

Chapter Eleven: The Outdoor Life

Jacobs was indeed waiting at Okehampton when Rhodes and Fleming arrived back at the station. Neither party made comment, though Rhodes amiably asked Jacobs to make good time returning to the manor. The pair sat in silence in the carriage; Rhodes planning his next move, Fleming thinking of what culinary delights awaited them.

It was a half past six before they were ready to start their expedition across the moor to the asylum; a walk of ten miles as the crow flies. Fleming had insisted on a second helping of the cook's pork in cider with new potatoes and then on studying maps of the region from Lord Cotterill's library.

Experiences in Africa had taught him never to venture into the unknown ill prepared, and the weather on Dartmoor was prone to sudden and severe changes, even in the height of summer.

With bags packed, a small hamper full of food strapped to his back, his pistol in his pocket, and a whistle around his neck in case he got lost, Fleming at last felt ready to venture into the unknown. Rhodes carried a smaller bag and had a loop of rope, supplied by Jacobs from Lord Cotterill's garden shed, over his left shoulder. A small pocket telescope protruded from his inner coat pocket.

They bid a goodnight to Miss Cotterill and informed Jacobs that they would be back late and that he needn't wait up for them. A key would be left under the doormat for when they returned and a light supper placed in the dining room; which gave Fleming something to look forward to on the return trip.

"So," said Fleming after several miles had passed in silence, "what exactly are we doing going back to see Doctor Mulelobber, then?"

Rhodes cast a glance upward. The weather had held, though the sky was beginning to darken as the sun headed inexorably westward. It would be a foggy night, and the half moon was concealed by a low cloud, perfect weather for remaining unseen on their approach to the asylum.

"Muelhoffer," he corrected. "I wish to see exactly what our good friend the doctor is doing out here on the moor," he replied, checking his pocket watch for what seemed the umpteenth time to Fleming.

"Well, I thought he was treating mad people. Just because he's foreign and a little strange, doesn't make him a criminal, does it? Would you like an apple? They're very juicy."

"No, thank you, Bratton. For all his demeanour as a learned and highly skilled man caring for the sick, albeit a man with the largest ego I have ever encountered, something did not feel right. There were several clues that lead me to this conclusion."

"Oh?" Fleming looked slightly lost. "Were there? What were they, then?"

"Firstly," said Rhodes placing his right index finger on his left little finger, as if checking off facts, "do you remember what Doctor Muelhoffer said about his patients being sedated?"

"Er...no, not really. I think I was pouring the tea at that moment." Fleming crunched into his apple, juice spraying onto his moustache and sideburns. "Remind me, Rhodes," he said chewing.

"He said that he kept his patients sedated at all times, so as to allow his revolutionary new drug to work. However," he continued before Fleming could interrupt him, "when we arrived, many of the patients, at least those within ear shot of us, were making a frightful noise. One typical with regularly treated insane people, I believe. In short, he lied."

"Ruddy Bosch!" snarled Fleming. "I knew he was up to no good the moment I saw him, didn't I?"

"Second," continued Rhodes, "moving his index finger to touch the ring finger of his left hand and ignoring Fleming's reply, "he showed little concern that one of his patients was loose, even if he was nearly cured, which I do not for one moment believe."

"Ruddy quack!" spat Fleming. "How could he act so calm when Mad Man Willy was running loose? No ethics at all, that man. Still, he was a German."

"And still is, as I doubt whether he has changed nationality in the last few hours. I find it very unlikely that the orderly mixed up the medicine and, even if he had done so, Willy would have been at least partially sedated. Even if Willy was completely in charge of his senses I find it difficult to believe that he managed to overpower his guards, escape into the courtyard, and then hide on a laundry wagon. You've worked in a lunatic asylum, have you not, Bratton? What sort of protection do guards wear?"

"They're like big wooden buckets with an area removed for the face. That's covered with metal bars of course, to protect the guards' faces." He continued to devour his apple.

"As I thought. So, a madman overpowered two protected guards, both of whom were probably armed with some sort of weapon for defence."

"Big wooden sticks," said Fleming helpfully. He threw the apple core to the ground and licked his lips. "Only to be used in self-defence, of course."

"Naturally. Having now escaped his guards and, let us say for the purposes of speed that he also overpowered the door guard, Willy now finds himself in the courtyard. The front gates are barred and a long guard stands on the inside. What does Willy do?"

"Hide in the laundry wagon," answered Fleming.

"It was a rhetorical question, but yes, he hides in the laundry wagon. Why not simply overpower the guard, as he had done already, and flee onto the moor? Why hide in the laundry wagon?"

