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University of Nevada, Reno

A Monstrous Force

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of the Arts in English (Writing) and the Honors Program

By

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We recommend that the thesis
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Abstract

A Monstrous Force follows Elson Owsley, an unskilled worker, as he joins the newly formed London Metropolitan Police in hopes of providing a better life for his wife and unborn child. While he initially plans to keep his head down and follow orders, a string of attacks on lower class individuals arouses his suspicion, particularly after his superiors ignore a murder, insisting that the victim was probably a criminal who deserved what he got. When Elson begins his investigation into the deaths, he soon discovers that the murderer is more than a human serial killer; it can't be considered human. **This work of historical fantasy illustrates how monster theory can be applied to historical and modern issues.**

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Introduction

Fantasy is, at its core, a method of storytelling that involves elements or creatures that have not and could not exist in the world as we know it, ranging from magic to monsters, often intersecting with other literary elements such as horror. Fantasy, as illustrated in Susanna Clarke's *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell*, can be used to great effect as a means of commenting on or exploring aspects of society through the lens of allegory. *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* follows the eponymous characters, two of the only magicians in Regency England. Throughout the novel, their pursuits of knowledge and power are stymied by a fairy known only as The Gentleman-with-the-Thistledown-Hair, who has become enamoured with a black servant and wishes to put said servant on the throne of England. In Clarke's novel, fantasy is used as a means of exploring what some might consider the fundamental aspects of human nature, such as prejudice against other races, and illustrating how absurd they are by having a character unused to such prejudices question them (Clarke 159). The use of fantasy elements in Clarke's novel is imperative, as they serve to underscore how society is more willing to accept magic and fairies than to accept that all races and genders deserve equality.

Terry Pratchett also makes great use of fantasy to this end, as illustrated in his fantasysatire *Discworld* series. In *Feet of Clay*, for instance, the notions of freedom and free will are discussed by having characters debate whether or not golems, creatures that exist solely to work for their masters, can truly think and fend for themselves (Pratchett 78). Thus, through the lens of fantasy, an author can create a dialogue about contemporary issues without seeming overly didactic while simultaneously creating a fresh look at the topic. With these authors and their works in mind, I set out to apply these tactics to my writing, a work of historical fantasy set in the early Victorian era.

The police force as it is known today first came into being in the early years of Queen

Victoria's reign, fully coming into its own by 1856 (Mitchell 435). While there had been previous attempts to curtail crime, such as the Bow Street Runners, these attempts were uniformly undermined by corruption and lack of resources (ibid). Until The Police Act of 1829, law enforcement was governed by an outdated statute written six centuries prior (ibid). Under Sir Robert Peel's direction, the London Metropolitan Police was modernized, though this change was met with distrust and often hostility from civilians (Mitchell 436-7). Peel recruited literate, able-bodied men from all walks of life; though many of the unskilled laborers joined in hopes of bettering their lives, few actually attained this dream (Shpayer-Makov). Although the police force was created with good intentions, it soon became clear that they served the interests of "the social and political elite", thus fostering further hostility between the lower classes and the police (Shpayer-Makov). Some might argue these conditions persist to this day, with recent events such as Ferguson bringing to light the issue of which members of society the police are truly sworn to protect and serve. When monster theory is applied to the matter of police-civilian relations, the matter of police negligence and brutality is explored in ways that better illustrate how pervasive and nefarious these problems are. While the problems of police brutality and negligence are understood by most, placing these problems in a context where they are juxtaposed with creatures more traditionally understood as monsters sheds a new light on the problems by showing the overlap between police immorality and the actions of monsters against marginalized groups. In this context, the police and the lower class are at odds about the nature of the creature; the police insist that it is simply a low-life criminal, while the lower classes insist that it is something far different and bound to the upper classes' disinterest in the deaths of lower class workers.

According to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, there are seven theses that apply to what he deems

“monster culture”, or the mythos surrounding monsters. The first of the seven pertains to the notion that the monster is a product of a culture and society, “Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself: it is always a displacement, always inhabits the gap between the time of upheaval that created it and the moment into which it is received, to be born again” (Cohen 4). Thus, monsters can be seen as signifiers that illustrate a culture’s deepest fears in ways that could not be conveyed by simply stating said fears. Cohen’s thesis argues that behind every monster lurks a cultural anxiety which serves as the birth site of the greatest works of horror.

In *A Monstrous Force*, the monster that hunts Elson and other lower class individuals is a product of both the upper class fear that they will come to harm at the hands of the lower classes and the lower class fear that their deaths could go unnoticed by an uncaring society. Furthermore, the monster embodies the disparity between the classes that causes so much struggle, truly making it a product of the culture in which it is situated.

The theory of the monster being a product of a culture or society is also applicable to the racial tensions that have spurred so much police brutality in modern times. As seen in both Ferguson and Baltimore, the police fear and distrust people of color so much that they feel the need to arrive at peaceful protests in full riot gear, thus mentally preparing themselves for an escalation of violence that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy due to their hostility towards the protestors.

His second thesis asserts that the monster always escapes. He states,

“Each time the grave opens and the unquiet slumberer strides forth (‘come from the dead, / Come back to tell you all’), the message proclaimed is transformed by the air that gives its speaker new life. Monsters must be examined within the intricate matrix of relations

(social, cultural, and literary-historical) that generate them” (Cohen 4-5).

In this thesis, Cohen discusses the fact that no matter how many times a monster is apparently defeated, some form of that monster appears in other works of fiction. This claim illustrates the malleability monsters have in their ability to rise from the dead both figuratively and literally to take on new cultural values and fears.

In my thesis, I use the idea of a “creature from the Id” to convey the thoughts and prejudices held against the lower classes in Victorian Britain. The “creature from the Id” has been present in works of fiction ranging from *Forbidden Planet* to recent episodes of the television series *Doctor Who*. My choice to incorporate such a creature proves Cohen’s theory that forms of the monster will always continue past the original fiction’s climax.

In a more sinister way, the monster in *A Monstrous Force* lives on due to the fact that institutionalized classism and class struggle have not been eradicated by the end of the novelette, and indeed continue to be problems to this day. The anxieties that created the monster still exist, and so the monster still exists.

For proof that the monster of institutionalized racism continues to exist, one need only look at the outbreak of black deaths at the hands of white police officers around the nation. Since the start of 2015, 388 people have been killed by police officers in the United States (killedbypolice.net). While this list does not provide the specific details of the events leading to each death, the fact that such a large amount of people—the vast majority of them being people of color—were killed by the police in such a short amount of time is proof that the problems of racism and police violence continue to exist and intersect in tragic ways despite measures taken against them.

Cohen's third thesis is that "the monster is the harbinger of category crisis", which expands on his second thesis by saying that monsters are capable of living past their death in the source material because they cannot be easily categorized (6). Monsters, by their nature, do not fit neatly into any of society's preconceived boxes; this makes them all the more dangerous and terrifying. Cohen states, "Because of its ontological liminality, the monster notoriously appears at times of crisis as a kind of third term that problematizes the clash of extremes—as 'that which questions binary thinking and introduces a crisis'" (6). By existing between and beyond cultural categories, monsters draw attention to the tacit binaries that construct daily life and then proceed to subvert them in such a manner that calls into question the nature of said binaries. The monster's resistance to categorization grants it the ability to live long after a culture's categories have become history, allowing it to rise from the ashes when convenient.

The notion of the "creature from the Id", as seen in my thesis, is hardly a new one, and it continues to exist in media because it transcends and problematizes the boundaries consumers of media take for granted. It does this by existing between the realms of imagined and real, taking the fears that were present in the minds of characters and making them physical. In addition to blurring the lines of the real and imaginary, the creature in my thesis also serves to call attention to and question the dichotomy of the upper and lower classes. Furthermore, monster in *A Monstrous Force* blurs society's lines by being a creature of both the upper and lower classes. While the monster lives and lurks in the lower class sections of London, in a sense making it a monster of the lower classes, it carries the fears and prejudices of the upper class. Because the monster contains elements of both the upper and lower classes, it highlights and questions the class dichotomy.

The recent tensions between the police and people of color continue to exist because the institutionalized racism that spurs these tensions manages to defy categorization. This can be seen in the disparate accounts of the events leading to recent protests, where who gets blamed for the death of an innocent person of color varies from news station to news station. Because the public cannot form a cohesive opinion on the institutionalized racism that causes the needless deaths of people of color, the problem continues to exist.

Cohen next postulates that the monster “dwells at the gates of difference” (7). According to Cohen, “The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within” (7). In this quote, Cohen explains that the power behind monsters stems from a fear of the unknown. In my thesis, the monster stems from the upper classes’ anxieties concerning the lower class, who appear as “other” as the monster the upper classes have unknowingly conjured. This is closely related to Cohen’s statement that, “In the United States, Native Americans were presented as unredeemable savages so that the powerful political machine of Manifest Destiny could push westward with disregard” (8). The sentiments expressed in both Cohen’s quote and the creation of the monster in my thesis illustrate the tendency of the powerful to ascribe negative and often monstrous traits to marginalized groups, a tactic the modern police have been accused of using against racial minorities.

The fear of those who are different can be blamed as the driving force of the recent outbreak of racist violence at the hands of the police. This can be seen in the tragic case of Felix David, a black man with an unspecified mental illness who was fatally shot by the police when he struggled with him during his arrest. The struggle that led to his death consisted of him

grabbing one of the officer's radios, which prompted said officer to shoot him in the chest (Velez). The institutionalized fear of both the mentally ill and people of color caused the police to behave more violently than was warranted, proof that fear of the "other" is present and dangerous in modern times.

The fifth thesis is that monsters serve as a warning against curiosity and exploration of boundaries (Cohen 12). Cohen states, "The monster of prohibition exists to demarcate the bonds that hold together that system of relations we call culture, to call horrid attention to the borders that cannot—*must not*—be crossed" (13). In my thesis, *A Monstrous Force*, the creature is a manifestation of upper class unwillingness to allow the lower classes any amount of upward mobility or social status; it only manifests when members of the lower class begin taking jobs with the potential for upward mobility. In this sense, the monster serves as a warning to the main character about what happens when someone attempts to cross the boundaries between society's castes; the lack of police interest in the murders of lower class individuals helps reinforce the monster's de facto regulation of class boundaries by targeting only the lower class.

