw him out."

"How?"

"We're gonna set a little honeytrap out and you're the honeypot."

"Come again?"

"You're gonna dress up as a dollymop. You're gonna be his next victim, Terry."

"Fer fuck's sake. Tell me you're kidding?"

"No. Deadly serious."

"No chance."

"Come off it, Terry. You're a natural. The King of the disguises!"

"What, d'yer think so?" He saw the twinkle in Trimp's eye. "Fuck off yer piss-taking bastard."

"C'mon Terry don't be so touchy. You've gotta admit you could have made a better effort? Than Barker bloody Biffin."

"I'm still not doin' it."

Trimp fixed him with a deep penetrating stare. "Terry, you are a natural performer. The man's inhuman. You're tough. The place will be well covered. If anything kicks off we'll be on it in a flash. Think of the girls. Think of Bess. Faye. My Clara."

"Well..."

"There's money in it."

"How much?"

Suddenly Trimp had Growler's full attention and he realised he could have saved himself a lot of time and effort if he had just mentioned money straight away.

"Twenty."

Growler whistled. "That's a tidy sum."

"It's in everyone's best interest to get this man off the streets. So?"

Growler thought for a moment. He took a swig of beer and rolled it around his mouth before swallowing. "You fuckers better be there to cover my arse."

"Don't you worry about that." Trimp extended his hand. "Thanks, Terry."

This time Growler took it. Instead of letting it go he held it in a firm grip and looked Trimp in the eye. "We were good mates you and I, Sammy. At one stage you were the only family I had."

"Yes, I know."

"Why d'yer have to fuck it up? If it wasn't Sheldrake, what was it?"

"A question I have asked myself more than once Terry, I assure you. But we were always destined to walk different paths."

"Just so long as you can live with yourself, Sammy."

"Oh, I can live with myself, Terry. Don't you worry about that."

Trimp got up to leave, his thoughts now occupied by where he could get his hands on twenty pounds reward money.

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Doctor Tumblety found himself drawn back to the East End, like a moth to a flame. He knew he was in danger, that Ezekiel and the police would no doubt be looking for him. It was with regret that he decided to change his appearance. He was a fair haired man and it had taken him an age to grow the imperial whiskers that had made him so popular with the boys. He had retired his military regalia in favour of a peaked sailor's cap and a smart cutaway jacket. He looked good but not spectacular.

He stood on the pavement outside the barber shop. It belonged to a Severin Klosowski. Good. A foreigner would be less likely to bother him with unwanted questions. He noticed the sign 'Musical Shaves' and smiled. He liked music. Perhaps it was a sign to say farewell to the whiskers.

He opened the door. The shop was empty. He heard sounds from the back. An angry voice, speaking in heavily accented English.

"I fuckin' kill you. You fuck."

He heard choking noises and grinned. A nice little spot of domestic trouble. How quaint. The floor creaked as he moved forward, hoping to catch a glimpse of this intriguing little drama. The sounds stopped.

A burly, mustachioed villain stepped forward and flashed him a gypsy smile. All that was lacking was a dagger between the teeth.

"Good morning, sir," he said. "Can I help?"

"Mmm. A shave. If you please."

The man nodded. He was red-faced and sweating. "Lucy! Get out here!"

A pretty, pale-faced woman came out. She held her hand to her throat.

"Yes, dear?"

"The pianoforte. This gen'man want shave."

"Oh. Of course."

As she began to play, a dainty air, Tumblety noticed the livid marks around her neck and chuckled.

"Get rid of the tash."

"Sorry?"

"The whiskers. Lose them."

"I..." The barber was surprised. "But such fine whiskers. You sure you want?"

"Yes."

He closed his eyes and listened to the music. Who would have thought such an insignificant creature as this wretched mouse of a woman could create such a lovely, relaxing atmosphere? She probably picked it up parrot fashion he told himself.

"Is a lovely cologne you wear, sir," said the barber.

"Thank you, my man."

The barber finished his work and Tumblety stared at himself in the mirror. He wanted to weep. His beautiful whiskers, consigned to the shop floor. He consoled himself with the knowledge that he now looked ten years younger, no longer the dignified statesman perhaps, but not bad. Not bad at all. As he paid for the shave, a thought occurred to him.

"Mister Klosowski, that is your name, yes?"

The barber stared, his black eyes burning into his. "What of it?"

"I wonder if I may have a word. In private."

The barber shot a hard stare at the piano player. "Vanish."

She scurried away.

Tumblety grinned. "I couldn't help overhearing your little upset as I came in."

The man looked away. "Is nothing."

"Sure. The thing is I could use a man like you."

"For what?"

"I'm a doctor."

"Really? I too was doctor. In Poland."

"Better and better. I need a man to help me conduct a series of experiments. No pay. But a rewarding experience, I promise you."

"What kind experience?"

"Experience with women."

"Yes?" He licked his lips. "I have interest."

"Good man."

\*\*\*

Stan pondered the consequences of his meeting with David and his cohorts. He asked Joe to bring him a tot of brandy and then another. Who would have believed it? Ezekiel had tried to squash him and now the boot was well and truly on the other foot. He had

Ezekiel's men. He frowned. The one thing he did not have was Ezekiel's fortune. Ezekiel had money and money brought favours and respect. Stan was no match for Ezekiel. Perhaps he had been wrong accepting David's proposal. Ezekiel was sure to fight back, hard and furious. It was one thing standing up for his own rights and fighting to keep the Palace. It was quite another to go up against Ezekiel and play him at his own game. He lacked the means and the ruthlessness. Not that he would be above ridding himself of Ezekiel for good if the opportunity ever arose. He just knew it would not. He had survived so far on blind luck. He knew full well what Aaron Ezekiel was capable of. He still had nightmares about Jonah's severed head.

"The bastard," he swore. "Poor Jonah."

There was a knock on the door.

"*Entrez.*"

It was Joe.

"What is it, Joe?"

"Is it, Joe? It's a package for you, sir."

"A package?"

"A package? Yes sir."

"Give it here then."

"Here then. Here you go."

Joe handed him a large envelope filled to bursting point. His name was scrawled on the front in a neat but hurried hand.

"Who left it?"

"Left it? Buh."

"Buh?"

"Buh? Dunno, sir. It was there on the floor, sir."

He opened the package. Various legal documents spilled out onto his desk. The deeds to properties. A theatre in Bow, a property in Thomas Street, a pub in the Minories, a warehouse in Houndsditch. All made out in his name and witnessed by a lawyer called Gerald Morris.

"Fuck me sideways," he grinned. "Joe, bring me another brandy. Have one yerself too."

"Yerself too. Comin' right up, sir."

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"Mister Garrideb!"

"Inspector Trimp! Becoming quite the regular. We'll be putting you on the bill next. Do you sing?"

"Only as a threat."

"Pull up a chair. Cigar? Drink?"

"Yes to both. Thank you, Mister Garrideb."

"Please, call me Stan."

"Very well. Stan it is. As I seem to be a man of leisure at the moment please feel free to call me Sam."

The two men smiled.

Cigars lit and drinks charged, Trimp said, "Business is booming, looked like another full house out there tonight."

"Yes, they come to see Job. He's sensational."

"You got that right. I've never seen anything like him. Is he for real?"

"I'm not going to lie to you, Sam. I think he is. I can't see the joins anyway."

"Blimey. What a talent."

"Anyway, what brings you here?"

"It's Growler I've come to see actually."

"Oh no, don't be starting all that monkey business again."

"Don't worry," chuckled Trimp. "Nothing like that. He's agreed to take part in a little experiment. To try and catch this bloody maniac."

"Really? Growler cooperating with the police. How d'yer manage that?"

"Not only that, he's agreed to dress as a dollymop in an attempt to draw him out."

Stan guffawed loudly. "Ballocks!"

"I told him there was a very generous reward for the killer's capture. Strictly between you and me I've got to find someone to put up the money. If it comes to that of course, and assuming this man is caught because he couldn't contain himself when faced with Growler's petticoats!"

Stan smiled. "What's the reward?"

"Thirty pounds."

"Blimey, that's a sum." Stan took a slug of brandy and a puff on his cigar. "I'll post it."

"Business must be good."

"Let's just say I seem to have had a change of luck regarding my finances recently."

"Really?" said Trimp with a smile. "I'm glad to hear it."

"This must remain between you and me," said Stan.

"Don't worry Stan. Your secret's safe with me."

They were interrupted by the office door opening and Bess burst in.

"Stanley, I just wanted to ask...Oh. Hello Inspector, I didn't realise you were here."

Trimp got to his feet, surprised at how suddenly his heart seemed to quicken. "Good evening, Miss. A pleasure to see you, as always."

"Thank you, Inspector, you are too kind. How is Mrs Trimp today?"

"Very well thank you, very well indeed. She asked me to express her best wishes and say how very much she enjoyed seeing you all the other evening. As did I."

"Why, thank you," said Bess, giving Trimp what she hoped was her best heartstopping look and sweetest smile.

"God, she's beautiful," thought Trimp, desperately trying to banish the lustful thoughts from his mind.

"Bess, I think the Inspector wants a word with Growler, can you round everyone up at the final curtain?" said Stan oblivious to the sexual tension crackling across the office.

"Yes, boss. Should I wrap up all the valuables and board the windows?"

"I'm assured that won't be necessary."

"Thank God fer that!" Bess made to leave.

Stan said, "What did you want Bess?"

She stopped, flustered. "Oh, fucked if I can remember, boss."

Out she swept, Trimp inhaling the very smell of her as she left the room.

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They were sat round a small round table, drinks in hand waiting for Job and Faye to join them. Little Bess sat opposite Trimp directly in his eyeline. Bess enjoyed the fact that Trimp was a man of discretion and he gave nothing away by look or gesture to indicate that he liked her, but she knew that he did. The trouble was she really liked him too, and the more she saw of him the deeper she seemed to fall. He was so comfortable in his own skin. Gentle, well mannered and sophisticated and yet when he and Growler went at it the other night, savage and brutal. She had to really stop herself thinking about him pinning her to the bed, looking at her with those calm, brown, cruel eyes as he slowly... Her thoughts were brought to a swift end as Job and Faye burst into the room.

"Sorry we're late," gushed Job. "We were just discussing a few things."

"Course you were," said Bess. "Listen Job, you take the day off tomorrow, have a rest, cos I reckon I know exactly what Faye's been up to, an' I don't even have ter lay a hand on 'er."

