
IN THE FOG

Dr Seward's Diary (kept in phonograph)

17 SEPTEMBER.

Last night's delivery was easier than the others. Much easier than last week's. Perhaps, with practice and patience, everything becomes easier. If never easy. Never... easy.

I am sorry: it is difficult to maintain an orderly mind and this marvellous apparatus is unforgiving. I cannot ink over hasty words or tear loose a spoiled page. The cylinder revolves, the needle etches, and my ramblings are graven for all time in merciless wax. Marvellous apparatuses, like miracle cures, are beset with unpredictable side-effects. In the twentieth century, new means of setting down human thought may precipitate an avalanche of worthless digression. *Brevi esse laboro*, as Horace would have it. I know how to present a case history. This will be of interest to posterity. For now, I work *in camera* and secrete the cylinders with what remain of my earlier accounts. As the situation stands, my life and liberty would be endangered were these journals exposed

to the public ear. One day, I should wish my motives and methods made known and clear.

Very well.

The subject: female, apparently in her twenties. Recently dead, I should say. Profession: obvious. Location: Chicksand Street. The Brick Lane end, opposite Flower & Dean Street. Time: shortly after five *ante meridiem*.

I had been wandering for upwards of an hour in fog as thick as spoiled milk. Fog is best for my night-work. The less one can see of what the city has become in this year, the better. Like many, I've taken to sleeping by day, working by night. Mostly, I doze; it seems years since the bliss of actual sleep. Hours of darkness are the hours of activity now. Of course, here in Whitechapel things were never much different.

There's one of those cursed blue plaques in Chicksand Street; at 197, one of the Count's bolt-holes. Here lay six of the earth-boxes to which he and Van Helsing attached such superstitious and, as it eventuated, entirely unwarranted importance. Lord Godalming was supposed to destroy them; but, as in so much else, my noble friend proved not equal to the task. I was under the plaque, unable to discern its wording, pondering our failures, when the dead girl solicited my attention.

'Mister...' she called. '*Missssster...*'

As I turned, she settled feathers away from her throat. Her neck and bosom showed mist-white. A living woman would have shook with the cold. She stood under a staircase leading to a first-floor doorway above which burned a red-shaded lantern. Behind her, barshadowed by the stairs, was another doorway, half-sunken below the level of the pavement. None of the windows in the building, nor

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in any close enough to see clearly, showed a light. We inhabited an island of visibility in a sea of murk.

I traversed the street, boots making yellow eddies in the low-lying fog. There was no one nearby. I heard people passing, but we were curtained. Soon, the first spikes of dawn would drive the last new-borns from the streets. The dead girl was up late by the standards of her kind. Dangerously late. Her need for money, for drink, must have been acute.

‘Such a handsome gentleman,’ she cooed, waving a hand in front of her, sharp nails shredding traces of fog.

I endeavoured to make out her face and was rewarded with an impression of thin prettiness. She angled her head slightly to regard me, a wing of jet-black hair falling away from a white cheek. There was interest in her black-red eyes, and hunger. Also, a species of half-aware amusement that borders contempt. The look is common among women, on the streets or off. When Lucy – Miss Westenra of Sainted Memory – refused my proposal, the spark of a similar expression inhabited her eyes.

‘...and so close to morning.’

She was not English. From her accent, I’d judge her German or Austrian by birth. The hint of a ‘ch’ in ‘chentleman’, a ‘close’ that verged upon ‘cloze’. The Prince Consort’s London, from Buckingham Palace to Buck’s Row, is the sinkhole of Europe, clogged with the *ejecta* of a double-dozen principalities.

‘Come on and kiss me, sir.’

I stood for a moment, simply looking. She was indeed a pretty thing, distinctive. Her shiny hair was cut short and lacquered in an almost Chinese style, sharp bangs like the cheek-guards of a Roman helmet. In the fog, her red lips appeared quite black. Like all of *them*,

she smiled too easily, disclosing sharp pearl-chip teeth. A cloud of cheap scent hung around, sickly to cover the reek.