In the case of recent events, the warning against curiosity comes from the numerous accounts of a white police officer entering a lower class neighborhood or "ghetto", becoming unduly fearful, and overreacting when faced with a civilian who may or may not have meant them harm. The violence against the civilian and the resulting unrest in the community seems to serve as a warning against venturing into parts of town already considered dangerous by the police, thus creating a positive feedback loop of fear when faced with venturing into the "unknown" and the violence against civilians and ensuing unrest that follows all too often.

Cohen next theorizes that fear of monsters is closely linked to a type of perverse desire

(16). He asserts that the pleasure of horror stems from the notion that, as terrifying as the story may be to audiences, the consumers are still aware that the fear will abate after the story ends and they re-enter the real world (Cohen 17). He then postulates that monsters fulfil another type of desire, the wish to destroy those aspects of society which a culture deems unacceptable (18). He states,

“What Bakhtin calls ‘official culture’ can transfer all that is viewed as undesirable in itself into the body of the monster, performing a wish-fulfillment drama of its own; the scapegoated monster is perhaps ritually destroyed in the course of some official narrative, purging the community by eliminating its sins” (Cohen 18).

This can be applied to my thesis in that society’s rampant classism is embodied in a monster that is, as is often the case in such narratives, vanquished by the story’s end. In this way, the destruction of the monster at the hands of lower class individuals is the culmination of a fantasy to end society’s classism, particularly the classism exhibited by the police force.

The desire to transfer the undesirable to another being before destroying it can be seen in Darren Wilson’s grand jury testimony, in which he describes Mike Brown, the unarmed young man he shot to death for tenuous reasons, as looking “like a demon” (McCoy). His choice of words in this testimony is telling, as it demonstrates that people of color, particularly young men, are so hated and feared by white police officers that they are viewed as being more similar to actual monsters than human beings. Wilson’s testimony proves that society is desperate to ascribe traits they fear or hate upon their victims before visiting violence upon them.

Cohen concludes his theses by saying,

“These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place. They ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions

about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression. They ask us why we have created them” (20).

At their core, monsters serve as a mirror in which society’s prejudices and desires are exposed. They question society’s preconceived notions and threaten social norms. In *A Monstrous Force*, the monster, while violently reinforcing the class hierarchy, asks the readers to question the social construction of class and how far the upper classes will go to preserve the existing social order. It also represents the upper class’s dangerous belief that the lower class is populated entirely by criminals; the violence of the monster is prompted by the upper class’s fear of violence from the lower class.

With Cohen’s theses in mind, I set out to write a piece of historical fantasy that applied monster theory to historical events. In *A Monstrous Force*, the main character is forced to contend with both everyday classism at the hands of his superiors in the London Metropolitan Police and the prejudices of society that manifest in a more sinister and deadly manner. By writing *A Monstrous Force*, I hoped to explore the prejudices that still exist in the police and society by means of a fantasy novella. **By the end of my novella, I hope to have answered the question of how monster theory can be applied to historical and modern problems.**

A Monstrous Force

Elson shuddered against the cold as he exited the factory. While working there was hardly enjoyable, at least the sheer number of people crammed into the building served to warm him up a little. The December air pierced through his thin clothing and bit at his skin until the pain grew so unbearable that it transformed into numbness. He'd never been happier that the factory, which belched acrid smoke into the surrounding area, was close to his flat.

As he approached his building, he noticed a figure coming towards him. While it looked like a man, it moved in leaps and spurts, jerking its way towards him. As it drew closer, Elson felt himself grow inexplicably exhausted and sad, as though his mind was mired in a thick fog. Through the malaise, he knew he should go inside. Violet was waiting for him, and it wouldn't do to spend all night in the freezing temperatures. Still, his arms and legs felt leaden; it took all his energy to so much as twitch his little finger.

The being was almost upon him now. It was impossible to make out the details of it through the flurry of snow, but something at the end of its arms glinted in the streetlights. It moved like something that had only had motion described to it, like something that wasn't entirely human, that might not be entirely living. It stank like the by-products of a butcher's shop, and Elson's stomach churned as the scent threatened to overpower him. He mustered the last of his strength and ran inside.

Once inside, the feeling abated. He could breathe once more, and his energy slowly returned to him. As he drifted off to sleep on the dilapidated mattress he shared with Violet, he

could almost pretend that the encounter had never taken place. He wanted to tell her about his experience, but he doubted she'd believe him. He almost didn't believe himself.

#

Elson stepped out of the home he and Violet shared with a small family and an irate expriest and walked into the London smog. His flimsy clothing, which consisted of more holes than cloth, provided only minimal protection against the December wind, but he had long since grown accustomed to it. Warmth was a miracle that would come only when either the factories started paying reasonable wages or the world was enveloped in fire, as his housemate was so fond of telling him. As he left, he remembered his conversation with Violet that morning.

"I'm never going to sell any apples in this weather," she said, pulling on her threadbare coat.

"I'm sorry. I could help you sell them, if you like."

"Oh, yes. Two of us standing in the cold would definitely help, especially when you lose your job for not showing up. Speaking of jobs, I heard Peel's recruiting."

"Pardon?"

She raised her voice to a quavery approximation of an upper-class woman's accent. "Sir Robert Peel seeks fine men of sound body and mind to join the ranks of London's finest, the London Metropolitan Police Force."

Her voice dropped back to her normal register. "Don't tell me you've not heard of this. It is all anyone's talking about these days. You should try to join; I heard it's a good way to make a name for yourself and provide for our family."

"That's what they said about the Bow Street Runners, and they wound up bullying the people they were meant to help."

“Ah, but this is different. Peel’s men can’t afford to do that, not with everyone watching them. Even Her Majesty is paying attention. Go on, then, Inspector Owlsley.”

He’d chuckled and glanced at Violet’s abdomen. “I’ll try, if only for you two. How are you doing?”

She sighed. “It’s not as bad as it could be.”

“I don’t like you working out here in your condition,” Elson said, grabbing her hand.

“What choice do we have? As bad as this is, living in debtor’s prison would be much worse for me and the baby.”

“I suppose you’re right. Be safe, Violet.”

He walked through the soot and grime-covered streets, narrowly avoiding being run down by a hansom cab as he crossed the road. By the time he reached the factory, he’d seen enough orphans and unfortunates to populate an entirely new city. He removed his battered top hat as he walked through to his station.

The body heat of the throng of other workers warmed his fingers enough so that they could function as more than decoration, allowing him to begin spinning the cotton fibres onto their spools. It was amazing how many families he could count in the factory; the adults wrapped the fibres onto the spools while their offspring had the unenviable task of cleaning out the machines. As a result of their task, he could count on one hand the number of children in his neighbourhood who had two.

Like most of his fellow workers, Elson had moved to London when the industry began to pick up. His farming skills had proven all but useless in the urban setting, and he found himself forced to take a menial job in one of the many factories that had sprung up with the invention of new technology. The job was both physically and emotionally draining, and the pay was barely

enough to support one person, let alone a family, but there were few other options for someone in Elson's position. Once granted a job in the factory, the men and women were expected to follow a rigid code of conduct. It was, the manager insisted, to ensure that they remained moral in the changing times, but it only seemed to ensure that the factory controlled every aspect of their lives. For many, their lives began and ended with the factory, sometimes all too literally.

His mind began to wander as he continued his work, only coming back to himself when it was time to switch to another empty spool. He could hardly imagine life as a member of the constabulary. Would he have a uniform? If so, he hoped it would be made of heavy wool. The colours could clash, so long as he was warm. It would certainly be more exciting than his current occupation, too. If nothing else, he'd actually be a respected member of society, perhaps respected enough to marry Violet. They'd dreamed of that once, but their combined financial instability had prevented that fantasy from being any more realistic than flying horses. He knew better than to expect that they'd have a problem-free life in a stately manor in the countryside, but perhaps he could afford a simple home away from the factories where Violet could raise their children. The more he thought about it, the more appealing the idea of joining the police force became.

By the end of the day, bones he wasn't sure existed otherwise ached from the constant labour. His mind had gone numb and blank as a defensive mechanism against the monotony; as such, he nearly forgot about his potential job with the constables until he'd turned onto his street. He let out an inarticulate noise of exasperation, turned on his heel, and raced in the opposite direction, hoping that Sir Peel hadn't decided to have an early night.

To his relief, the lantern outside the police house was still lit. He made a cursory attempt at smoothing the perpetual wrinkles from his shirt before entering the building.

The man at the desk glanced up briefly before returning his attention to the small stack of papers. He looked about Elson's age and wore a blue woollen coat with stripes that Elson imagined indicated his rank.

He said, "You can't come visit your cousin or whoever it might be. We don't need anybody trying to break the locks; you'll have to wait to see them at the hanging, like everybody else."

Elson blinked, mouth slightly agape. "Pardon? I came here to enquire about joining the constabulary."

The man snorted. "Is that so? And I suppose you'd like to be a commissioner, too, wouldn't you?"

"Well, if you think—"

"Listen, lad. *If* we let you join, you'll start out a constable, just like everyone else. Can you read?"

Elson's hands shook slightly as he answered. "Yes, sir. I can write, too."

"You ever have trouble with the Runners?"

"They refused to get my watch back for me unless I paid them all my wages," Elson said.

"Typical, but that wasn't what I meant. Did they ever come after you?" the man said, digging for a blank sheet of paper and scribbling on it.

"No, sir. We stayed well away from each other in that regard."

"Very good. I imagine you know your way around well enough, so you shouldn't have trouble learning your beat. You did come to us at the right time."

"What time is that, sir?"

“The time when we’re bloody short-staffed and run ragged. Stop by tomorrow morning for your uniform; Superintendent Willoughby will assign you your beat. What’s your name, lad?”

“Elson Owsley, sir.”

“Any idea of how you’d spell that?”

“It’s spelled like it sounds, sir.”

“I’ll try not to mangle it too badly.” The man smiled, and it almost seemed genuine. “Welcome to the force, Owsley. Try not to get mugged; it does horrible things for our reputation.”