"Well, well, you're a genius, lollipop," said Job resting his hand on Bess's shoulder. "Phooo-weee, pussycat! Is it possible a girl with such a pretty face as yours can think such thoughts?"

"Alright, alright," said Bess, blushing deeply. "I won't say anything if you don't."

"Inspector," said Job turning round and offering Trimp his hand. "How nice to see you again."

"You won't take offence if I decline your offer to shake hands, Job?"

"Not at all. I've already seen enough." He shot a little glance at Bess and winked. Bess smiled and looked away.

"To business," said Stan bringing frivolities to an end. "The Inspector would like to say a few words. Inspector?"

"Thank you, Stan. Firstly, thank you very much for coming and congratulations for the other night. Great show. As you know tension in the area is running very high and will continue to do so until we bring this killer to justice. It is foolish to put all our eggs in one basket, and there are quite a few suspects in the frame."

Bess was full of admiration, for as the Inspector started his speech she took it upon herself to take her stockinged foot and place it in Trimp's crotch. He did not flinch nor show any outward signs that this was pleasurable to him, but she knew it was. She could feel it. It might not be up there competing with Job, but it was surprisingly close.

"Obviously, I am trusting you all here and I hope what I tell you and what we discuss remains in this room. Do not discuss this with any body. Understood? Faye?"

"What?" said Faye, indignant. "Why's everybody looking at me?"

"Blimey, girl," said Growler. "Let me think now. Oh yeah, cos you've got a fuckin' big mouth."

"Fuck off, Fido!"

"C'mon now," said Stan. "Carry on, Inspector."

"As I say there are a few suspects but the main one, or put it this way, the one I would really like to talk to is the American. Doctor Francis Tumblety. The evidence is starting to stack up against him."

"Is it good evidence, Inspector?" said Bess, her eyes dancing,

"It's hard, Bess. Very hard indeed."

"Hmm. I can believe it."

"I assure you this is not personal. I know that he got close to my wife and I have you all to thank that things were not as terrible as they could have been. I think he is aware of our interest and has gone to ground. He'll turn up though. Somebody like that won't be able to stay away. I believe he is building up to a frenzy and it won't be long before he resurfaces. That's where you come in, Terry."

Growler just grunted.

"After much arm-twisting and persuading, Growler here has consented to act as bait in a bid to lure him out."

"Brilliant," laughed Faye. "Cos we all know Doctor T's got a bit of a soft spot for our Growler."

Growler kicked her ankle under the table.

"Really?" said Trimp with a grin. "Why don't that surprise me? Our Growler was always a bit, how do you call it? Androgynous. That's it. Remember the Beadle back when we was kids? We all knew what you were gettin' up to in that store room."

Growler's face was black as thunder. "Fuck off. I was stockin' shelves."

"Yeh. Course you were. We all believe you. Thousands wouldn't."

"Look you," said Growler, losing his temper and getting to his feet. "Do you fucking want some? I'm ready to go again, sunshine. Anytime you like."

Trimp was sorely tempted, but he remembered he'd promised Stan there would be no repeat of the other night and more importantly, were he to get to his feet now he would be exposing to the others the unseemly bulge in the front of his trousers.

"Come on Terry, don't be like that," said Trimp. "I'm only teasing you. God, that temper of yours. Listen, seriously for a moment. What I'm asking you to do is highly dangerous and I wouldn't be asking you if I didn't think you were capable and could do it well. We owe it to ourselves to catch this fucker. Come on mate, sit down. Please."

Growler sat down slowly. "Alright, but no more piss taking. Especially you Faye."

"Come on, Growler. As if I would."

ALL MADE UP WITH SOMEWHERE TO GO

As successful as the show was that night, the audience were missing out on perhaps the biggest event of them all; Growler Griffin's transformation from cheeky cockney chappy into a dazzling dollymop. Job really was a master with the rouge.

"I'm gonna be having wet dreams about you tonight, my lovely," Job confided as he added a last touch to the eyes.

"Mmm. When I look at you I wish I was a lesbian," Faye agreed. "Mind you, nothing new there. I always felt that way when I looked at you."

"Leave it out," Growler grumbled.

"Ready to face your public?" asked Job.

"Do I have to?"

Growler was really scared. He was scared of the reaction of his friends. He knew he was giving them enough ammunition to last them a lifetime. He was also scared of the reaction of the man on the street. What if someone really did like him? What if the killer wasn't Tumblety but some other monster? How would he know? Would Trimp and Warner still be watching? Finally he was scared of Tumblety. Growler had killed before, on several occasions. However, he took no pleasure in it. He had seen Tumblety kill and he knew he loved it. The man was enough to give anyone nightmares.

"Come on, Growler. You want to catch this bastard, don't you?" said Faye.

Growler nodded. "All right. But if I do this, no more piss taking? I wanna bit o' respect around here. That ain't too much to ask is it?"

"Not at all," said Faye. "I'll be good as gold. Cross me heart." She turned to Job and added in a stage whisper, "If he believes that, he'll believe anything."

"Cut it out, Faye," laughed Bess. "Can't you see the poor bugger's scared?"

"I ain't scared of noffink," scowled Growler. "Come on. Let's get this over with."

He tottered out of the dressing room in his lady's boots, to a round of applause and merriment from the crowd of police gathered outside the door.

"Fan-bloody-tastic," laughed Warner, now back in his Patch Wallers disguise. "Boys, I'd like yer ter meet Growlette."

"Pleased ter meet you, Ma'am," said one young constable, tipping his helmet. "Fancy a bit of business?"

"Easy, lads," grinned Trimp, pushing forward. "Blimey, that's quite a transformation. Well done, girls," he nodded to Bess and Faye.

"It was Job, really," Bess confessed. "He's a wizard."

Job beamed with pleasure. "Flattery will get you everywhere."

"Look are we gonna just stand here like fuckin' idiots or are we gonna go catch us a nutter?" said Growler.

"Eloquently expressed as ever," said Job.

"Right, Growler," said Trimp. "This is the plan. You go out. Do the rounds. Work your way round Whitechapel. Take your time. Even stop off for a quick one in the pubs if you like. Keep your eyes peeled for Tumblety or any other suspicious character."

"What if someone wants to do business?"

"We'll be watching. If they seem weird, lead 'em on. We'll get 'em before anythin' nasty happens. Ain't that right, lads?"

The bluebottles all nodded.

"Won't our killer get a bit shy if he spots you lot around?" said Stan, nodding at the uniformed police.

"Good point," said Trimp. "That's why Warner here's gonna be their eyes. He won't let Growler out of his sight. As soon as anythin' happens, he blows his whistle an' the lads'll

pile in. Growler an' Warner should be able to hold our killer until they get there. Any questions?"

"Yeh. Can we come out an' watch?" asked Bess.

Trimp sighed. "Fine. But you stay with Growler unless he gets to do some business. If anyone propositions you girls, just say you're already engaged fer the night an' yer takin' a break. Got that?"

Faye and Bess nodded.

"I'm so excited I'm wettin' meself," giggled Faye.

"Then I suggest you use the lavatory now before we go out," said Trimp. "We don't want the smell of piss putting our killer off."

"Saucy monkey, it never 'as before," said Faye giving him a clip round the ear. "Right, hang on boys. Shan't be a tick."

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When they had gone, Job and Stan gave Joe a hand to clean up.

"Quite a lark, eh, sir?" said Joe. "All these p'licemen an' boys dressed up as girls. Shouldn't be allowed."

"If it helps them catch a killer, Joe," said Stan.

"A killer, Joe. Mmm. Yeh. Well. We'll see, won't we? Jus' seems an excuse for playactin' if you ask me," said Joe.

"I don't think Growler actually enjoys dressin' up as a prostitute, Joe," said Job.

"Prostitute, Joe. Mmm. Well, you know what they say? Theatrical types is all a bit you know, funny like that. Beggin' yer pardon an' no offence. Just statin' it like it is."

Job and Stan left him to finish cleaning.

"You wanna go out an' watch the fun, Job?" said Stan.

"Mmm. I've never been one to turn down an adventure, or a bouncy bottom. How about you?"

"Nah, I need ter get on top of all this paperwork. Plus, too many cooks an' all that. You get off , go see Growler drivin' 'em mad wiv desire."

## AN OUTBREAK OF MURDER

The air outside hung heavy, damp and ominous. A thick wet fog was building up from the Thames, invading all the nooks and crannies, side roads and alleyways, muffling all the sounds. Growler was worried. He could not shake off the overwhelming feeling of foreboding that hung over him like a heavy shroud. Job had given Growler a tug on the old opium pipe, and on the street Samuel Trimp had sidled over and given him a hefty swig of whiskey from what looked like a very expensive silver hip flask.

"You good, Terry?"

"No, Sam, I'm scared."

"You can handle it, mate. I wouldn't have asked you if I didn't think you were the best man for the job."

"There you go again, Sam. You were always good at talking me into trouble."

"Eh?"

"You were always egging me on. 'Only you can do it Terry...Only you can say it Terry...They'll listen to you Terry'."

Trimp chuckled. "I seem to remember you didn't need much persuading. Wherever there was trouble it could be guaranteed you'd be in the thick of it, whether I was there or not. Anyway, come on, admit it Terry, I was always there to cover your back. Who sorted out that business with the Beadle in the end?"

"What d'yer mean?"

"I knew what was going on. Knew damn well what that fucker was up to. It was Sheldrake all over again. Do you think his leaving without ceremony was a coincidence?"

"You?"

"The very same."

Trimp offered the flask and Griffin took another big slug. "Next yer gonna tell me I was packed off ter Australia for me own good!"

Trimp paused, fighting with his conscience. He wanted Growler to forgive him. He needed to be sure of him, to make sure they were on the same side. He said quietly. "They were gonna kill you, Terry."

"Fuck off!"

"You were being set up. Why do you think they were paying you and putting food in your belly? You're not Irish, Terry, or a Fenian. They didn't give a fuck about you. They were using you, seeing how far they could go. Yes. It worked out for me. Sending you out to Australia was my big break. It got me noticed. It also saved your arse." Griffin paused taking it in. He was about to say something but changed his mind. The two men stared at each other. At length, Growler sighed. "Well you better be watching my arse this evening, that's all I can say."

"Terry, looking like that mate, everybody will be watching your arse this evening, don't you worry about that."

"Fuck off!"