The streets are filthy, open sewers of vice. The dead are everywhere.

The girl laughed musically, the sound like something wrung from a mechanism, and beckoned me near, loosening further the ragged feathers about her shoulders. Her laugh reminded me again of Lucy. Lucy when she was alive, not the leech-thing we finished in Kingstead Cemetery. Three years ago, when only Van Helsing believed...

‘Won’t you give me a little kiss,’ she sang. ‘Just a little kiss.’

Her lips made a heart-shape. Her nails touched my cheek, then her fingertips. We were both cold; my face a mask of ice, her fingers needles pricking through frozen skin.

‘What brought you to this?’ I asked.

‘Good fortune and kind gentlemen.’

‘Am I a kind gentleman?’ I asked, gripping the scalpel in my trousers pocket.

‘Oh yes, one of the kindest. I can tell.’

I pressed the flat of the instrument against my thigh, feeling the chill of silver through good cloth.

‘I have some mistletoe,’ the dead girl said, detaching a sprig from her bodice. She held it above her.

‘A kiss?’ she asked. ‘Just a penny for a kiss.’

‘It is early for Christmas.’

‘There’s always time for a kiss.’

She shook her sprig, berries jiggling like silent bells. I placed a cold kiss on her red-black lips and took out my knife, holding it under my coat. I felt the blade’s keenness through my glove. Her cheek was cool against my face.

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I learned from last week's in Hanbury Street – Chapman, the newspapers say her name was, Annie or Anne – to do the business swiftly and precisely. Throat. Heart. Tripes. Then get the head off. That finishes the things. Clean silver and a clean conscience. Van Helsing, blinkered by folklore and symbolism, spoke always of the heart, but any of the major organs will do. The kidneys are easiest to reach.

I had made preparation carefully before venturing out. For half an hour I sat, allowing myself to become aware of the pain. Renfield is dead – truly dead – but the madman left his jaw-marks in my right hand. The semi-circle of deep indentations has scabbed over many times but never been right again. With Chapman, I was dull from the laudanum I take and not as precise as I should have been. Learning to cut left-handed has not helped. I missed the major artery and the thing had time to screech. I am afraid I lost control and became a butcher, when I should be a surgeon.

Last night's went better. The girl clung as tenaciously to life, but there was an acceptance of my gift. She was relieved, at the last, to have her soul cleansed. Silver is hard to come by now. The coinage is gold or copper. I hoarded threepenny bits while the money was changing and sacrificed my mother's dinner service. I've had the instruments since my Purfleet days. Now the blades are plated, a core of steel strength inside killing silver. This time I selected the post-mortem scalpel. It is fitting, I think, to employ a tool intended for rooting around in corpses.

The dead girl invited me into her doorway and wriggled skirts up over slim white legs. I took the time to open her blouse. My fingers, hot with pain, fumbled.

'Your hand?'

I held up the lumpily-gloved club and tried a smile. She kissed my locked knuckles and I slipped my other hand out from my coat, holding firmly the scalpel.

‘An old wound,’ I said. ‘It’s nothing.’

She smiled and I quickly drew my silver edge across her neck, pressing firmly with my thumb, cutting deep into pristine dead-flesh. Her eyes widened with shock – silver *hurts* – and she released a long sigh. Lines of thin blood trickled like rain on a window-pane, staining the skin over her collar-bones. A single tear of blood issued from the corner of her mouth.

‘Lucy,’ I said, remembering..

I held up the girl, my body shielding her from passersby, and slid the scalpel through her stays and into her heart. I felt her shudder and fall lifeless. But I know the dead can be resilient and took care to finish the job. I laid her in the well of the sunken doorway and completed the delivery. There was little blood in her; she must not have fed tonight. After cutting away her corset, easily ripping the cheap material, I exposed the punctured heart, detached the intestines from the mesentery, unravelled a yard of the colon, and removed the kidneys and part of the uterus. Then I enlarged the first incision. Having exposed the vertebrae, I worried the loose head back and forth until the neckbones parted.