As Elson exited the police house, he thought he heard something moving in the alley behind him. He subconsciously quickened his steps, only returning to a regular pace once his flat was in view.

#

The next morning shone through the cracked window with all the pleasantness of a sharpened dagger. Elson groaned and braced himself for another day at the factory before remembering the conversation he’d had the previous night.

The other tenants had long since vacated the building, giving him ample time to dig through his wardrobe for an appropriate outfit. Of course, he soon realised, this would have been a more formidable task if he owned more than one set of trousers and two shirts. With a sigh, he picked the shirt with the least amount of holes and pulled on his trousers. At least his shoes were fairly sturdy. From the sound of it, he would be walking a great deal for his new job.

Elson hurried past his old workplace and down the street, making a conscious effort to slow to a stroll as he reached the police house. His clothes were already working against him; he

scarcely needed to rush into the building as though he were being chased. He took a deep breath and walked in.

His heart fluttered like a trapped moth as he approached the desk. He became uncomfortably aware of his tongue and throat muscles. What was he supposed to do with his hands, again? Did they really spend most of their time hanging limply from his arms?

He cleared his throat and said, "I came to speak with Superintendent Willoughby. I was offered a job. Here. By the man at the desk last night."

For a panicked moment he wondered if he hadn't actually spoken. The man seemed oblivious to what he'd said. Finally, he gestured for Elson to walk past the desk and down the hall. Feeling for the world like he was going to collapse, Elson complied.

The corridor was narrow, though perhaps its size was exaggerated by Elson's nerves. He found himself fighting the urge to turn around and return to the factory several times during the short walk. At last, he reached the door the man had pointed to. It was, of course, closed.

He lost track of time as he mustered up the courage to knock on it. When he finally did, it seemed like he'd barely tapped on the oak door. He half-hoped that the knock was too quiet for Willoughby to hear, giving him the opportunity to return home with the knowledge that he'd at least tried.

The door swung open, and the reedy man on the other side of the threshold stared at him as though he were only a slightly better sight than a slug.

The words spilled out of Elson's mouth before he had a chance to stop them. "I-came-here-to-see-about-a-job-the-man-at-the-desk-last-night-said-I-should-see-you-for-my-uniform-I'm-Elson-Owlsley."

Willoughby blinked. “Ah, yes. I got a note about that. Come along, we’ll get you properly outfitted. Your pay is twenty-one shillings a week, and I don’t expect to hear any complaints about it.”

“You won’t hear none from me, sir.”

“Good,” he said, leading Elson further down the hall. Willoughby unlocked the door and disappeared into the room.

Elson stood there, unsure of whether or not he should follow Willoughby. He settled for standing as close to the threshold as he could without actually entering the room. It seemed like the safest option.

Willoughby emerged with a blue woollen coat and a pair of trousers in much better shape than the ones Elson wore, in addition to a leather top hat, a rattle, and a truncheon. He said, “These should fit. If they don’t, I suggest you grow more; that’s the smallest the uniforms get. You’ll report to Commissioner Jacobs—you should remember him from last night—for training tonight.”

“Thank you, sir. I’ll try to live up to the job.”

Willoughby smiled. “You might just make it here. We have another member of your class here; you might know him. Albert Saltonstall.”

“I’m afraid I’ve never had the pleasure, sir.”

“He seems a good sort, considering his breeding. I’m sure you’ll be acquainted in no time.”

That said, Willoughby turned on his heel and walked back to his office.

Elson clutched his new uniform to his chest and hurried out of the building before

Willoughby had a chance to change his mind. He stepped out into the cold air and suddenly remembered that he'd never told his former employer that he was leaving. He swore under his breath and began writing a mental script of what he would say to the foreman.

You may have noticed I didn't turn up for work today. Perhaps you didn't. You only seem to notice us when we're trapped in the machines, after all.

That would never work.

My humblest apologies for not coming to work today. I was busy being hired to keep the peace for overfed buggers like yourself.

That was, if anything, even worse.

There was nothing to it. He would simply have to avoid going near the factory for the rest of his life, a feat easier said than done, considering how close his living quarters were to the building. He could grow a moustache, too; that might help disguise him if he had the misfortune to run into the foreman on the street.

"What are you doing out and about?" Violet called to him from across the street. He checked both directions for oncoming cabs and went to her side.

"Following your advice, my darling," he said, lifting the wadded up uniform for her inspection.

She grinned. "I'm proud of you, dear. You'll enjoy the change, just you watch."

"And *you'll* enjoy the added coal to the fireplace."

"I certainly won't say no to that. Or to warm clothes for little Sophronia."

"We're not naming our child that. Especially since we're having a boy."

"And I suppose some gypsy fortune teller told you as much?" Violet said, eyes twinkling.

“I just have a feeling. Just like I have a feeling that I’ll spend as much time avoiding trouble in this job as I did in the last,” Elson said, clutching his uniform to his chest. “Except now I have the added possibility of being stabbed.”

“If you get stabbed, the law won’t have a chance to get to your attacker. They’ll have to take in what I leave of him,” Violet said, squeezing his shoulder.

“Not in your condition, you won’t. You’ll stay inside when you can and avoid anyone with a knife.”

Just as Elson was about to turn away, Violet said, “Watch yourself out there. I heard there’s something going after people out past dark. Miss Jameson said the boy downstairs disappeared when he was walking home one night.”

Elson felt a jolt of panic at the memory he’d tried so hard to suppress. Ever since that night, he’d had nightmares about that *thing* that he’d encountered. He’d thought he was doing a good job of pretending it hadn’t happened, but Violet’s words stirred it to the surface like silt in a once-clear pond. “Surely you meant ‘someone’?”

“I was just repeating what I’d been told. Be careful,” she said, clutching her basket close to her chest as though it were a protective talisman. “Don’t you dare disappear on me.”

Elson stepped closer to her and looked her in the eye. “I’m not going anywhere, Violet. I promise.”

He spent the hours until his training at home, looking for ways to pass the time. He cleaned and put away his few belongings, then reorganised them several times until he was satisfied with how he’d stored them. He tried to imagine where the baby would sleep. There was precious little room left when all the tenants were inside, but it’d be some time before Elson

could afford a better place, even with his new job. Elson and Violet would simply have to make room on their cot.

“Welcome back, lad,” Jacobs said as Elson entered the building. “Arriving early, that’s something I like to see. I suppose you’re eager to start learning your beat?”

“My beat?”

“The route you’ll be patrolling, constable. You’ll be responsible for lighting the streetlights, calling time, and stopping crimes along that path. Let me see which one you have,” he said, shuffling papers. “Oh, look at that. You’ve been given District H. That’s Whitechapel. That’s good; you’re probably familiar with it.”

“Oh?”

“Albert Saltonstall hails from that district, you know. He seems to be doing rather well in the force, too, given his upbringing.”

“Would you mind if we set out? I’m eager to learn my beat,” Elson said, wondering if he’d spend his entire career being reminded of his background. For a brief moment, he’d hoped his job as an officer would allow him to transcend his status, but it was becoming clear that that wouldn’t be the case. No matter how far he climbed on the social ladder, his background would be affixed to him like a shadow, laid out for all to see and judge.

“Very well. Follow my lead, lad.”

They walked down Whitehall Place and along the Thames until they reached what Elson assumed was the beginning of his beat. As they walked, Jacobs explained the duties of a police officer. In addition to their responsibility to keep the lamps lit and the town informed of the time, they were to prevent petty crimes. When questioned about the more serious crimes, Jacobs gave a noncommittal shrug and said that it really depended on the circumstance. The last thing Peel

needed, he added, was for half of his new recruits to turn up dead or missing. For one thing, there wouldn't be anyone to fill out the copious forms that accompanied nearly every preventative action the police took. At least, Elson thought, there would be more accountability than the Bow Street Runners had had.

Jacobs said, "You're lucky to have this beat at this time; it means you don't have to climb the ladders to light the streetlights. We've already had someone fall off and break his ankle. Between you and me, his breath smelled a little of juniper."

"Disgraceful," Elson said, feeling that he should contribute to the conversation in some way but uncertain of what he should say. Jacobs didn't sound too broken up about the other officer's injury, but it never hurt to sound like you took the job seriously.

"Follow me. I'll walk you through the beat the first few times, and then it will be up to you to remember it. Don't worry; there will be other constables doing this beat at the same time as you. We might even run into some while we're walking."

"May I ask a question?"

"You already have, lad."

"Why do I have this rattle?"

"To call for help, of course. That will be especially important in this neighbourhood. If you're being mobbed by the criminal element, you want to alert the other officers that you need assistance."

"And they'll come to my aid?"

"Or they'll find a nice pub that's out of the way and hide there until your screams die down. It's hard to tell, really."

"Well, *that's* reassuring."

"Work hard, then. You'll have a chance at the desk jobs once you move up in the ranks."

You never hear of someone being mobbed by criminal pens.”

“I’ll keep that in mind, sir.”

They proceeded through the neighbourhood, stopping every so often to peer down narrow streets. Jacobs gave them only the most cursory of glances, possibly expecting the criminal element to move at a pace more fitting for molasses. Elson half-hoped that he would get to see Jacobs chase after a criminal with enough sense to run.

“Oh, time to ring the hour,” Jacobs said, checking his pocket watch as he paused outside of a tenement. He took a deep breath and, shaking his rattle furiously, called, “Ten o’clock!”

Someone in one of the higher levels of the tenement responded, “Bugger off, you blasted fool! Some decent people are trying to sleep!”

“There’s nothing like the appreciation of the masses for a job well done,” Jacobs said with a smile.

They walked along a few more feet before they were approached by a young woman. Her clothes were tattered and old, but still held some remnants of finery about them. In between gasps she said, “Please, sirs. I’ve been robbed. A man... approached me in an alley and demanded I give him my purse.”

Jacobs’s friendly smile took on a malicious glint. “Oh? And what were you doing out at this time of night without a chaperone, miss?”

Her face, already flushed from the cold, grew redder. “I don’t have a chaperone, sir.”

“And you thought it safe to wander the streets by yourself at this time of night?”