Trimp offered his hand. "Good luck, Terry."

"Thanks, Sam."

An hour passed and Growler began to relax a little. Bess and Faye had come over to gee him up and every now and then as the fog lifted momentarily, he would catch a glimpse of Warner. He knew there were more men around in various buildings and alleys all poised and ready for action. Would they be quick enough? They bloody better be. There was interest too. Mostly a few timid punters coming over and enquiring shyly if Growler was available for business. Growler liked to consider himself a good judge of

men and ascertained that these were the type escaping from a loveless marriage and a domineering wife, desperate for a bit of 'ow's yer father, and not the cold, bloody killer types, so a gravelly "Fuck off you cunt," was enough to send them on their way. On Faye's suggestion they headed over to The Britannia to fortify themselves against the chill. When he returned to the street he was up for anything and ready to catch a killer. The pubs started to spill out as the streets filled with drunken mutton mongers all looking for a quick dab. One in particular caught Growler's eye. He stood in the shadows and watched for a while seemingly weighing up his options. After fifteen minutes he crossed over the road and headed toward Growler.

"You up fer a bit of business?"

Growler nodded.

"Shall we head down this alley, yer know, a bit of privacy and all that?"

The man was heavily built and seemed at great pains to hide his face. Growler headed for the alley affecting what he hoped was a fetching and alluring walk. The man stopped him and pushed his head hard into the wall. Growler cried out in alarm and pain, stunned stupid by the blow.

The man laughed. "That's right you fuckin' bitch, I like it a bit rough. Yer gonna get it now. What do yer say to me fuckin' you up the arse?"

"And what do you say to a broken fuckin' nose, you cunt?" Growler turned, hitting the man hard in the face. He could feel the crunch of bone before the blood streamed from his nose. The man rushed from the alley, straight into a gang of drunken sailors.

"Watch yer fuckin' step," roared one, grabbing him by the shoulder. His friends gathered around, eager for the fight.

The man wailed and pointed down the alley. "That fuckin' whore is a fuckin' feller dressed up as a woman. He...She...Fucking he, just smacked me in the face."

The biggest and drunkest of the sailors, peered blearily at Growler. "Hey! What's the big idea? Are you some kind of fuckin' perv? Come on lads lets fuckin' bray him!"

They all ran down the alley, wading into Growler. His attacker egging them on as if he was at the races.

Warner was the first to blow the whistle, and from their hiding places, Trimp and his men raced into the alleyway to rescue Growler. What followed was full-scale public disorder. The fight spilled out onto the street as large groups of men kicked seven shades of shit out of each other.

From a discreet distance Job watched with his arms protectively round Faye and Bess. After a while he turned to Bess and said, "Hey pretty, if you want to fuck him, just fuck him. I won't say anything. Honest."

\*\*\*

Long Liz had enjoyed the commotion. She liked to watch men fight. It was raining a little but a fight was always good for business. Better yet, the police had gone, taking the brawlers and dabenos with them. Now she could have her pick of the gentlemen, excited by the night's action. She turned down Berner Street and listened to the sound of singing from the International Working Men's Educational Club. They were singing some foreign song but she liked the tune. She stood outside the entrance to Dutfield's Yard and hummed along. She sniffed the air. It was as foul as ever but there was something new. Scent. A powerful cologne. It wasn't nice. A hand clapped across her mouth and dragged her into the yard. She was pulled to the ground as the knife sliced into her throat. She saw a man across the road stop to stare. Her assailant yelled something. Then another man started running. Would she be saved? No. The knife was at its work again. Her eyesight dimmed as she choked. The man was running after the witness. She saw no more.

The killer cursed. If the witness got away, the place would be crawling with busybodies. A wasted opportunity. He wiped the knife clean on his handkerchief and stepped back out onto Berner Street. His friend was returning, breathing heavily. He could tell from the stoop of his shoulders that the witness had escaped.

"Let's go," whispered the killer. "But keep your distance."

\*\*\*

Aaron Ezekiel sharpened the knife in the wreckage of his kitchen. He tested it on his thumb, wincing a little and then licking the thin line of blood as it welled up. It was a horrible taste. Like sucking rusty iron. He placed the knife in his pocket and extinguished the candle. He had work to do.

\*\*\*

Growler winced as Bess dabbed at his black eye with a wet hanky. Job and Faye were busily sucking faces behind him. A crowd of onlookers were gathered around pointing at the shaven-headed man, clutching a wig and dressed up as a low class Judy. Trimp pushed his way through the crowd.

"Bloody great. We'll have to call it a night. Warner and the others'll be busy at the station thanks to you and your bloody high spirits."

"That fucker wanted to fuck me," snapped Growler. "Up the arse! What was I supposed to do?"

"Just be polite. You didn't have to hit the bastard. Tumblety'll be laughing his head off if he saw that. There's no way we'll draw him out now. Not tonight."

"It wasn't my fault," Growler pouted.

"It never bloody is, is it?"

"What's that supposed to mean?"

Trimp relented. "Nothing. I'm tired. That's all. I'm sorry. Same again tomorrow?"

"Fuck off. Everyone's seen me now."

"You want to come home with me?" said Bess. She thought he deserved a little present after all he had been through.

Growler shook his head. Dressing up as a woman and being half beaten to death had sapped his libido.

"Nah. I'm gonna head home. Scrape all this shit off. See the girls home will yer, Job?"

Job grinned. "It'll be a pleasure, sweetie. Sure I can't tempt you to join us?"

"Go fuck yourself."

"Ah, if only I could."

Trimp sighed. "Go on, get off home. And thanks, Growler. It was worth the effort."

They departed. Job arm in arm with the girls, Growler staggering away on one broken heel towards his crib on Ellen Street. Trimp sighed again. They'd fucked up good and proper.

\*\*\*

Ezekiel couldn't stop coughing. He was feverish too. His hands were trembling. He wasn't sure if he had caught something or if it was the excitement of the night's adventure. Soon, his work would be done and he would be back on top.

He saw Faye and Bess walking home, arm in arm with a tall stranger with an eerily familiar face, giggling away as if they hadn't a care in the world. He had seen the girls at the Palace. He knew Garrideb liked them. Perhaps he should rip them up. Leave the world a message. He shook his head. Later, when he was in control again, they could prove very profitable. He would let them live. He smiled. The tremors were gone. He felt like God. He turned down Dorset Street. The Palace was in darkness, but a light shone in the office. He looked around. There were still too many people around. Didn't these wretches ever sleep?

He made his way down the alley to the back of the theatre. He had been a child when he first broke into a property. As he reached the door, he was pleased to note that he would not have to call upon those long forgotten skills. The door was unlocked. He reached for the knife, his hand steady as a rock. He knew what had to be done and he was looking forward to it.

\*\*\*

Trimp stood for a while on the street. Trying to take it all in. Tumblety was here. He knew it. It felt like he was trying to catch the devil himself. Ballocks! He didn't subscribe to any of that superstitious hocus pocus. Tumblety was just an evil, nasty piece of work and that was the end of it. He thought about going home to Clara and the children and getting a good night's sleep but he couldn't. He had a nagging feeling that the night's work was not over yet. It was going to throw up a few more secrets before the break of dawn. He needed to mull, but more importantly, he needed a stiff drink. He recoiled sharply as he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Bess.

"What are you doing back here?" he asked.

"I didn't fancy going back and listening to Job and Faye dabbin' it up all night long. Like an opera singer he is when he gets going. I looked back, saw you were still here so... Anyway, you're the detective, so go on then, find us somewhere we can still get a drink."

"I was just thinking the same thing. It just so happens..." Trimp offered his arm to Bess. She took it, squeezing the muscles. "Shall we?"

Trimp knew of a place, run by a retired sergeant. The man was on Trimp's 'blind eye list' and was well known to stay open, but only for the workers who finished late shifts and wanted an honest session, not for any old bludger.

After ten minutes they arrived and Trimp knocked on a big blistered door. It creaked open an inch as a voice within exclaimed, "Sammy, old son!" It opened wider to reveal a huge bear-like man who wrapped the detective in a warm embrace.

"Where the fuck have you been you old dog? I thought you promised not to become a stranger?"

"Oh you know how it is George, I don't need to tell you."

George nodded wisely. "Of course, of course."

Trimp made the introductions and George showed them to a nice quiet corner. Bess was amazed that beyond the big door lay a rather cosy candlelit, club-like atmosphere with lots of men at tables chatting away, laughing, swapping good natured banter. There were ladies present too and Bess assumed correctly that they were on the arms of married men, though not necessarily as their wives.

Once seated Bess said, "Sure now. I've lived in the area for years and thought I knew every inch. I had no idea this place existed."

"It did start life as a police only drinking den but then it threw open the doors to other professions too. I like it."

"I can see why." Bess teased. "Is this where you take all your women?"

"You are the only woman I've ever brought here," answered Trimp.

Bess loved the way Trimp didn't rise to her goading and could answer loaded questions without emotion.

They fell into silence as George returned. Bess couldn't recall Trimp ordering anything but George was armed with various plates of food, a big jug of beer and two pint glasses.

"Eat up, Miss," he said giving Trimp a discreet 'you lucky sod' sort of a wink.

"This is nice," said Bess not standing on ceremony and tucking in with relish.

Trimp watched for a while. "Even when she's shoving handfuls of bread and cheese in her gob she's sexy," he thought. "What's your story, Bess?" he asked after a while.

He waited patiently whilst she finished chewing and took a large swig of beer.

"Nothin' ter tell." She looked at Trimp, waiting for him to press her for information. She was enjoying herself. She was enjoying him. She knew she was fooling herself. He was a respectable married man. She suddenly felt angry with herself for indulging her dreams for a better life. Better to crush those dreams now than face the inevitable disappointment of rejection once she had allowed him to steal her heart. She sighed heavily and then looked into his eyes, unblinking. "I come from a long line of whores."

She saw his cheeks flush red and wished she had said nothing. She tried to take it back.

"Well, not a long line. Not really. Mam came over from Ireland to work as a housemaid in a large London residence when she was fifteen. By all accounts she was a real stunner. Clever too. She thought London would be the making of her. She always wanted to be an actress." She laughed at the thought.

"Go on," said Trimp. He reached across the table and squeezed her hand.

"The inevitable happened. She fell for the master's son. He talked her into his bed. She tried to keep it a secret, but once she began to show, they threw her out on the street."

"I'm sorry," said Trimp. "What did she do?"

Bess shrugged. "Not much she could do. Nobody would take her in. She went to the workhouse, had the baby and went back to Ireland. She left the baby behind. It broke her heart."

"So you grew up in the workhouse too?" Trimp wondered if this was why he was attracted to her.

"No," said Bess, and Trimp felt a twinge of disappointment. "She kept it quiet, she went back home and married a local farmer. Things didn't work out. On their wedding night,

he discovered she wasn't a virgin. She had scars, see, from the birth. He threw her out of the house. 'Soiled goods' he called her."

Trimp winced. He ordered more drinks and continued to hold her hand.

"She became a hoity toity girl." She laughed. "That's what she called it. Hoity-toity. Makes it sound fun, doesn't it?"

Trimp said nothing. There was nothing she could say.

"Then she had me. She gave me to the nuns. Sure, she'd come and visit. Sometimes she'd steal me away for a week or two. But I always ended up back there. With the sisters. After a while she married one of her gentlemen. He was a nice feller. Let me call him Da. I had a home. They loved each other an' we all lived happy ever after. End of story. Your turn."

"No it's not," said Trimp. "You didn't live happy ever after."

"Always the detective. Don't you ever switch off?"

"It's obvious something happened," said Trimp. "The clues are there. Your mum started off as a nice girl who fell through the cracks. Finally, she finds a good man. I think you were fond of him. But you're here now, far from home. Something happened. Something bad."

Bess nodded. "I was eight when she died. Consumption. I was only just getting over the shock when Da was killed. Don't ask me how. I never understood. I ended up back with the nuns. They were cruel. Really cruel. They kept telling me, my mam died in a state of sin. That I was born in sin and would remain in sin. At fifteen I ran away. To Dublin at first, then when I was eighteen I came to London. Tried to make a go of it. But, you know..." She let the sentence trail off. "Anyway," she said suddenly perking up. "That was then. According to Growler... Terry... you didn't fare much better yourself?"

"No, he's right. At least you had the good fortune to know your mum albeit all too briefly, I shall go to my grave forever wondering. I've got to say it's not very nice. God help me, before Clara and the children came along, Terry was the closest thing to family I had."

"I know."

"You know?"

"It was bleedin' obvious," chuckled Bess. "Honestly, you men. You are like brothers. All that arguing and that childish fallin' out. Growler talks about you and the workhouse all the time."

"We met when we were four. The lump hotel was a tough place believe me. We were bound to form a bond."

\*\*\*

Kate Eddowes was released from the drunk tank at Bishopsgate just as the wagon arrived with the wounded dockers and policemen. Sergeant Warner had removed his patch and was desperate to change out of his filthy disguise and back into uniform.

"You been in trouble again, Kate?" he asked. She was well known to the men at the station.

"I had a bad pie," she grinned. "It disagreed with me."

"You want one of us to see you home?" he asked.

"Nah. I'll get in a frightful row as it is gettin' back at this time."

"So you should," said PC Hutt, the arresting constable. "You had no right gettin' drunk."

"Give her a break, lad," laughed Warner.

"Cheerio, old cock," chuckled Kate, sauntering out of the station and into the night.

\*\*\*

Aaron Ezekiel had held the Borough in a vice-like grip. Now he had been systematically undermined. They all thought he was useless, harmless, no longer a threat. Fools. He was going to make them pay. This night would down in history. The thought made Ezekiel smile. First the music hall upstart. Killing him would be a pleasure. They all said he hadn't the guts, that he was spineless. Well stand back and watch. Next on the list, Inspector Trimp. In the dead of this very night he would wedge the doors and windows shut pour an accelerant through the letterbox and listen with pleasure to their screams as they all burnt to death. Then tomorrow morning, David. The gun for this, thought Ezekiel. Invite him to his house on the pretext of some big money offer, sit him down and then 'bang'... a bullet to the head. Abberline would follow. That greedy, fucking corrupt bastard. Took his money then sold him down the river. Insulting him and his race. He would only be getting what he deserved. He slipped through the unlocked door silently and headed down the corridor for the office.

Ezekiel was not a superstitious man. He laughed at the idea of ghosts and the supernatural, but as he edged his way towards his prey, he felt his chest tightening. It was as if the building were alive and watching him. He wanted to turn back and run away. He sensed hate all around him. The building that he wanted for his own hated him. He wiped the sweat from his face. He was being ridiculous. Buildings don't hate. Only people hate. He heard a creak and farted in fear. He forced himself to move forward without looking back. That was a mistake, if he had looked over his shoulder he would have seen the figure slip in through the door behind him. He reached the office. Slowly he opened the door. The desk lamp was lit. He was alone.

"Damn," thought Ezekiel. "Don't tell me the fucker is in the toilet."

What next? Wait in the shadows? Go out and come back later? Something on the desk caught his eye. An address he was familiar with. Curiosity got the better of him and he

moved closer to look. One of his properties. He then saw the desk was covered with his paperwork. He picked up a contract. It was signed over by his lawyer, on his behalf. He felt the anger well up like a volcano on the verge of eruption when he heard the sound of laughter behind him. He turned round quickly and walked straight onto the knife as it was pushed slowly into his guts. His eyes widened with shock as he came face to face with his assailant.

"You!"

He felt the knife withdrawn roughly from his guts and was powerless to stop its second thrust, up under the ribcage. He fell, face down, eyes open. He heard his killer hawking a oyster of phlegm and spitting it. Then footsteps moving away. Then nothing.

\*\*\*

Stan was sure he had heard something. He buttoned up his flies.

"Hello? Anyone there?"

Silence apart from the ticking of a clock.

He saw the bloody footprints in the doorway leading to the backdoor and he swallowed deeply.

"Not again. Please. Don't let there be a head on my desk. Please."

He entered the office and saw the body. He knelt down.

"Ezekiel?"

He gave him a shove. Then he felt for a pulse. The body was warm but dead. He looked around. He was alone. He checked the papers on the desk. They were still there.

"Bloody hell."

He helped himself to a brandy. He had drunk too much today but suddenly he felt stone cold sober. The fire settled into his belly. He poured himself another. What a mess. What was he going to do? When the police found all Ezekiel's property had been made

over to him they were sure to jump to conclusions. Unpleasant conclusions. Fuck. He looked at his watch. Growler should be finished by now. He would know what to do. He looked in his address book. Growler had lodgings in Ellen Street. He grabbed his hat and after locking the office door headed out into the fog. Growler would help. Growler always knew what to do.

\*\*\*

Leather Apron washed the knife under a tap in Miller's Court, then sauntered casually out of Dorset Street and down Commercial Street. He tried not to twitch and stare. He didn't want to draw attention to himself. It would spoil a beautiful evening.

\*\*\*

Growler smelled him first. There on the corner of Backchurch Lane and Ellen Street. Cheap cologne. He stared around wildly. He saw a man in a peaked cap, mincing down the Lane, whistling a music hall ditty. It was Tumblety. He knew it. He began to follow, cursing his broken heel. He was making too much noise. The man turned and saw him. He had not been mistaken. It was Tumblety all right. He stopped and smiled, peering into the gloom. He hadn't recognised him.

"Evening, Ma'am. You in need of some company?"

Growler quickened his pace. Tumblety's eyes widened as he realised the woman had a shaven head.

"Griffin? Growler Griffin?" He seemed unsure whether to be amused or alarmed. He giggled nervously.

"Come here, you!"

Tumblety ran like a hare.

Growler tripped on his broken boot and landed in the gutter, swearing and cursing.

"I'll fuckin' have you," he swore, shaking his fist.

Tumblety had stopped under a lamppost and was laughing, taunting him

"Promises, promises."

Growler staggered to his knees and then gasped as his head was yanked back. The knife cut through his throat like butter. He gurgled and gasped and tried to stem the flow of blood but his breath was coming in great whistling gulps. His mouth was filling with blood but he could not swallow. His attacker let him drop and hurried after Tumblety, laughing.

"Big fun. Big fun. But you promise women, not pretend women."

"The night is young, my friend," laughed Tumblety. "The night is young. Go on ahead. I'll catch you up." Tumblety walked slowly back towards Growler.

Growler tried to get up but his legs had no strength.

"Well ain't this pretty? The man assigned to lure me in to his trap, walking slap bang into mine?"

Perhaps if he rested a while. Perhaps if he could only catch his breath.

Tumblety crouched over Growler's defenceless body. "Such a shame. All brawn and no brains. Shoulda fucked me when you had the chance."

Growler just looked with eyes bulging, gurgling sounds and fine blood was spraying out with the last of his rattling breath.

"What's that? I can't understand what you're saying old friend. I'd love to stay and chat, but alas, I'm quite busy this evening." He brought his lips closer to Growler's. "Thus with a kiss..." he kissed Growler firmly and passionately on the lips before withdrawing. "...You die."

He stood bolt upright and erect, looked all around him, took a deep lungful of the putrid East End air as though inhaling some fresh coastal breeze and vanished like a phantom into the foggy London night. There, on the cold, damp, piss-soaked pavement, lying in a

spreading pool of his own blood, grotesque, with smudged lipstick and slashed throat, Growler Griffin died.

\*\*\*

Kate Eddowes didn't have the money for her doss. She had spent it all on drink. Now she was homeless and without a roof. Perhaps her man would have earned enough, but she doubted he would be in the mood to share if she turned up late, penniless and smelling of drink. Maybe she could earn her bed quickly. She was desperate to get her head down. She turned into Mitre Square. It was a quiet spot but it was dark and there was usually someone hanging around in the hope of a quick jolly.

She grinned. There was a man beside the streetlamp. He was wearing one of those sailor's caps. That was good. Sailors were generally in a hurry. She could do the business and be tucked up in bed inside of half an hour. The man saw her and beckoned her to follow him into the dark away from the streetlamp.

"Bless him, he's shy," she giggled. She preferred the shy ones. They were usually more gentle.

There was nothing gentle about the knife that took her life.

## AFTER THE STORM

"Will you walk me home, Sammy?"

"Of course I will, Bess."

They had been at George's a good two hours and they had talked and talked as the beer flowed. Trimp had never allowed himself to open up this way before. It was as if she were made for him. Bess seemed to feel the same way.

Turning into Wentworth Street, Bess could contain herself no longer. She pulled Trimp into a darkened yard, kissing him passionately on the lips. He responded immediately and she moaned in pleasure. He could feel her hands as they expertly reached down and started undoing the buttons of his fly. He let out an involuntary gasp as her hand found what it was searching for.