Elson took a small step back from Jacobs and the woman, hoping to avoid being dragged into the conversation.

The woman's voice quavered and broke as she said, "I apologise for bothering you, sirs. I won't make that mistake again."

She turned on her heel and hurried away from them. Elson tried to ignore the tiny voice telling him that he should have used his new position to help an unfortunate. After all, that could have easily been Violet. But really, there was no point in making enemies on his first night on the job. It was best to simply keep his head down and do what everyone else did.

Jacobs seemed to notice his internal struggle and said, "Don't fret, lad. She shouldn't have been out by herself this late. She's no-one to blame but herself. Probably a woman of the town, too, if you want my opinion."

Elson tried to smile gratefully at Jacobs, but he got the feeling that his facial muscles weren't doing quite what they were supposed to. What gave Jacobs the right to decide who was worthy of aid? It was well enough for him; his wife got to stay in a warm home with plenty of food. He'd never seen a child, too young to work but too desperate not to, get caught in a machine while the foreman looked on in apathy. Elson sighed and shook his head.

Despite the best attempts of the police to light up the streets, Whitechapel gave pedestrians a sensation of being in constant darkness. The streetlights were coated in a film of soot carried from the factories via wind, and the pervasive air of desolation that emanated from the dilapidated and overcrowded buildings only added to gloom. As Elson and Jacobs walked down Dorset Street, the district grew more caliginous until it seemed that no amount of light could ever illuminate the area. Every so often Jacobs would gaze upon a vagrant and make a disgusted noise between a bark of laughter and a grunt. Elson kept his eyes glued to the cobblestone ground.

By the end of his shift, the sun had begun rising into the sky, and Elson's feet ached in ways he hadn't previously thought possible. He had never been quite so aware of the bones and muscles in his toes until he'd used them to walk the same path for hours on end. The ache seemed to grow when he remembered that he would be walking the same route the next night. Still, it was already a better job than working in the factory.

After the deepest sleep he'd had in some time, he woke to realise that he'd slept away most of the daylight. He put on his uniform and left the house.

The streetlights were being slowly and meticulously lit by a man in the same uniform as him. He straightened his coat and approached his fellow officer.

"Hello," he said.

"Damn!" the officer said, wobbling and clutching onto the streetlight. In his haste to keep from falling off the ladder, he dropped the matchbook he'd been using to ignite the gas.

Elson picked it up and stood on his tiptoes to hand it to the man. He said, "Sorry about that. I didn't realise I'd give you such a fright. I'm Constable Owlsley."

"Constable Saltonstall," the officer said, leaning slightly to take the matchbook from Elson's hand.

"I've heard of you," Elson said before he could stop himself. "I patrol Whitechapel; I heard you come from there."

"News travels quickly, doesn't it?" Saltonstall said as he descended from the ladder. "Those officers gossip worse than fishwives. It was a pleasure to meet you, Constable Owlsley. Be glad you're not on lamp-lighting duty; it might be the worst thing ever invented."

That said, Saltonstall took the ladder under his arm and staggered down the street to the next light. Elson shrugged and walked after him.

“I’m like you,” he said.

“I assumed as much, since you just left a house on this street.”

“I didn’t know you saw that. You’re rather good at police work, aren’t you?”

“Bit early to tell, really.”

“Well, you’ve not fallen off the ladder and broken your ankle, so that has to count for something.”

Saltonstall chuckled. “Not for lack of trying on your part. I’m finished for the night after this street. Would you care to stop by a pub? Unless your shift starts soon, that is.”

“Oh, no. I won’t start my patrol until midnight. The uniform is just warmer than my other clothes.”

“Great. I know just the place.”

After Saltonstall dropped off the ladder at the police house, they walked to a small public house situated between a two competing haberdasheries. Rumour had it that the proprietors of the shops frequently got drunk together, excursions that would end in creative threats involving hat pins. The publican never bothered to ban either of them from the premises, stating that he got twice as many customers when the haberdashers drank together.

Considering both of the haberdasheries were closed and the public house was crammed with people, it seemed that the rumours were true.

“I’ll handle the first round,” Saltonstall said, walking up to the counter.

Elson scanned the room for an empty table, preferably one with all its legs and enough chairs for the both of them. He spotted one and walked to it with more haste than was proper.

“Did you just join the constabulary, then?” Saltonstall said as he deposited the mugs of beer on the table and sat. “I don’t recall seeing you when we marched through the streets last week.”

“I joined recently, yes,” Elson said, sipping his beer. He’d heard some beers described as being “full-bodied”; this one would have been described as an entire graveyard.

“Well, welcome to the force. How are you liking it so far?”

Elson shrugged and took a huge gulp of his beer. “It’s certainly better than my old job.”

“You’ll want to pace yourself, Owlsley.”

“I have a few hours before I work,” Elson said, trying not to sound or feel like a petulant child. It seemed the primary job of his fellow officers was to inform him that everything he did was wrong.

Saltonstall grew grim. “That might have been true if you were from better stock, I’ll grant. But we’re not like them. Nobody believes in us, and it’s our duty to prove them wrong.”

“That’s hardly fair,” Elson said. He was vaguely aware of a growing commotion behind him.

“And where in your life have you experienced fairness, Owlsley? Until stalls and entertainers fill the streets constantly, we won’t be seeing ‘fair’ anytime soon.”

“Your buttons have more chips in them than a boxer’s teeth!” a man behind Elson bellowed.

“The only sharp thing in your shop is the top of your head!”

In mere seconds, the commotion became a clamour, complete with the sounds of chairs being thrown and glass breaking.

Elson attempted to shrink down upon himself and stared at his beer until Saltonstall said, “Get up. We have to intervene.”

“But we’re not on duty right now. We have no authority, and we’d only have to let them go if we tried to bring them in. This isn’t even either of our districts.”

“At the very least we can try to talk them down. Then we’ll have made some lucky officer’s night much easier.”

Saltonstall gestured for Elson to stand and follow him. Elson, bereft of choices that would not alienate a potential ally, obeyed.

“Gentlemen, we have to request that you cease antagonising one another. You’re disturbing the peace,” Saltonstall said.

Behind him, Elson nodded and tried to look authoritative. The haberdashers were burlier than he’d expected. How big did one have to be to sell sewing supplies? Even with his truncheon and their intoxicated state, Elson doubted he could best one of them in a fight.

“Really?” one of the haberdashers said. “And what authority do you have to tell us what to do?”

“We are constables of the London Metropolitan Police Force, and we must insist that you stop your aggressive actions immediately.”

“How much will it cost for you to ignore this?” the other haberdasher said, reaching for his coin purse.

Saltonstall’s voice sounded slightly stiff as he said, “Sir, you must be mistaken. The Metropolitan Police Force does not take bribes..”

“Right. Does five pounds sound fair?”

Saltonstall looked both ways and said, “Make it six, and we’ll call it a night.”
The man handed him the money and returned to his drink.

Elson and Saltonstall returned to their table, and the haberdashers resumed their argument.

“Why did you take this job, Owlsley?”

Elson paused with his mug halfway to his mouth. After a moment's internal debate, he decided to be honest. "It paid better than my factory work, and I thought I could improve my lot this way."

Saltonstall said, "We're less likely to get our hands torn off, too."

"So true." Elson glanced at the pile of coins in Saltonstall's hands. "Won't you get in trouble for that?"

"Who's going to find out? And if they did find out, who would blame me? Even if the pay's better than factory work, it's not enough to support my family. Those rules were made for men who don't worry about getting their next meal."

"You have a point," Elson said.

Saltonstall handed him a pound. "Consider this payment for your silence."

That said, he stalked out of the building, leaving Elson alone with two half-full mugs of beer. Elson shrugged and got to work on them.

He'd finished his mug of beer when someone walked over and tapped him on the shoulder. He turned and found himself face to face with Violet.

"Hello, Miss Violet," he said. "What brings you here?"

She sat in Saltonstall's chair and took a sip from his abandoned mug of beer. "I heard something interesting the other day."

"What was that, pray tell?"

"A friend of an acquaintance tried to get help from the police last night. She'd been robbed, and she wanted them to help her retrieve her belongings."

Elson found his gaze drawn to the scuffed wooden table. "Is that so?"

"And you know what she told me? She said the senior officer mocked her, and a man

who looked like you stood by in silence.”

Elson felt his face flush. “That may have happened.”

“And here I thought that you would use your station to help others. At least you fit in with the rest of the bastards on the force,” Violet said before taking another swig of beer.

“I wanted to help,” he said to a spot on the wall just above Violet’s head. “But Jacobs made some good points. I don’t mean to insult your friend, but we had no evidence that she was an innocent party in the robbery. Her reasons for being out at night could have been distasteful. She didn’t even have a chaperone.”

“In case you hadn’t noticed, Elson, I don’t have a chaperone. Does that mean I deserve to get robbed?”

“That wasn’t what I meant. I—”

“I’m sure it wasn’t. I see you’re in uniform. Are you ready for another exciting night of standing by while innocent people get hurt?”

Elson stood. “Funnily enough, it’s almost time for me to do that. I thought I would mock someone as they were stabbed to death. I’ll see you when I get home.”

“Perhaps.”

He left the public house, carefully avoiding the haberdashers. Violet’s words echoed through his head as he walked to the police house. By the time he arrived, it felt like there was no space for thoughts of his own. At the time, it seemed like his actions were sensible. Why would he willingly make more trouble for himself if he could avoid it? But after his interaction with Violet, it seemed like inviting trouble was the moral action.

“Ah, Owlsley. Nice and early,” Jacobs said as Elson scribbled his name on the roster. “Stand by while we wait for Burrows to relieve my post. He should have been here five minutes ago.”

At that moment, a sergeant stumbled into the building. He smelled so strongly of beer that Elson would not have had a hard time believing the man had been bathing in it.

“Ah, there you are,” Jacobs said, apparently oblivious to the man’s stench. “It should be an easy night for you. The place is deader than my nan.”

Burrows nodded and walked to the desk, stumbling into every obstacle on the way.

“Well, that’s taken care of,” Jacobs said, clapping Elson on the shoulder. “Ready for another exciting night of patrolling?”