"Oh God, Sammy. I really want you," she whispered in his ear.

"Fuck. Bess. No." Trimp pushed her away gently. "We can't...I can't. Shit, fuck, I so want to, but it's not right. Clara...The children..."

Bess held up her hand to stop him. "Don't say another word." She was firm but not unkind. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have put you in that situation, it wasn't right of me. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry. It's just how it is. Under any other circumstance..."

"I know, I know."

As Trimp was buttoning himself up he became aware of the commotion. It wasn't in keeping with this time of night. Frantic blasts on police whistles and men shouting.

"Something's happening. Let's get you over to your place, quick!"

\*\*\*

They hadn't got as far as George Yard before they ran into a young constable.

"Oh sir, you're here. Please, wait here, sir if you don't mind."

Trimp and Bess waited as the young constable gave three short blasts on his whistle. A little while later Warner arrived on the scene breathless and hot from running.

"Well done, Constable," he said to the young lad. "Sorry about that, sir, but we've been searching everywhere for you, I was beginning to think the worst."

"What's happened, Warner?"

"Bodies, sir."

"Bodies? Plural?"

"Yes, sir, 'fraid so."

"How many?"

"Three."

"Three? Fuck! Women?"

"Two women, one man."

Samuel Trimp sensed what was coming next. "The man?"

"It's Griffin, sir."

Bess saw Trimp's shoulders sag as he crumpled slightly on hearing this news. He composed himself quickly. "Take me to him."

"This way, sir."

\*\*\*

When they arrived at the scene they saw Faye standing grim-faced and pale with shock and Job bending over Griffin's body. He stood up as the Inspector approached.

"Can you tell me anything, Job?"

"No Inspector, I can't. Not yet. It might take a little while or it might not happen at all. Even then it depends..."

Trimp gave Job a look, encouraging him to explain further.

Job continued. "He'll talk at some stage, no doubt about that, it's just a question of what he saw. If he didn't see the killer then we're no better off than before."

Trimp nodded, he bent down to inspect Growler's body, removing the jacket someone had placed over him. Growler's sightless eyes stared out at the sky, the mascara and eyeliner all smudged, the deep angry slash across his throat. Trimp closed the eyes of his oldest friend.

"Oh, Terry," he whispered. "I let you down...I'm sorry..."

Behind him he could hear Bess and Faye weeping softly. Job put his arms round their shoulders. Trimp bent down further putting his nose to Growler's cheek. There it was. That familiar smell of Tumblety's scent. For the first time in his police career Trimp felt something he hoped he would never feel again. Despair. This fucking man was playing him like a fool. He got to his feet wearily and stood for a while saying nothing.

Job broke the silence, offering his hand he said, "I'm sorry Inspector." This time Trimp took it. Job reacted as though he had been shocked, his hand seemingly leaping out of Trimp's of its own accord. "Oh," he gasped.

"What is it, Job?"

"Inspector Trimp?" They were interrupted by Stan who had arrived on the scene. He saw the body. "Is that...Is that?"

"Growler? Yes, Stan, sorry, it is."

"Oh God. Inspector, can I talk to you for a second?"

"Of course."

They stepped to one side. "What is it Stan?" He had never felt so weary.

"I... I wanted to see Growler. I needed him. I...Oh God, I'm in trouble, Sam. Big trouble."

Trimp took his arm and moved away from the others.

"What is it? Is it so important it can't wait? Growler's dead. There's two other judies ripped open and we're standing here fucking clueless..."

"I understand. Look, Inspector can you stop off at the Palace? Please?"

Trimp could see Garrideb was really upset. He sighed. "Very well. Give me a minute."

He walked over to Job. "Girls, can you excuse us for a second?"

Job released them from his embrace and allowed Trimp to walk him a discreet distance away.

"Job, can you see the girls home and make sure they're safe?"

"Of course, Inspector. That's not the real reason you walked me over here though is it?"

"No it's not, Job. Your reaction when you took my hand. I have to ask. What did you see?"

"Tonight," said Job, "when you went off with Bess. Did you dab her up?"

Trimp's first reaction was to show outrage but he knew Job would see straight through him. He chose honesty instead. "No. I wanted to, but... No. I didn't."

"Thank God for that. She's your sister. I'll leave you to tell her. Tomorrow perhaps? Goodnight, Inspector."

Trimp watched them leave. He was shaken. He looked at Bess's retreating figure and choked back a sob. He had a sister? Surely not. Then he looked down at the body.

"For God's sake. Can we not get this man to the bloody morgue?" He turned to Stan,

"You ready?"

Stan nodded.

"Come on then."

\*\*\*

Trimp saw the bloody footprints before Garrideb opened the office door.

"I'm not going to like this am I?"

Stan shrugged. "I don't know. It depends on your point of view."

He opened the door.

Ezekiel lay as he had died on the floor.

Trimp stared. He got down on one knee and examined the wound. Then he laughed

"Oh yes! One for the angels."

Garrideb nodded. "Yes but what do I do?"

Trimp stood up. "Mmm. You'll have a lot of questions to answer. Especially when they find those papers."

"I know... I..." Garrideb frowned. He had put the papers away before leaving. "Half a minute. How did you know about the papers?"

Trimp gave Stan a look that suggested perhaps it might be wise not to move that subject on any further. "I'm glad you came to me, Stan. There's others on the force might start askin' uncomfortable questions. Might even start lookin' at motives. It's not the first time you've been linked to a dead body here is it Stan?"

"And you. What do you think?"

"Me? I'm just glad he's dead. I don't give a fuck if you did it or not."

Stan shook his head. "What am I going to do? About the body?"

"Don't ask me, Stan. You book the acts. Book a fucking magician. Make the cunt disappear. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm off to bed."

Stan stepped aside.

What was he to do? How could he make a body disappear? He locked up and headed to the Blue Coat Boy across the street. He knew it was a regular haunt of David and his men. It had just opened to cater for breakfast for the market workers.

He breathed a sigh of relief. David and Israel were there in a corner playing cards.

"Boys."

"Boss," said David. "Heard the news?"

Stan nodded.

"Fuckin' monster."

Stan nodded again.

"I've got a little problem, lads. Do you think you could help me out?"

"You're the boss," said David.

"It's regardin' your old employer."

David paled a little. "Oh."

"Come with me." They got up and followed Stan back to the Palace

He showed them the body.

Without saying a word Israel made to get his prick out of his trousers.

"What are you doing?" asked Stan, aghast.

"I'm going to piss on him."

"It'll ruin the rug. Can't you wait? We've got a privy down the hall."

Israel frowned. "I can wait. What d'yer want doin' wiv 'im?"

"Can you... you know, make him disappear?"

David laughed. "Course. It'll be a pleasure. It's what we're here for boss. Ain't that right, Izzy?"

Israel winked. Yep. Best bloody job I've done all year, this'll be. Mind if I roll him up in the rug? It's ruined anyway, boss, it's got blood on it. Yas'll never get that off!"

Stan nodded. "Fine. Yes. Well in that case, if you think the thing is ruined, you might as well piss on him then."

Israel's face broke into a smile of genuine pleasure. "Cheers, boss. Yer a real gentleman."

He unleashed his cock and out gushed a torrent of frothing piss.

"Watch where you're aiming," said David. "I felt some splashes then! Ah fuck it. Mind if I join in too?"

Stan nodded. "Be my guest." Then he sighed and dropped his breeches. "Ah well. In for a penny. In for a pound. It'd be rude not too. Let's give this fucker a wash."

\*\*\*

When they were gone, out the back way, Stan scrubbed the floor from the office to the back door. Piss he could stand but not blood. People might start asking too many questions. When it was done he settled back at his desk. David and Israel were good men to have beside him. Ezekiel had been a fool to lose them. He had let power go to his head. Stan swore he would never make the same mistakes. He poured himself a small brandy.

"To Growler. You'll be missed chum."

He downed it and poured another.

"I can't toast Growler with a small un. Here yer go Growler. Rest in Peace, mate."

### A TERRIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING

The next day the sun was shining and the birds were singing in the trees and as Samuel Trimp stood at the dining room window watching his boys playing in the garden with Jane the nurse he wondered if last night had actually happened. From the dining room table Clara said, "Is everything alright, Sammy? You're very quiet."

"Terry's dead."

Clara went pale. She crossed the room and opened her arms to her husband, allowing him to bury his head against her bosom. "I'm so sorry. I liked him. When he wasn't fighting you. I..."

Trimp sobbed against her. He had lost his oldest friend.

"Would you like a cup of tea?" she asked.

He looked up, his eyes red. "Yes. Yes, thank you. The past is finally over Clara. Now there can be only the future."

\*\*\*

In a small room in a lodging house off the Mile End Road, Tumblety shuddered with passion in the last throes of pleasuring himself. He lay back spent and sweating and thought about all of last night's excitement. What a find the barber had been. Such a handy accomplice. He realised that he might have to lay low for a few weeks. Yes, the Pole was going to be very handy after all. I'm sure he wouldn't mind a lodger for a short while. It's a shame he just didn't have enough time last night. He so wanted to build up his collection again. Growler's penis would have looked wonderful in a jar.

\*\*\*

It took a good few minutes for Bess to get over the shock but after it had sunk in, she threw her arms round Trimp and they clung on to each other tight.

From across the table, mug of gin in hand, Faye said, "Blimey, it's a good job yer din't fuck him girl, yer could have ended up with a two-headed baby or summin'k."

"Is that all you ever think about, Faye?" sighed Bess.

"Well, it was bleedin' obvious really. I mean yer both look alike for a start all black haired and pale skin...Both got tiny feet, both of you fuckin' weird..."

"Can you remember who our mother worked for when she first came to London, Bess?"

"No, Sammy. The only information I got was from the nuns. They took great delight in telling me about my... our mother and what a dreadful sinner she was and how God punished her."

"Would you like me to help, Inspector?" Job had spoken from the door of the bedroom, where he stood shrouded in a large cloud of opium, his dressing gown open and all on show.

"Depends what you are offering to help me with, Job," said Trimp gesturing to the open dressing gown.

"Oh. Excuse me everybody. Forgot we had company for a minute there. No, I mean last night when we touched hands, it was your mother I saw. Would you like me to talk to her?"

"Yes, Job. I would like that very much."

"Then step this way, sir," said Job, showing Trimp into his bedroom. "Would you care for a little blast?" He offered Trimp the pipe.

"Never say no to another man's kind hospitality. Let's along."

Once they closed the bedroom door behind them Faye said, "Would you still fuck him now, Bess?"

"For God's sake, Faye, give it a rest."

"Can I have a go then?"

\*\*\*

The days turned into weeks and still the police achieved no results in their hunt for the man the press were now calling 'Jack the Ripper.' With the bodies piling up and the demise of Ezekiel, Abberline wasted no time in asking Trimp to come back to work. They had extra patrols every night. Stan Garrideb had David and his gang out all hours looking for anything suspicious and keeping their eyes peeled for Tumblety but it was as if he had dropped off the face of the earth.

\*\*\*

Tumblety was enjoying his little holiday. The extra patrols and gangs of vigilantes had made it next to impossible for him to leave his lair but he was happy. He was lodging with his new friend Severin Klosowski and his wife Lucy. He liked to listen to Lucy play and he loved to watch the couple fight.

"One day I cut you up good," snarled Klosowski during one breakfast table spat.

"Now, now, Sev," Tumblety admonished him gently. "You want to be careful. People might start to think you're Jack the Ripper."

The two men laughed as Lucy fled the room.

"Such a vulgar name, 'Jack,' don't you think?" sighed Tumblety.

The barber shrugged. "Is good name. When we do more work?"

Tumblety shrugged. "I don't know. It's difficult with things as they are. Maybe we should have a change of scene. How do you fancy a trip to the land of the free, my friend? It could be the making of you."

"Land of free? Free what?"

"Freedom my boy. America. Land of Opportunity. We could go far out there. To be honest I'm missing the old place. I don't know if I can stand another winter over here."

"Maybe."

The bell above the shop door jangled.

Klosowski went to see who it was.

He came back a moment later.

"Francis, come look."

He went back into the shop. Tumblety followed and stood in the hallway watching as his friend spoke to a pretty buxom girl. It was Mary Kelly.

"Can you shave my man, Joe?" she asked. "He's always wanted one o' them musical shaves. Can you fit him in later today?"

Klosowski nodded. "Yes. Anytime. You send him over Mrs..."

"Oh no... It's Miss. Call me Mary, ducky."

"Yes, Mary. You send Joe to me. We shave him good."

"Thanks love."

She sauntered out without a care in the world.

Tumblety entered the shop.

"Well? She good, yes?" said Klosowski, his eyes bright.

Tumblety shrugged. "Mmm. Not bad. Not bad at all. Find out from her man, this Joe, where she lives. Can you do that?"

"Of course."

"Now if you'll excuse me. I fancy a stroll."

He knew he was taking a risk but he had been cooped up inside for too long. Perhaps the bloodhounds were losing interest in him. He wanted to walk the streets and look at the boys.

"You be care, yes?" said Klosowski.

"I haven't the slightest notion what you're talking about dear boy. You be care. Hah. It's careful. You be careful. There you see, you learn a new word every day. I missed my vocation. I should have been a teacher."

\*\*\*

It was Tiny Pete who saw him. The dwarf, along with Blue Skin had been searching for Tumblety ever since Growler's murder. They had a score to settle with him. Growler had been good for them. He had propelled them to stardom in the music hall. He had been a friend. The two men had been working alongside Garrideb's Jewish firm but so far without success.

Pete was coming out of The Grapes when he heard sobbing coming from the yard across the street. He crossed over and looked. A man in a long coat was holding a young boy up against the wall. The boy's breeches were around his ankles. Pete picked up a rotten apple from the gutter and flung it.

"Hoi! You! Stop that!"

The man released his hold on the boy who staggered away.

Pete recognised the man at once. "Lads! We've got him!"

"There's been a misunderstanding," said Tumblety, smiling as he approached, his hand reaching inside the pocket of his coat.

Blue Skin, Israel Lipski, Joshua Schwartz and David came charging out of the Grapes and spilled into the Yard.

"It's the fucker what got me thumb!" yelled Schwartz.

"I'm sorry, I think you must be mistaken," said Tumblety backing up against the wall.

"I've never seen you boys in my life. Th... that youngster was trying to rob me."

"Of what?" snapped Pete. "Your spunk?"

"Kill him, boys," grinned David, pulling a knife out of his back pocket.

"I want his fuckin' thumbs," said Schwartz.

Tumblety weighed the possibilities. He could kill one or maybe two of them. But these men were young and furious. He would be overpowered. More people were already coming into the yard to witness the cause of the excitement.

He screamed. "Help! Murder! Robbery!"

"What's goin' on?" asked a grocer, pushing forward.

"Stay out o' this, mate," snapped Blue Skin.

A police whistle shrilled nearby.

"Easy lads," said David, putting his knife away.

A police constable joined them.

"What's all this then?" he asked.

"These men were robbing me," gasped Tumblety.

"It's a lie," said Pete. "He tried to rape me. He's a bleedin' mandrake. These boys saved my arse."

The constable glared at Tumblety. "Is that so?"

"Yeh. Yeh it is," growled David. "Ain't that so, people?"

His eyes took in the crowd, many of whom paid their dues to him every Monday morning. They nodded their assent.

"Yes. We saw him," said one. "The dirty bleeder."

Two more constables had arrived.

They began taking notes while Tumblety was handcuffed.

"We've got enough trouble without you bleedin' Yanks with yer foreign ways," said one pushing Tumblety through the crowd.

"I swear it's all a misunderstanding," Tumblety bleated.

"Save it for the Beak."

## AN ANSWERED PRAYER

As Tumblety languished in a cell in Bishopsgate, David brought the news to Stan at the Palace.

"We got him, boss. He's in Bishopsgate."

Stan was overjoyed. "Joe! Champagne for the boys."

"The boys. Yes sir. Bit extravagant this time o' the mornin' ain't it?"

"We've caught the bugger who killed Growler," grinned Stan.

"Killed Growler. If you ask me he got what was comin' to him. Dressin' up like a lady an' that."

"Keep your opinions to yourself, Joe," snapped Stan.

"Yerself Joe. Yes cap'n. No offence."

"David, can you send one of the lads over to see Trimp? I think we should let him know the good news. Don't you?"

"Very good, boss. I'll go meself."

Trimp was in the garden, enjoying the company of his boys, playing with a ball. His wife and children had been like rocks to him over the last month. They had comforted him over the loss of Growler Griffin. They had also welcomed Bess into the bosom of their family. Trimp was delighted to have a sister and thanked God that nothing more had happened between them on that terrible night. She was precious to him. Two weeks ago when Jane had sheepishly asked for permission to talk to a potential employer closer to her home and family, Trimp had no hesitation in letting her go. He had been sorry to see Jane leave, but Bess was a natural with the children and got on well with Clara too. She was a nurse from heaven. When the time was right maybe Trimp would call on his father. He hadn't yet made up his mind. He had made enquiries and knew

who he was and where he lived. Every day for the last fortnight he had passed by his father's residence and watched the old man come and go. He seemed a lonely soul with no family. Not short of a bob or two, he lived in a grand old house in Islington with just his valet for company. Did this man deserve to know he had a wonderful daughter-in-law and three grandchildren? One day, Trimp would work up the courage. One day. He had visions of himself, Clara, Bess, the children and the old man enjoying a family Christmas, gathered around the fire, basking in each other's love and affection. Of course, there was always the possibility that Job had got it wrong, that he was a clever fake. Trimp doubted it. He trusted Job and he believed in him. Clara was convinced the man was touched by God and while Trimp would never have admitted it to anybody, he was tempted to agree with her.

It wasn't hard to spot Garrideb's man coming up the street. In an area like this he stuck out like a sore thumb. Trimp met him at the gate.

"Mornin' squire," said David.

"What is it?"

"We got him. Me an' the lads. We got the mandrake."

Trimp knew who he was referring to at once. He grinned broadly. "Dead?"

David shook his head, sadly. "Nah. Your lot turned up before we could do the business.

They've jugged him. He's down at Bishopsgate."

"Nice work, lad." Trimp handed him some change.

"No need for that, guv."

"Go on. Have a drink on me."

"Ta very much, Cap'n."

"Clara? I've got to go in to work," he called. "I might be late."

\*\*\*

Tumblety was scared. He was no stranger to police cells, but this time was different. If that infernal Trimp got his teeth into him then he was done for. He told himself he wasn't afraid to die. But he was lying. It wasn't fair. He had done nothing wrong. He was a scientist. He was only conducting research after all.

"I'm like you, Jesus," he prayed to himself. "I'm just like you. Up there on the cross. Persecuted and misunderstood. If you are there, my Lord, please help me."

Sergeant Houghton entered the cell.

"Right, Mister Tumblety. You'll be up before the Magistrates on..."

"It's Doctor, Constable. Doctor Tumblety."

"Right. An' it's Sergeant, if yer don't mind."

"Mea Culpa."

"Eh? Oh. Mmm. You're up before the Magistrate on November 20th. Nine sharp. Gross indecency. Nasty business."

"Quite. And as I said it's all a mistake."

"Well you can explain that to the Beak. He might believe you."

"Have I got to stay here until then? I'm a busy man. My patients need me. I do important government work."

"Depends."

"On?"

"You'll need to post bail."

"How long will that take, Sergeant?"

"Again, that depends. How long will it take you to get hold of some money?"

Tumblety's heart began to race. He couldn't believe his luck. Thank you my Lord! You do indeed move in mysterious ways!

"Why, immediately my dear Sergeant. I have it about my person now."

"Then come this way, sir. We'll have you out of here in no time."

\*\*\*

Trimp had stopped off at Lemn Street to collect Abberline and Warner.

"They've got Tumblety. He's in a cell down Bishopsgate."

Abberline was excited. He may well have been taking money from Ezekiel, but he wanted the Ripper caught more than anyone. "Great news. Come on. Let's nail the fucker's balls to the cell door."

They took a cab to Bishopsgate and ran into the station together.

"Which cell is he in?" Abberline snapped at Sergeant Houghton.

"Who, sir?"

"Tumblety."

"He's gone sir. Twenty minutes ago."

Abberline stared at Houghton then at Trimp.

"Gone? Gone where?"

"Home sir. He's posted bail. Up for indecent assault sir. He's bailed until the twentieth."