Elson nodded, wondering what trouble he’d find this time. Trouble, it seemed, was more prevalent than fresh air in Whitechapel.

“That’s the spirit. I’ll be covering Constable Llewellyn’s beat tonight, so you’ll be on your own. I trust that won’t be a problem.”

Elson shook his head. The night grew bleaker with each word out of Jacobs’s mouth. Rather than improve his lot in life, all he’d managed to do was create a new series of circumstances where everyone was angry with him and there were no right answers.

“Very good. I’ll try to check up on you periodically,” Jacobs said as they proceeded to Whitechapel. He nodded to Elson when they arrived at the edge of District H and walked in the opposite direction.

Elson sighed and began walking his beat. Jacobs’s comment on getting mobbed by criminals joined the din of Violet’s words in his mind. Surely he wouldn’t have to worry about

that, though. Jacobs had said it was a quiet night. Regardless, he clutched his truncheon a little more fiercely than he would have on a different night.

The winter air stung his face, and the thick clouds overhead threatened the town with snow. As if this district needed more misery heaped upon it. Just as Elson thought that, large flakes began falling from the clouds. He found himself brushing snow from his hat brim every few steps, and the ground had become treacherously slippery. Perhaps, he later reflected, he should have stopped before trying to dust off his hat, because then he wouldn't have stepped on a well-hidden patch of ice and gone sliding into an alley.

By the time he'd managed to stop his slide through a combination of grabbing everything in reach and sheer dumb luck, his hands were covered in scratches and a knot was forming on the back of his head. He stood slowly, terrified that a wrong move would continue his horizontal travel through Whitechapel. His hat had fallen off somewhere near the beginning of his trip. He was about to retrieve it when he noticed a large object slumped against one of the buildings.

The snow had done a stellar job of obscuring its identity, but something managed to poke out through the covering. Upon closer inspection, Elson realised that the protrusions were fingers. They were blue-grey from the cold and withered, but unmistakably fingers. He gave a small scream and jumped back, losing his footing and falling onto the ground once more. His heart raced, and his stomach roiled at his discovery. His breaths shortened with each passing second, and the tremble in his hands couldn't be blamed on the cold.

When he'd managed to stand once more, he took a deep breath and said, "Relax, Elson. He might be asleep. In the cold. And unaware that snow is piling up on him. It could happen. Stranger things have definitely happened here. We'll simply wake him up and be on our way."

He inched towards the man and began shaking him, calling for him to wake up and get out of the cold. The snow stung his already cold and injured fingers. When the person did not wake from their sleep, Elson tucked his hand into his sleeve and began brushing the snow away from the head in an attempt to discern the person's identity.

When the snow was cleared, he was no closer to identifying the man. He looked like any number of the men in Whitechapel, complete with that faint-yet-permanent dusting of soot that came with living and working so close to the factories.

Elson brushed the rest of the snow away from the body, shuddering as he did so. He'd hoped to avoid corpses for the rest of his life, considering he already saw enough people close to death in the factory. Still, he owed it to the man to investigate.

A cursory inspection of the body revealed nothing out of the ordinary. Elson wanted nothing more than to pretend he hadn't seen this, to leave the mess for someone else to clean up, but he couldn't bring himself to do so. Bile rose in Elson's throat as he manipulated the body to inspect the corpse's palms. There were deep, thin cuts along the palm of his hand and his fingers. Torn between curiosity and revulsion, Elson continued to check for other signs of foul play. He dusted off snow from the man's torso and gagged at what he saw.

Long, deep gashes ran down his chest and stomach, and in some places it looked as though he'd nearly been cut in half. Some of his internal organs had spilled out from the cuts on his torso, staining the snow around them a sickening red. Unearthing the body had released an overpowering stench of blood, and it was all Elson could do to refrain from getting sick in the alley.

When some of the shock had worn off, he noticed a black lump poking out of the snow next to the body and fished it out.

The contents of the wallet were nothing surprising: a few pence, a small wooden cross that looked like it might have once been on a chain, and several clumps of lint. On closer inspection, however, Elson noticed that someone had carefully written their name, William Pole, on a piece of white cotton sewn to the inside of the wallet. Still reeling from his discovery of the man's wounds, Elson stood and ran for help.

His dash to find Jacobs was hindered by the fact that every few feet he found himself losing his balance and sliding in every direction except for the one in which he was attempting to travel. By the time he found Jacobs, he was covered in scrapes, and he was certain that he'd managed to rip his new coat.

"What are you doing off of your beat? And why are you out of breath?" Jacob said. A cloud of worry passed over his face as he peered over Elson's shoulder. "You aren't being chased by anyone, are you?"

Elson shook his head, still gasping for air. The smoke and cold air stung his throat, causing him to sputter and consequently gasp even more. When he finally regained enough breath to speak, he said, "I found a corpse in an alley. Thought I should tell you. Think he was murdered."

"Murdered? Zounds, lad, take me to him."

They walked to the alley where Elson had found William's body, Elson limping as though he'd been born without knees. When they reached William, he was covered in snow once again. Elson pulled his hand back into his sleeve and began brushing the snow away. He gestured to the gashes along William's arms and torso.

"See?" he said. "That couldn't have been an accident."

Jacobs made a noncommittal sound. "With those clothes, I wouldn't be surprised if he got himself killed committing some crime. Whoever killed him probably did the world a favour. We can take him into the station, but I doubt anything would come of an investigation. At best, we can find out if his relatives have enough money for a proper grave."

"But sir," Elson said. "It looked like he was attacked. He might not have been involved in any criminal activities."

"That you knew of. Trust me, lad. Nobody in this district is an innocent victim. The only way to rid Whitechapel of crime would be to take a torch to it." He clapped a hand on Elson's shoulder. "Come along. We'll alert Burrows to the body, and someone will be out to get it off the streets."

Elson nodded, retrieved his hat, and followed Jacobs back to the police house. Jacobs's words stung almost as badly as the scrapes on his hands. How dare he assume everyone in a given area was a criminal? He knew he should have been accustomed to statements like that, but the knowledge that his superior had all but said he considered Elson a criminal exhausted and infuriated him. The sheer injustice of the statement made Elson want to both rail at the world and lie down forever with the knowledge that nothing he did would change Jacobs's opinion.

When they arrived, Burrows was slumped on the desk. A large puddle of drool had formed around his face, soaking the report he'd been writing.

"Burrows," Jacobs said, slamming his hands on the desk. Burrows sat up quickly, overbalancing, and toppling both himself and the chair. He somewhat resembled a large and beer-soaked turtle. "Hnuh?"

"We have a report to fill out. Owlsley here found a body in district H."

“Oh, is that all?” He shuffled around some papers, sending several flying onto the floor. He handed one to Elson. “Just write your report on this. I’ll have it filed, and we’ll send someone out to pick up the corpse.”

Elson took the form and a pen from the front desk. In a hand that had obviously once had decent penmanship before lack of use and the biting cold took a toll on that skill, he scribbled a detailed account of how he’d come to find William Pole. Once he was satisfied with what he’d wrote, he signed his name at the bottom and handed it back to Burrows.

“What’s this?” Burrows asked, drool still hanging from his thin lips.

“It’s the report you asked me to fill out. About the corpse in the Whitechapel alley.”

“Oh, right. I’ll have someone collect that. You just carry on with your patrol, then, Constable.”

“Right, sir,” Elson said as Jacobs gestured for him to walk out of the police house. Once they were outside, he said, “Are you certain we should leave this in his hands? The man was clearly pissed.”

“You fret too much, Constable. Burrows is a capable man, and I’m certain this case will get the attention it deserves under his care,” Jacobs said.

Elson spent the rest of his patrol in a haze of automated motion. He was vaguely aware of the fact that he was moving, and every so often he’d move his hands in a way that irritated his new cuts, but his brain registered these facts only as minor details. Every time he glanced at an alley, he wondered what would happen to William. Surely someone would see his report and investigate the situation that led to William’s death. The police couldn’t brush it under the rug simply because he was from Whitechapel, could they?

Anxiety wrapped its hands around Elson’s heart and squeezed as he thought more on

Jacobs's treatment of people from his social rank. He'd ignored that woman's pleas for help, but that was understandable. For all they knew, she could have lost her purse while committing a crime. But Jacobs had no reason to suspect William of being a criminal, so he should have been more amenable to starting an investigation. Despite his fervent desire to have faith in the new police, he couldn't help but doubt their pledge to help all the citizens of Britain.

By the time he'd finished his shift, the entire situation felt like a loop. Images of him endlessly trying to convince the other officers to look into the murder flashed through his mind, adding the chill of despair to the anxiety already lodged in his chest. Perhaps it would be best to simply wait and see what would happen. He was being entirely too pessimistic about the situation. Somebody would take William's murder seriously, and then the justice he deserved would be granted to him. All Elson needed was a little more patience and faith in the new legal system.

Morning and day flitted by as Elson slumbered. His dreams were interrupted every few hours by the appearance of William's corpse and that *thing* he'd seen, and when he woke up at six o'clock, he felt more exhausted than he had before he'd gone to bed. He made himself a small meal out of the cheese and bread he'd bought with his wages and thought of ways to pass the time until his patrol began.

He needed to talk to Violet. Perhaps she could give him advice on what to do about the body, considering her suggestion had put him in this situation. He reflected on their last conversation and sighed. All things considered, it would be a miracle if she'd tell him the cost of apples. He'd learned from experience that she could hold a grudge better than a miser could hold onto money. He ran through his mental list of friends and found it depressingly spare. He'd interacted with some of his co-workers in the factory, but the foreman's rules in regards to

speaking while working had made it difficult to form any strong bonds without the risk of becoming unemployed. He hadn't the scarcest idea of where to find his old co-workers outside of the factory, anyway. As tempting as it was to keep the murder to himself, particularly if it meant avoiding interaction with anybody who was irritated with him, the death threatened to grind his mind into a fine dust.

He put on his uniform, fighting the nausea the memories of the previous night brought. With any luck, Violet would still be working at her usual location. She didn't typically return to their home until late in the evening, when the chances of anyone purchasing an apple were slim enough to be outweighed by the likelihood of being accosted.