"You fucking numbskull," Trimp's voice was low and menacing. "Do you know what you've done? You've just released Jack the fuckin' Ripper."

"Eh?"

"Let it go, Sam," said Abberline, his shoulders slumping.

"But..."

"He wasn't to know. He's not a bloody mind reader. What's the address?"

Houghton looked down at his paperwork.

"100 Thomas Street, sir."

Abberline turned to Trimp.

"Let's go."

Trimp shook his head. "Forget it. No point. That's Ezekiel's address. It's a bloody shell.

He won't be there. He's laughin' at us."

Abberline sighed and then pulling himself together he swung a punch at Sergeant Houghton, catching him on the nose.

"You fucking halfwit."

\*\*\*

Trimp watched him leave his house and then after letting him get a good hundred yards ahead, started to follow. Trimp was surprised at the sprightly pace. The man carried an air of sadness and melancholy that pointed towards him being elderly, however the pace of his stride indicated a much younger man. Trimp had to step it up a bit in order to keep up. He noticed that the man was not dissimilar to himself in size and build and smiled as he watched the man's gait. There were definite similarities. The man walked briskly for a good two miles before reaching Highbury Fields. There he took to a bench and sat, back nice and straight, hands clasped together on his cane. Trimp sat beside him.

"Pleasant for this time of year, wouldn't you say?" said Trimp, suddenly shy.

"Sir," said the man, "I've seen you before. You appear to have been watching my house. For weeks now I have seen you. Today I took a long walk to find out for sure if it is me you are interested in. Seemingly you are."

"Seemingly I am. Yes."

"May I ask why?" The man had a kind face and was younger in person than Trimp had thought. Mid fifties, certainly no older than sixty. Trimp was right about the sadness and the melancholy. It was there, in the man's eyes, clear and alert but troubled.

"A month ago someone I've known since childhood died. I felt his loss profoundly. More than I thought possible. I said to my wife that the past was now over, from now on there was the future only. I was wrong. Do we ever escape our past?"

"Escape? Is that the right word? I have found as each year rolls by it is the past that has escaped me. One fleeting moment in time can haunt you forever. What do you want sir?" It was not said unkindly but it was clear to Trimp that here was a man of authority very much used to giving the orders and controlling the situation.

"My name is Samuel Trimp. I am a detective. It has been my responsibility to bring to justice the man they are calling Jack the Ripper."

"Oh. An onerous task indeed. Are you any closer to apprehending this fiend?"

"Yes, sir," said Trimp, simply. "I am."

"Good man. You still haven't answered my question though. Why? Are you finding it difficult?"

Trimp thought for a while. The two of them staring up at the clear autumn sky. It was cold but their exertions had warmed them up. Neither man felt the chill. A raven swooped down from a tree and began pecking at a worm. It stopped and stared at them as if it too wanted to hear Trimp's answer.

"Difficult? Yes. I spent the whole of my life thinking myself an orphan. I grew up in the workhouse. I thought I would go to my grave never knowing who my mother and father were. Over the last month the past has spat out the answers to questions I haven't dared ask since I was a child. I know who my mother is and I now know who my father is."

Trimp looked at the man with the sad eyes. "It's you."

The man didn't react. He just gazed into the eyes of Samuel Trimp. At length he said quietly, "Your mother is called Marie. She came to work for my family when she was fifteen. I have never seen a girl so beautiful. I was sixteen. Oh my, I was so in love." He

paused. Lost in the painful memory. "When something comes to a sudden and drastic end it leaves the worst sort of feeling. The never knowing. My father was not a cruel man but he was a man with a position. He thought the scandal would destroy everything he had built. He made decisions that he thought were for the best. The best for him. The opinions of a sixteen year old boy counted for nought." He repeated the phrase with a sigh. "The never knowing. Every single day of my life I have thought that this might be the day when there is a knock on my door and Marie is standing there. Or that the child, my child, would come and find me. Now you are here. A middle-aged man. Not a child at all. So strange. In my mind time has stood still. You should be a baby and Marie should be that young fresh-faced beauty who took my heart."

"Marie is dead, sir. I'm sorry."

"Ah. I thought that would be the case. You probably wonder why I accept your story? Why I don't ask for proof? Or why I don't tell you to go to hell?"

Trimp shrugged.

"I can see her in you."

"Really?" Trimp felt his heart racing.

"You have her eyes. I think it must be the good fortune of all sons that they look like their mothers. He looked Trimp up and down and smiled. The smile took years off him.

"Bless us. You've got her feet too."

"I hope she didn't have my bunions, sir."

"Please. Call me..."

"I don't think I can. Not yet."

The man nodded. "Of course. I... I don't want to rush you. I..."

The two men looked at each other and laughed.

"So much to say and yet we're both lost for words. A detective eh? You lucky bu...bli... fellow. I always wanted to be a detective. A lot more exciting than cotton."

"I should imagine it is."

"Would you like to come back to the house?"

"Yes. Yes I would."

## A GATEWAY TO HELL

The killers had no difficulty in renting a room opposite Miller's Court in Dorset Street. It was unfurnished save for two wooden chairs, one with a broken leg. Mould grew on the walls, rats scurried behind the walls and there was a small leak in the ceiling. Drops of water spattered slowly into a cracked basin on the floor. A fine drizzle fell from the skies, in a vain attempt to wash away the sins of the East End. The killers were glad to be indoors. They watched from the cracked window of the darkened room. They could hear Mary Kelly singing. She was drunk. It was a little after 1.00am.

"Now?" asked the younger man.

The other shook his head.

Half an hour later, she appeared on the street.

"Go on. Get her home. I want to take my time with this one."

The younger man left, he carried the tools in a package under his arm.

He followed her down to Flower and Dean Street. She was talking to a man. He stepped back into the darkness. She came back towards him.

"Lookin' for company?" she asked.

The man nodded. "I have a friend too."

"Oh, it's like that is it, saucey?"

The man grinned.

"All right, chuck."

"You'll be good for what I tell you?" he asked.

She nodded and took his arm. He supported her as she swayed across the cobblestones.

She began singing. He didn't like her voice but he refrained from telling her to shut up.

She led him into her room. It was a squalid affair. Filthy, cold and dark.

"Light the fire," he said.

"No fuel love."

He picked up a jacket from the bed and tossed it into the fireplace.

"Here, that's my Joe's that is."

There was a tap at the door.

"My friend," said the man.

The smell of cologne overpowered the smell of damp and dirt.

"Light the fire, my man," he said, drawing the knife from his coat pocket.

Mary's eyes widened with fear. "Murder!"

His hand covered her mouth.

"Light the fire. We want to see, don't we?"

The other tossed more clothes on the fire.

"Don't worry, my love. You won't be needing them anymore."

She pulled away and managed to cry "Murder," once more. The killer dispatched her swiftly.

"More light, we need more light."

Within minutes the fireplace was like an opening to Hell itself as the two men went about their work.

\*\*\*

By mid-afternoon the news had spread like typhoid over the East End. The Naughty Wonder Girls had a minute's silence, broken only by a fart from Job.

"Sorry. It's those eels I had for breakfast. I think they're still alive in there."

"Please Job, we need to concentrate," said Stan. He was rehearsing the troupe. Since Bess had left to live with her brother, Faye had taken on double the workload. Faye had introduced them to another girl, Carroty Nell.

She was a knockout. Nice voice. Angel face. Cute personality. Perfect.

"Okay love, you're hired," said Stan. "Just one thing, I'm thinkin' of havin' it put in all our contracts that our girls mustn't go off an' live with long lost brothers or get 'emselves killed. Is that fair enough."

Nell laughed. "I ain't got no brother. As for the other. I'll do me best, ducks."

"Good. I... look. You'll be earning enough here to... well... I don't want you walkin' the streets. You know."

"Mary was done in her own bed," said one of the other girls. "If Jack wants yer... he gets yer. Simple as."

"Yeh well. Still no point in takin' chances is there?" said Faye.

Stan was impressed. Faye being sensible for once. Wonders would never cease. Maybe Job was a good influence on her after all.

Stan heard the clinking of glasses from the bar behind them. It was Joe Barnett, cleaning up for the night's performance.

"Joe," said Stan, going over to him. "I didn't expect you here... today...after..."

"After... No. I s'pose you didn't." Joe's eyes were red. He had aged years in one night.

"You don't have to come in this week, Joe," said Stan. "You take the week off. Here..."

He handed Joe a handful of notes. Well over a month's wages. "Get some nice flowers. You know... for the..."

"For the... yes sir. Very handsome sir. I don't mind workin' sir. Gives me somethin' to do. Takes me mind off things."

Stan nodded. "I know. I know. It's just..."

"It's just... what sir?"

"Look. It sounds horrible but, you bein' here... it'll make everyone think of Mary an'... well an' how she died. It's... I feel such a bastard sayin this but it's bad for business. People come here for a show an' a good time. If people hear you're workin' here we'll

end up doin' a roarin' trade in ghouls wantin' to see the feller of the Ripper's latest victim. I don't want that kind of business."

Joe blinked back tears. "Kind of business. That's what I am now ain't it? I'm not me any more. I'm Mary's boyfriend. Or more like it I'm the boyfriend of that prozzy who got fuckin' gutted by the R...R..."

He broke down in sobs.

Job, Faye, Carrotty Nell and the others came round to comfort him.

"Who cares what the others think?" said Stan. "She was a bloomin' princess, your Mary. Had a voice like a nightingale."

Faye stared at him and stopped herself from ruining the illusion just in time.

"Nightingale. Very kind of you to say, sir. I always said she could've been a star. She had a nicer voice than that Faye there."

"Steady on," growled Faye, whose vein of compassion only ran so deep.

"Easy gal," whispered Job.

"You get yourself home Joe," said Stan. "And remember, if you need to talk, my door's always open."

"Always open. Cheers guv. You're a prince. A real prince."

He left in a daze.

"Fuckin' hell," sighed Stan. "Aren't they ever gonna catch that fucker?"

"I keep hearing from Growler, boss," said Job. "He won't leave me alone."

"How's that then?"

"Says if the cops don't catch him soon he wants me to do it."

"Blimey."

"I tried tellin' him he was out of order. He don't care though. Says he'll haunt me forever until that fucker's dead. I..." He pulled Stan towards the office. "Scuze a second gals."

"What is it?" asked Stan once the door was closed behind them and they were alone in the office.

"I can't dab it up anymore."

"Eh?"