He saw her at a nearby corner and sighed with relief. Surely she'd forget about their argument in light of what had happened. He strolled up to her, attempting to radiate an air of armistice.

She looked over and raised an eyebrow. "Do you know what one of your fellow officers did?"

"I'm sure you'll tell me," he said, immediately cursing himself for his flippant tone. That was hardly the way to win her back to his side.

"He accused me of selling other services," Violet said. "He said I was violating the law, and refused to listen to me. It's a miracle he didn't arrest me."

"William Pole is dead," Elson said, unable to hold the words back any longer.

Violet blinked at him.

He rubbed his hands over his face. "I didn't mean to interrupt, and I'm very sorry for what happened. But someone has been murdered."

"How do you know?"

“I... I found his body. He’d been... it was horrible, Violet. There was no way it was an accident. And the officer I told, he said the man was probably involved in some crime.”

“Ah, now he sees the truth about the police,” Violet said, hugging her basket of apples to her chest. Elson noticed how her sharp eyes never stayed focused on anything for more than a few seconds, and how she tensed slightly whenever someone in dark blue walked by.

“What do I do?”

“Well, what can you do?”

“I thought I’d wait and see if anyone opened an investigation before I did anything drastic.”

“‘Drastic’, like looking into the death of someone,” she said with a raised eyebrow.

“It’s more complicated than that,” Elson said to the heavy grey clouds overhead. “I could lose my job for getting involved in something they want to ignore. I can’t let that happen.”

“But you can’t let a death go uninvestigated, can you?”

“Well, of course not.”

“Well, I’m sure your superiors are leaping at the chance to investigate the murder of one of us,” Violet said with a snort.

“I’ll check to see if anyone’s started investigating it. We have to have faith in the new police, Violet.”

“Tell me that after you’ve been harassed by them.”

“Goodbye, Violet,” Elson said. He had a terrible feeling that a continued conversation would only lead to another argument.

As he walked away from her, the heavy clouds burst open with a torrent of snow, temporarily making the city look clean. This was almost immediately ruined by the smoke and

coal dust, but Elson cherished the brief illusion. The streetlights were little more than hazy dots of yellow in the whirlwind of white. At least, Elson thought, the snow hadn't been packed down to the point where it was virtually impossible to walk on it without slipping and twisting an ankle.

He walked to the police house, taking care not to look down any alleys on the way. When he finally arrived at the police house, the snow had accumulated to the point where he found himself forced to choose between shuffling through it or lifting his legs to an absurd height with each step. After being laughed at by an urchin for taking the second choice, he decided to stick with shuffling.

"You're early," Jacobs said as Elson walked to the front desk.

"Er, I was wondering if anybody had begun looking into the murder of William Pole," Elson said, acutely aware of how the snow on his trousers had begun to melt onto the wooden floor.

"Who?"

"William Pole. The corpse I found last night. I was wondering if—"

"Yes, lad, I heard you the first time."

Elson stood there, waiting for Jacobs to continue speaking. Finally, Jacobs said, "We were unable to open a case, I'm afraid. The paperwork for it was misplaced."

"Misplaced?"

"That means we can't find it, lad."

"How did it get misplaced?"

Jacobs shrugged. "Bureaucracy has its failings, I'm afraid. With all the paperwork we're responsible for, something was bound to get lost in the shuffle."

“Of course,” Elson said through tightly constricted vocal cords. “Well, thank you for keeping me informed. Was Mr Pole already buried?”

“Just this morning. Didn’t need it taking up valuable space, after all. We’re crowded enough as it is.” Jacobs scribbled something on one of the many sheets of paper that covered the desk like a literary tablecloth. “It’s a good thing you stopped by early. We’ve changed your beat. You’ll still be in district H, of course. You’ll be taking the route parallel to your typical one. Oh, and try not to wind up in any alleys this time. It’s lucky you only found a corpse last time, considering the neighbourhood.”

“Yes, sir,” Elson said in the completely emotionless tone he’d perfected in his years as a factory worker.

The snow had only grown in strength during Elson’s time inside; it was all but impossible for him to see more than a foot in front of him. The chaotic flurry of precipitation matched the turbulence in his mind. There was no way to prove they’d deliberately lost the paperwork, but what were the odds that the one document needed to begin an investigation into a case that the other officers considered a waste of time would get misplaced? And of course they had already buried William. Why would they keep a corpse from a murder they refused to acknowledge?

“You were right, Violet,” Elson muttered as he waded through the snow. Beside him, the Thames River flowed, carrying chunks of ice and discarded items. Elson found himself mesmerized by the movement of the water and stopped to watch it, despite the smell. It was less pungent than it would be in the summer, but it was enough to make him reconsider his decision to marvel at the river. Wrinkling his nose, he continued his journey to Whitechapel.

The good thing about the weather, he thought, was that it would keep all but the truly desperate indoors. He'd been walking his beat for five minutes, and so far the only living being he'd seen was a pigeon. Just as he'd let out a sigh of relief that it would be a quiet night, a young boy walked up to him.

The boy wore what could generously be called a nightdress, though it more resembled a gunnysack with three holes cut in it. Due to the still-growing pile of snow on the ground, it was impossible to tell if he was wearing shoes. Elson hoped so, but he knew better than to expect it.

"Can I help you?" Elson said.

"Your missus, Violet, sent me. I'm an orphan," the boy said in a tone that made Elson wonder if he knew what "orphan" meant.

"I'm sorry."

"My mother is especially dead."

Elson stopped walking. All his available brain power was devoted to attempting to parse out how someone could be especially dead. After no logical answer came to him, he gave up. He said, "What are you doing out in this weather?"

"I was sent, I was. I've a job to do. You know, the kind of job that means I get paid," he said with a loud snuffle.

Elson fumbled in his pockets and produced a half-penny. "Here you go, er—"

"Ollie."

"There you go, Ollie." His mouth dropped open as an idea struck him. "Ollie, what's your job?"

"I was sent to tell you something about that dead man in the alley. I saw it happen, I did," Ollie said, holding his hand out expectantly.

Elson sighed and produced another half-penny. “Nobody likes an extortionist, Ollie.”

“Got to eat, gov.” Ollie scratched his nose and said, “I seen a man go into an alley after a shadow. The shadow looked... odd. It was almost like a person, but not. Didn’t see what happened next, though. There were screams, though, and I felt sort of strange.”

“That’s good. Strange? How so?”

Ollie coughed and held out his hand once again. Elson rolled his eyes and gave him another half-penny. He lied, “That’s all I have, I’m afraid.”

“Like exhausted and sad, but more than that. I thought I was going to lie down right there and sleep forever.”

“You saw the man go into an alley, felt strange, and then you left?”

“Yes, sir. I wasn’t about to stay there after he started screaming. I know what happens to people who do.” Ollie sucked in a breath and shivered. “I’m not going to get in trouble for this, am I? Only I have brothers and sisters, and one of ‘em can’t even walk yet. You can’t take me to jail.”

Elson squatted until his eyes were level with Ollie’s and smiled. “You’re not going to jail, Ollie. You’re helping the police with an official investigation. And if you keep helping, then I can promise that there will be more coin in it for you. I might even find some extra food if you’re especially helpful.”

“Do I get stripes on my clothes, too?” Ollie said, tugging on what passed for sleeves on his potato sack. “I bet I wouldn’t be able to move for shillings if I had stripes on my clothes.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Elson said. “Don’t tell any of the other officers what you’re doing. This is... a secret investigation.”

“Are you sure I won’t get in trouble for this, mister?”

“Of course not. I’m an officer, aren’t I? I know what we will or won’t get in trouble for. But if you tell the other officers, they might object to me paying you,” he said quickly, feeling a rush of pride at that fabricated detail. “You’ll be able to find me in this area every night. Keep me updated on anything you find.”

“You can count on me, mister,” Ollie said as he skipped off into the blizzard.

A penny and a half poorer and with tentative hope for his illicit investigation, Elson resumed his patrol. Ollie’s words rang through his head, eclipsed only by the panic that he hadn’t imagined that creature after all. It was real; it was out there. He could run into it at any time. Violet could run into it. And worse yet, he already knew the police would ignore either one of their deaths.

If he’d thought the storm was bad before, it had only grown in strength during his conversation with Ollie. It seemed as though he would be buried alive by the snow if he stayed in place for more than a second, but the accumulation on the ground made it all but impossible to move at more than a slow shuffle. When he stopped to ring the hour, the wind drowned out the noise of his rattle. Would anyone find out, he wondered, if he retreated back to the safety and relative warmth of his home? It was certainly a tempting idea, especially as the sensation in his hands went from prickles of cold to complete numbness. The only reason he hadn’t dropped his rattle was because he doubted his fingers could open without the aid of a roaring fire.

Still, he was risking enough by starting a small investigation without his supervisors’ knowledge. It wouldn’t do to have two strikes against him if they found out about his plans. Out of curiosity, he looked behind him. The trench he’d made in his trip down the street was already being filled in by the cloud’s outpouring of snow. It was going to be a long night.

When morning came and his shift ended, Elson didn't return home immediately. Instead, he walked to Violet's typical spot.

"How goes business?" he said, tucking his hands under his armpits.

"Oh, you know. Nobody wants a frozen apple, and police officers keep looking for excuses to arrest me. It's simply splendid." She stamped her feet and breathed on her hands.

"What brings you here? You're usually back home by this time."

"You were right."

She smiled. "You should say that again."

He snorted. "Fine, you were right. Are you happy now?"

"Mm, maybe say it one more time."

"I came here for a reason," he said without any real ire.

"Oh, pity. I thought you were going to make a habit of stopping by periodically to tell me I was right," she said with a chuckle. "I would not have objected to that, let me tell you."

"I'm sure you wouldn't." Elson brushed a strand of mud brown hair out of his face.

"I'm loathe to say this, but I did tell you." She sighed, releasing a large cloud of condensation into the air. "What will you do?"

"I still don't know what I can do. If I try to complain to their superiors, there's a decent chance they'll only ignore me. And that's being optimistic. In the worst case, I'll find myself begging for my job at the factory again," Elson said bitterly. The thought of fighting to work in the factory again after he'd found a chance to improve his life made him want to weep.