"Whenever me an' Faye are about to get down to it, as soon as I'm in there, so to speak, fuckin' Growler pays a visit. Starts whisperin' in me ear. It's puttin' me right off! I haven't had a hard on in weeks. Faye thinks I've turned mandrake. It's drivin' me mad."

"Bloody hell. What about opium. Doesn't that help?"

"No. It gets worse then. He knows me too well. There's only one thing for it. I either get an exorcism or I kill Tumblety."

"Or the bluebottles get him."

Job shrugged. "Won't happen. They had him an' let him go again."

"Trimp's different."

"Yeh. Well he's just one man."

"So are you. Get the exorcism."

Job shook his head. "I couldn't do that. Not to Growler."

## DEPARTURES

Tumblety hugged Klosowski on the doorstep of the shop.

"You have to go? Really?" said the barber, tears in his eyes.

"Yes. Look, meet me in New York. We can start again. Things are different there. Look on this as a rehearsal."

"I no know what you fuck talk about. Rehearsal. Hah." The barber laughed. "Is metaphors? Yes? Metafuckingphors. I like."

"Yes. I like too." Tumblety felt the tears welling up too. He loved this man. Such a fortuitous meeting at just the right time. Tumblety was amazed they had formed such a strong bond and had so much in common. He was like a brother. No. He was an apostle, that was it. An apostle to his messiah. "Severin. I will call you Peter because you are like a rock."

"Eh?"

"Never mind. I will see you in New York. In the meantime, be careful, but try and keep your hand in when you get the chance."

He left.

"I won't look back," he promised himself. "I won't look back. I'll be heartbroken if he's not watching me." He looked back. Klosowski waved. He bit his lip and turned the corner.

\*\*\*

Trimp was enjoying a warm bath. It was evening. It had been a hard day. The press were slaughtering the police. He knew the sight of Mary Kelly's poor mutilated body would keep him awake all night. He had never seen such savagery. As he plucked a hair from his nostril he swore that one day he would perform the same atrocities on

Tumblety, but he would make sure he was alive long enough to experience the full horror of it all.

"Why does God allow creatures like that to exist?" he pondered. "To keep me in work," he answered the question himself. "Well I'd go back to the Lump Hotel if I could just gut that bastard first."

Bess poked her head inside the bathroom.

Trimp covered himself with his hands.

"Bess, for goodness sake."

"What? Yer me brother aren't yer? No need to hide it from me."

"Yes but..."

"Stan's here. He wants to see you."

"Stan? Garrideb?"

"Oooh. You've been takin' your detective pills, haven't you? Course it's Stan Garrideb.

How many Stans do you know?"

Trimp shrugged. "Don't know. None. Tell him I'll be right down. Oh and Bess?"

"What?"

"Knock in future."

"Prude."

\*\*\*

Stan was waiting in the parlour, chatting away happily with Clara and Bess as he dangled the baby on his knee. Bess couldn't help but notice how natural he seemed with the children.

"I've left Faye in charge tonight. She's a good girl. Not like you, Bess, but a good girl all the same."

"She still hot on Job?"

"Mmm." He refrained from mentioning Job's personal problems. He also refrained from begging her to return. He could see she was happy here. Happier than she had been at the Palace. He found himself wishing that Trimp and his family had mistreated her so that he could carry her away like a knight in shining armour. He realised it wasn't so. Bess had a family now. These people loved her. A part of him loved them for that and another part hated them.

"So, Stanley. To what do I owe the honour?" Trimp strode into the room, his hair still wet. Stan handed the baby to Clara and rose to shake his hand.

"It's Tumblety. David's lads have spotted him."

Trimp was like a leopard catching a sniff of a wounded gazelle. "Where?"

"France."

"France?"

"The lads were watchin' the ports. So were your lot. Watching ships bound for America. He got one to Calais."

"Why didn't your lad tell the police?"

"He did. They wouldn't listen to him. Thought he was makin' trouble."

"For fuck's sake." He stormed out of the room, stopping only to take his hat and coat from the cloakroom.

"Samuel, where are you going?" asked Clara.

"France."

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The French newspapers were just as full of the Ripper as their British counterparts. Trimp found the French authorities extremely helpful. Although a part of him knew it was all part of the Anglo-French game of one-up-manship. If the French police caught Britain's most notorious murderer it really would be one in the eye for John Bull. Trimp

debated whether it would be almost preferable to let the killer get away. But then he remembered Tumblety and his oily smile and his confounded infernal scent. No, Tumblety had to be caught and gutted.

He found himself a pension in a village on the outskirts of Calais. The last thing he needed was for Tumblety to spot him in the street and disappear again. So much had happened to him in such a short space of time. Once the capture of Tumblety was complete he would sit down with Clara, Bess and his father and consider his future. Since that meeting on the park bench on Highbury Fields they had met up and talked for hours. His father was an extremely wealthy man and his house was huge but strangely austere, lacking any comfort or luxury. A reflection of the man himself. Trimp knew all this was about to change. The knowledge that not only did he have a son but also three grandchildren had been too much for him and he had broken down and wept tears of joy at the sudden turn of events. Trimp thought it wise to hold off introducing him to Bess. He had a hunch that the similarity between Bess and his mother may be striking. Bess was, like her mum, an extremely attractive girl. Trimp thought it more prudent to introduce her when the time was right. He was scared of nobody, and practically unshockable, his life up to now had been tough and uncompromising. Over the last six months he had seen enough though to convince him that a change might be good for not only himself but his family. When his father presented him the opportunity to take over his empire, Trimp realised he would have to consider this option very hard indeed. If he could tempt Warner to leave the force and join him he knew he could make a successful go of any business. As he sat in that French village, sipping his coffee and enjoying the last of a croissant, the autumn sunshine warming his face, Trimp knew that his future was all about to change.

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"Boss, can I have a word?"

"Sure Job, pull up a chair. Drink?"

"Never say no, boss. Thanks."

As Stan poured two drinks Job settled back into the chair.

"So what is it, Job? What's on your mind?"

"I've been thinking."

"Good."

"I'm off, boss. My work here is done."

Stan felt his stomach lurch. "Eh. Off? Off where? You're the star turn! A sensation.

People come from miles to see your act. What d'yer wanna spoil it for?"

"Boss, I don't want to spoil anything, I never wanted to be an act. I came to avenge my brother's murder. That's done. Much as I appreciate everything you've done, this place ain't healthy for me. Too many bloody ghosts. It's a big old world out there and I need to get out and live in it. People to meet, places to see."

The men sat in silence for a few moments and then Job said quietly, "Plus, I don't want to stick around here anymore knowing what I know..."

"Knowing what you know about what?" said Stan, suddenly uneasy.

"About you, Stan."

"Go on."

"Remember way back when, when I first met you in the opium den? We shook hands. I saw your mother. You were shocked. I said your secret was safe with me."

"Yes?" Stan's palms were sweating. He reached for the paper knife on his desk.

"Well, it still is, hombre, though I'm finding it a bit of a burden and now my conscience is starting to nag."

"Because of what I... Because of what happened to my mother?"

Job paused, and then said, "And the rest."

"Just what did you see in that opium den, Job. Everything?"

"Yes. Everything."

"Why didn't you report it... Or tell the police?"

"Jonah. You treated him with nothing but kindness and respect. I was here only to even that score. That's all. And... it's over. Isn't it?"

"Yes," sighed Stan. "It's over. It's been over for a long time."

Job looked over the top of his glass at Stan. "If anything happens to Faye, I'll be back."

Stan almost choked on his drink. "Faye? Good God. I'd never..."

"Good. I'm glad. Look, I hate fuss. I much prefer it if I just slip away. Faye's a tough nut. She'll get over it." Job rose from the chair. "Thanks for the ride, Stan. It's been an adventure."

"Wait," said Stan. "You don't really understand. It's not how it seems. About my mother. About the others. I had no choice."

Job shook his head. "I don't want to hear it, Stan. You had your chance. I... I know too many secrets. I can't take anymore. I'm sure you tell yourself you had reasons. Good. Keep telling yourself that because the moment you stop, you'll drive yourself insane."

Job walked out of the office, closing the door quietly behind him. Stan didn't try to stop him. He was lost in the past. A past he had hoped was buried and forgotten.

"I had no choice."

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News came in two days later. A man, calling himself Frank Townsend and bearing a striking similarity to police sketches of Tumblety had booked a passage on *La Bretagne*, a steamer bound for New York City.

"Shall we search the ship?" asked Ettiene Verrault, Trimp's official liason with the French authorities.

"No. He's a slippy fucker. Like an eel."

The Frenchman looked puzzled.

"*Anguille*. You know slippy sloppy flippy floppy?"

"Ah. Yes. Very good, monsieur."

"Can you get me on board? Quietly. I'll catch him."

The Frenchman nodded. "It is done."

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Tumblety stood on the top deck looking out to sea. He breathed in the salty air.

"Ah. So nice. So pleasant. A nice lovely cruise. Lots of men in uniform. Could life get any better?"

He looked down at the lower deck and smiled. Yes. Life could get better.

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Trimp had searched steerage. A fruitless exercise he knew. Tumblety would be sailing first class. But he wanted to savour his triumph and enjoy the crossing. He had always wanted to visit the New World and he was looking forward to the voyage.

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He was watching everyone. These people were in his hands now. Many were planning a new life abroad. Trimp wanted to make sure they lived to enjoy it. With Tumblety on board, lurking, biding his time, you couldn't take anything for granted. He watched a young boy, no older than four, pulling a wooden boat on wheels across the deck. A man in a white jacket bent down and tousled the child's head. Trimp couldn't see his face. He had his back to him. But he recognised the smell. He raced forward, pushing past an

elderly couple, not bothering to apologise. He grabbed the man by the shoulder and wheeled him round.

"Papa," cried the little boy in alarm.

The man stared at Trimp, whiskers bristling in anger. He let hurl a stream of invective in French, most of which went over his head.

"Excuse moi," Trimp mumbled, his face red. Why did all Frenchmen have to douse themselves in that disgusting muck? It was playing havoc with his sinuses.

He hurried away to the bar and ordered a glass of wine. He was not a great wine drinker but it hit the spot and he ordered another. He took it outside. He sipped it as he leaned against the guardrail, savouring the taste of the grape. Another whiff of cheap cologne. Strong. Close. He turned.

A flash of sunlight on steel. A sigh. A splash.

The end