"Did you come here to complain, then?" Violet said. "I won't send you away if you did. I only want to know so that I can suggest a new location for our discussion. Complaints taste less bitter with beer."

“Actually, I came here to thank you. You sent Ollie to me, yes? He’s been very helpful.”

“I hope you were just as helpful to him,” Violet said.

“I paid him well for his information, even if I’m not sure he was telling the truth.”

“Oh? What did he say?”

Elson opened his mouth and paused. Upon reflection, Ollie had given him little information. He said, “You should watch for any sort of man-shaped creature. It might not be human, and it’s definitely associated with a strange malaise.”

She raised her eyebrows. “You jest.”

“I wish, but I have to trust this information. Please be careful, Violet. I had a hard enough time courting you; I don’t think I could do that for another woman.”

#

As the days past, news of more disappearances and deaths began to circulate in Elson’s group of friends. All the victims had been members of their social class, and they’d been out late at night when they met their end. While there’d always been the chance of dying while out at night, particularly in the colder months, the growing number of deaths was more than a little unsettling. Elson couldn’t help but wonder if they were connected to the death of William Pole. To make matters worse, the police had been silent on the topic. No matter how many citizens came forward demanding a response to the casualties, the officers responded with similar statements about looking into the deaths when they had the spare time. By the looks of it, they would always be too busy to investigate. After all, they were more likely to get accolades and bonuses if they helped a rich woman recover silver stolen by a maid who just wanted to help her family stay warm.

Whitechapel during the day was only marginally more pleasant than Elson's usual view of it. It was all but impossible to enjoy the change from the district at night when the majority of the people out during the day were on the street out of necessity. He would have given anything, he reflected, to take Jacobs there and ask how criminal the freezing, half-starved masses in the streets truly looked.

He approached a woman selling handkerchiefs and said, "Excuse me, miss. I'm Constable Elson Owsley. I'm investigating a death. I was wondering if you knew a man by the name of William Pole?"

The woman pursed her lips, sniffled, and shook her head. Just as Elson was about to leave, she pointed to a man standing on the street corner. Elson nodded his thanks and went to see him.

The man rather resembled a ferret who'd grown to abnormal size and had donned a grubby suit out of a sense of propriety. He even wrinkled his nose in a decidedly rodent-like manner when he saw Elson approach.

Elson donned his most charming smile and said, "Hello, good sir. I'm with the London Metropolitan Police Force—"

"Really? I could have sworn you were with the chimney sweeps," the man said, rolling his eyes.

"Ah. Anyway, I wondered if you knew anything about William Pole—"

"William? Aye, I know him." The man spat on the ground, his saliva solidifying before it hit the snow.

"Would you be willing to answer a few questions about him?" Elson could already feel the emptiness the investigation would cause in his wallet.

“This won’t get him in trouble, will it?” the man said, his eyes narrowing until they were but black dots in the creases of his face.

“I can promise that William is in no danger of running into trouble with the police. I simply wanted to know his character.”

“He’s a good man. Works hard, always pays his debts. I’ve never known him to drink gin, which is more than I can say of the women ‘round here.”

“And what company did he keep?”

““Did’?”

“I’m sorry to tell you this, but William Pole was murdered. I discovered his corpse, and I intend to launch an investigation into his death,” Elson said, straightening his back unconsciously.

The man’s chin wobbled before setting in a frown. “He was a good man, sir. Promise you’ll find the bastard what’s done it.”

“I swear it. But I’ll need your help to catch him.” *Or ‘it’*, he added silently. “Can you tell me who his acquaintances were?”

“He spent his free time—when he had it, mind you—with Nathaniel Howards and Victor Anderson down at the Crown and Lion. They’re there most nights. Just go to the table in the back left corner of the pub, and you’ll find them.”

“Thank you, sir. Your contributions will help bring the blackguard to justice. They might even prevent another death,” Elson said with a smile he didn’t feel.

“As long as we see that man hang for what he did, I’ll rest easy,” the man said as he turned and walked to a different street corner.

His attempts at garnering further information from the other people on the street proved only slightly more successful than his childhood quest to make a tunnel to the colonies. When the civilians weren't outright hostile towards him, they seemed to make it their mission to keep their sentences as terse and monosyllabic as possible. After thirty unsuccessful interrogations, he decided to postpone his investigation until a time when Anderson and Howards would probably be in the Crown and Lion.

He was about to turn and walk out of Whitechapel when someone behind him skidded on the ice and ran into his legs. He looked down to see Ollie lying in the snow.

“Are you all right?”

Ollie tentatively got to his feet, which Elson couldn't help but notice were completely bare. His own toes stung at the thought of being barefoot in the winter.

Ollie said, “I've had worse. I'm glad I found you when I did.”

“You have more information?”

“I'm sure I do, if only the cold wasn't muddling my memory something awful,” Ollie said with a pathetic snuffle.

“We could go somewhere warmer,” Elson said, unable to tear his dialogue away from the invisible script Ollie had created.

“I'm terribly hungry, too. I could faint from the stomach pain.”

“And I'll buy you something to eat. I know a pub that does decent gruel; that should warm you up.”

“Why can't the other policemen be like this?” Ollie said as he trotted alongside Elson.

“Perhaps they have the common sense not to talk to urchins.”

“It's a good thing you haven't got that, then, because I think I know something 'bout what killed that man,” Ollie said, his already strident voice made louder by pride.

The Crown and Lion was the equivalent of a lower class woman with delusions of joining society. The tables and chairs, despite the fact that most of the chairs at any given table only had three legs between them, could have been used as a substitute for mirrors, and the publican seemed slavishly devoted to cleaning the same glass in between pouring drinks for his patrons. While it was situated near a small grove of trees, the pleasant effect nature would have normally had was somewhat ruined by the fact that the tree nearest to the pub had a pitchfork sticking out of it.

As Elson and Ollie entered the pub and approached the publican, the dull roar of the chatter dimmed to a susurrus, and Elson was uncomfortably aware of the fact that he was being intently watched by a small crowd of people.

“A pint of beer, please, and a bowl of gruel for the lad,” he said, pulling out his wallet. He noticed it was emptier than he’d remembered, and gestured for Ollie to return his coins.

“Sorry, guv,” Ollie said, not sounding remotely apologetic.

The publican grunted something that almost sounded like a number. Elson tentatively placed coins on the bar until the publican nodded that he’d reached the correct amount.

Elson grabbed the beer and gruel before guiding Ollie to a table that looked like it might be capable of staying upright without the help of a small stack of books. It wobbled when he threatened to place his beer on its surface.

Ollie paid no heed to the table’s wobbling, which only grew worse as he shovelled gruel into his mouth with a ferocity that left the bowl completely clean in less than a minute.

“You were right,” he said with a belch. “That was good gruel. Could you find it in your heart to buy another helping for a poor child?”

“Why don’t you tell me what you found out first, and then we’ll see if it earns another bowl of gruel,” Elson replied.

“All right. So I was talking to Leggy Dave, and he felt the same sort of strangeness I did the night that man died. Only he actually went in the direction it seemed to come from to see what it was, and you’ll never believe what he saw,” Ollie said, the words flying out of his mouth like a flock of terrified pigeons.

“What did he see?”

“He said it was about as tall as a man, but it looked like no man he’d ever seen. It didn’t even have a proper face, he said. And it had *claws*,” Ollie said with horrified joy.

“That’s certainly... something,” Elson said. “And your friend, Leggy Dave—he doesn’t have a laudanum problem, does he?”

“Definitely not. None of us will touch that, even if our arm’s halfway off,” Ollie said with a deep frown. “Even if we wanted to, we’d have to decide not to eat for a year to buy enough to have a problem with it.”

“I was just making sure.” Elson stood and gently placed his hands on the table, causing it to teeter until it was almost horizontal. “You earned yourself another bowl of gruel, lad. You keep this up, and you might be able to hide your ribs soon enough.”

“Bet you’re glad you don’t have common sense now, aren’t you, mister?” Ollie said, his face breaking into a grin.

“I wouldn’t press my luck if I were you,” Elson said, though the warning lacked any strong emotion. He could all too easily imagine his child falling into this life, should anything happen to him or Violet. Even if nothing happened to them, there was still the horrifying

possibility that their child would have to beg on the streets while his parents earned their meager wages.

“If I didn’t press my luck, my brothers and sisters would still be hungry,” Ollie said as Elson handed him the second bowl of gruel.

After Ollie had finished eating, Elson elected to stay in the pub until it grew dark. By the time the sun had set, his beer was only half empty, and he found himself doubting the reliability of the man’s tip. Just as he was about to give up and loiter somewhere else, two men shuffled into the pub and headed for the table in the back left corner.

Elson grabbed his tankard of beer and approached them. While they had the hands and demeanour of physical labourers, they wore suits that were cut well enough to indicate that they had at least a little money to spare on finer things.

“Hello,” the blond man at the table said with a smile just shy of improper. “How can we help you?”

His companion, a stern man with black hair, rolled his eyes. “Questions like that are the reason we wound up in Lancashire with no winter clothes last year, Anderson.”

“It was for the greater good, Nathaniel,” Anderson argued.

“The greater good shouldn’t involve nearly losing my fingers.”

Elson watched the conversation with the feeling that he’d stepped into an ocean with the belief that it was a puddle. He cleared his throat. “I was, er, wondering if I could ask you about Mr William Pole. He was an acquaintance of yours, correct?”

The two men shared a glance. After five seconds of silence, Nathaniel said, “We knew him, yes.”

“It’s my duty to inform you that he has been murdered.”

“What?” Anderson said, growing pale. “You must be wrong. I saw him just last week; he was perfectly fine. Nobody would want to kill him. He had no enemies; ask anyone.”

“No enemies at all?” Elson said, furrowing his brow.

“None that we knew of,” Nathaniel said. “If anything, he prevented us from having enemies. Had the soul of one of those ambassadors, William.”

Elson frowned as he found himself forced to follow Ollie’s lead. “Do you know if he was involved in anything that we might consider occult? A reliable source has informed me that his murder might not have been entirely natural.”

“And next you’ll say that snow is cold,” Anderson said, voice choked with grief.

“He’s trying to help us,” Nathaniel said in a stage whisper.

Anderson sighed. “My apologies, sir. As far as I know, William stayed well away from anything of that sort. When would he have time to get into trouble? Do you know how much time we spend working in the factory?”

“Approximately twelve hours a day,” Elson said automatically. “More, depending on the factory you’re in.”

“I didn’t know Peel was hiring people like us,” Anderson muse.

Nathaniel turned to Elson. “What did you mean when you said his murder was unnatural?”

“A reliable witness,” Elson began, pausing as he considered the leap in logic it took to make someone named “Leggy Dave” sound reliable. “A reliable witness saw something that might be connected to your friend’s death. From his account, the alleged murderer was the furthest thing from human.”

“Well,” Anderson said with an expression that indicated he thought Elson had spent a bit too much time investigating in pubs, “I hope you catch it. William didn’t deserve to die. He was a better man than any of us could hope to be.”

“I will certainly do that,” Elson said. “Thank you for your time, sirs.”

As Elson turned and began to walk away, he kept his eyes glued to the polished floorboards, and consequently didn’t see the other man until he’d run into him. “Terribly sorry,” he said. “Oh, Saltonstall. It’s you.”

“Drinking before duty again?” Saltonstall said drily.

“Actually, I was interviewing some of the patrons for my investigation.”

“You’re already in charge of an investigation? At your rank?”

Elson scratched the back of his neck. “If I’m being honest, my investigation might not be sanctioned by our superiors.”

“Are you mad?” Saltonstall said with an expression that indicated that if he’d had a drink, he’d have spat it at that moment. “You could get sacked for that.”

“They’re ignoring murders because they happened to people like us,” Elson said. “I thought you might want to help. Think of how they’ll look at us when they find out we’ve solved a crime on our own.”

“It will probably be a mixture of pity, anger, and complete befuddlement.”

“Don’t you want to help our people?”

“I had a lovely encounter with a superior officer who explained that a different set of rules apply in those cases. As much as I’d love to help, I’m afraid that my hands are completely tied.”

“I understand,” Elson said in a small voice. “You’ll do very well as a policeman.”
“Thank you.”

As Elson left the pub, he felt an intense desire to return for another pint.

The walk to the police house was plagued by jolts of terror every time the shadows in his peripheral vision seemed to move. It seemed ridiculous to take Ollie’s information as fact, but the primitive corner of his mind, the part of him that startled whenever thunder crashed, insisted that it was better to be ridiculous than dead. He walked faster than normal to get to the station. If he studied his emotions carefully, though, he was certain he could feel a growing malaise as he walked. He wished he could tell whether it was a product of the thing that stalked the streets or simply a reaction to his talk with Saltonstall.

“Ah, Owlsley. I hope you haven’t found another corpse,” Jacobs said with a laugh.

“No, sir. Am I taking the beat I had last night?”

“You’ll be on it for the foreseeable future. Now that you’re by yourself, we don’t need you getting into trouble with corpses again.”

His patrol that night was at best, uneventful and at worst, mind-numbingly boring. While it was a different sort of boredom than the bone-aching tedium of factory work, Elson nonetheless found himself paying less and less attention to his surroundings. At least the paranoia from earlier had faded away.

“Elson!”

He looked behind him and saw Violet approaching him.

“It’s not safe for you out here,” he said.

“I could say the same thing. You won’t believe what I saw,” she replied, rubbing her bare arms as the wind blew snow at her.

“Was it the creature?”

She nodded. "I didn't get a good look, but I felt odd when I was near it. And not just scared."

"Were you tired and sad?"

"Yes."

"At any rate, the streets aren't safe for you right now. You should go home and wait until daylight."

"Because you'll be so much safer than I will," she said with a frown.

"I... have a truncheon."

"Well, now I feel better. You might get mauled to death by some mysterious creature, but at least you'll smack it with a piece of wood a few times before you're killed."

"I can't leave my beat," Elson said. "This creature is harming innocent people, people like us. You could be next. Please, go back home until I've dealt with this."

"I'm not leaving you, Elson Owlsley."

Elson sighed. "Do what you want. You always did, anyway. But don't come back to haunt me if you get mauled to death."

Slowly, so that at first it seemed little more than the occasional formless sadness, a sense of malaise began to worm its way into Elson's heart. It grew stronger and more painful with each passing second. Through the fog of exhaustion and sadness, Elson knew he should run. His heart screamed that he should flee the area, his beat be buggered, but his legs felt leaden.

Violet muttered some distinctly unladylike words.

"Run, Violet!"

“Not without you,” Violet said, tugging on his wrist. “Come on, now’s no time to be a hero. Don’t you need a plan for this sort of thing, at the very least?”

Elson hesitated, but found himself running with Violet. Now that he’d made his legs move, he never wanted to stop running. It was only when he moved that the terror and sadness abated. Whenever his legs began to ache, he imagined the creature. Ollie had mentioned claws, hadn’t he? It was all too easy to imagine them rending his skin like old newspaper. Did he dare look back? They only stopped when they’d reached the river where the sound of rushing water drowned out any noise the creature might have been making.

Once he was free of the malaise, it was all too tempting to pretend it hadn’t happened. More than anything, he wanted a logical explanation for the creature and its effect on him, but he knew none would be forthcoming. The idea of going for help died as soon as it appeared in his mind. What credibility did someone like him have? They’d barely listened when he’d found William Pole; there was no chance of them believing him if he went into the police house with stories about a monster in Whitechapel. He exhaled shakily as he realised that he would have to handle this on his own.

“I know what you’re about to say, and I’m going with you,” Violet said, squeezing his hand.

They marched through the snow back to the beginning of Elson’s beat, steeling themselves for even a hint of malaise. Though neither of them said it, there was a shared resignation that should they come face to face with the creature, the chances of them escaping unscathed were so slim that even the most adventuresome better would refrain from placing money on them.

The walk to Elson's assigned area was blessedly free of malaise, which only seemed to make it worse. Rather than being able to accept that they were in the presence of a monster and figure out a solution, Elson and Violet found themselves jumping at every small noise and double-checking each shadow in case it had moved slightly. By the time they stopped in an alleyway, Elson thought they were as likely to die of their self-induced panic as they were at the monster's hands. Just as Elson was beginning to breathe normally, he felt it.

At first it was a slow, creeping sadness that made his bones ache and his eyes sting with unshed tears. It then grew to an all-consuming exhaustion. Before he was aware of what was happening, he had slumped to the ground. The snow prickled his cheeks, but the sensation was dulled by the immitigable exhaustion and sorrow that engulfed his mind. He'd always wondered if it was truly possible to die of sorrow; now he believed it. To his right, he saw that Violet had also fallen to the ground.

With the dregs of his remaining strength, Elson looked up. The monster stood above him. It didn't seem to have been born so much as created, cobbled together from half-remembered nightmares and the childhood urge to run away from the darkness at the bottom of a flight of stairs. Saying it had flesh would be a gross understatement, lumps of red-black flesh protruded from its body, and, as Ollie had said, it had no face to speak of. At the end of the long, sinewy appendages that could tentatively be called arms were hooked talons as long as Elson's forearm. At its current distance from him, the smell of rotten meat was overpowering. Elson's small meal of bread and cheese fought its way up from his stomach, and bile filled his throat. If he'd had the energy, he would have screamed. Instead, he found himself incapable of so much as opening his mouth.

As Elson closed his eyes and waited for the inevitable end, he could have sworn he heard someone speak. The strange part, he realized, was that their accent made them more suited for hosting a salon than walking through Whitechapel at night.

It said, "They're all the same, you know. That lot will never be anything more than thieves and beggars."

Another voice with a similar accent added, "They're the reason we have a problem with crime here. It's in their nature to steal and murder. Peel's embarked on a fool's errand; there's no way to change people like them."

A third voice chimed in, "If he wanted to do any lasting good, he'd round them up and put them in prison before they're caught in the act. Their nature should be evidence enough, in my opinion."

"Surely they aren't criminal by nature. I employed one as a servant, you know, and she never committed any crimes. But I'll be the first to admit that she was the laziest thing I've ever known. That's the problem. They could better themselves if they weren't so lazy."

"But would you want them in society? They'd be a complete embarrassment. No, it's much better for all of us if they stay in their place. No good can come of them playing at joining their betters."

"They could all disappear, and society would be better for it."

"No," Violet said weakly. "None of that is true."

"What?" Elson said, though his mouth seemed to lag behind his already sluggish brain.

"I said," she repeated with more strength, "None of that is true."

It might have been Elson's imagination, but the voices, which had continued speaking while Violet was talking, seemed to grow weaker.

“Keep talking,” Elson said. “I think it’s working.”

“We aren’t criminal by nature,” Violet said. “We’re just as capable of good as the next person, and they simply refuse to see it.”

“Most of us work harder than any of them will ever know,” Elson said.

“We don’t need to better ourselves,” Violet said. “We only need to better our living situation.”

The voices, which had once monopolized Elson’s ears and mind, were fading to a low hum in the background. Elson looked up; the monster appeared to be reeling from invisible blows.

“Our lives matter,” Violet said, raising her voice. “We matter. One day we’ll make them see that.”

The monster, which had been swaying more and more dramatically, screeched and began to melt. Elson and Violet scrambled to their feet, desperate to avoid touching the creature’s remains as it dribbled onto the snow. Several seconds later, all that remained of the creature was a red-black stain on the snow, a lingering scent of offal, and two sets of six razor-sharp talons.

“We did it,” Violet said, her voice tinged with disbelief. “We survived. What was that thing?”

“I think it came from what people think of us,” Elson said.

“Will it come back?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Let’s go somewhere warm. I think I’ve been put off the outdoors for a year.”

As they walked to a public house, Elson reflected on the fact that the police were just as culpable as the upper class in the creation of the monster. Despite their claim of accepting recruits regardless of social status, every interaction he’d had with his fellow officers had only

enforced the existing prejudices against Elson and people in his situation. While it could have been a force for change, the police were already rooted in the prejudices that only served to solidify the gaps between the social classes. He knew it would be difficult, but Elson vowed that he would change this. It was his duty.

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