"I thought that was obvious, Rhodes," said Fleming, believing that he had managed to deduce something his more observant partner had missed. "He needed to get away quickly. The wagon would have taken the shortest route to the village. Mad Man Willy could get fresh clothes there, couldn't he? Maybe steal some food as well"

"But he didn't, did he? When we caught him he was wearing nothing on his feet, had rags for clothes, and was eating a sheep, which I strongly suspect he killed with his bare hands. I doubt that Willy ever got near the village. Nor do I believe that he ever intended to visit there. They were not his orders."

"Hang on!" said Fleming, a surprised look on his face. "What do you mean his orders?"

"Assuming that Willy did manage to overpower his guards, the alarm should have been raised much sooner. Properly trained guards would have sealed the asylum and searched the laundry wagon before allowing it to leave the premises."

"Ah! But what if Willy had already escaped by the time the alarm was raised?"

"Then the guards should have started an immediate search. How far could a bare footed man with no idea of the surrounding landscape get on Dartmoor before he was caught? I am quite sure the asylum could have acquired some bloodhounds to track him, especially as he is a convicted murderer."

"But what does that have to do with him receiving orders? And what orders were they?"

"Simple, Bratton. I am of the firm opinion that Doctor Muelhoffer allowed Willy to escape for the sole purpose of killing Lord Cotterill." Rhodes noticed that the ground under foot was getting softer, wetter.

"That's a very strong accusation to make without any real evidence," said Fleming, oblivious to the subtle change in the terrain.

"And that is precisely why we are going to break into the asylum tonight."

Fleming snorted a short laugh. "Not many people can say they've broken into a madhouse, can they?"

"Indeed not," chuckled Rhodes, "but I feel we have plenty of evidence already. We know that Willy escaped from the asylum with surprising ease, that he had Lord Cotterill's handkerchief on his person when he was apprehended, that, in four days of freedom, he never got further than ten miles from the asylum, that three Germans, including the German Military Attaché paid a visit to the asylum..."

"Ah! We don't have proof of that, Rhodes, do we?"

"Actually we do," smiled Rhodes. "I noticed von Steinhagen's name was written in Muelhoffer's diary when I grabbed it after spilling my tea, along with what I suspect is another clue."

"Oh? What clue would that be then?"

"I noticed an entry for tomorrow. It read 'Lady Elisabeta, 7.30 p.m.' If my suspicions are correct then the plans stolen from Lord Cotterill's safe will be handed over tomorrow night and then removed from the country. This cunning charade, supposed to look like the workings of an escaped lunatic, was actually a devious plot to steal valuable military plans and, although I currently lack the proof to pursue the matter, the German Military Attaché himself played a vital part."

"Ruddy hell! You mean he's a spy, don't you?"

"I do, Bratton, and so is Doctor Muelhoffer; at least in part, anyway. Von Steinhagen no doubt knew of Muelhoffer's new treatments and had him prepare Willy to murder Lord Cotterill. Someone, probably a German agent, then cracked the safe and removed the plans. It would have seemed like a simple robbery turned to murder had I not suspected something from the very beginning."

"But my investigations show that Lord Cotterill was killed by something with claws. Mad Man Willy didn't even have much in the way of fingernails, did he?"

"Normally, no, he didn't. I am under the belief that there is more to this mysterious sedative than meets the eye. Had you ever heard of Doctor Muelhoffer before we began this case?" enquired Rhodes, now noticing that his feet were sinking a good inch into the boggy soil.

"No. I don't keep up with Bosch doctors. Never saw the need really, did I?"

"Doctor Ludwig Franz Muelhoffer is a renowned biochemist, much like myself. I speak with no regrets when I say that he is years ahead of my own research and has made many breakthroughs, including aspirin and a new drug for treating disease called an antibiotic."

"I had an Auntie Mavis, you know? Very nice lady she was, always baking bread and cakes for me. Said I needed fattening up when I was a young child. I was nothing but skin and bone back then." He looked down at his wide girth. "Not that there's much to me now really, is there?"

Rhodes opened his mouth to say something, thought twice about it, and carried on walking through the squelching undergrowth. It was a few minutes before he spoke again. "Several years ago Doctor Muelhoffer put forward the theory that the animalistic side of human nature could be harnessed. Nothing new about that, though. Doctor Jekyll had been arguing such theories for years.

"He proposed to bring out the beast that lurks within through certain drugs he was working on. He never finished his research, as the German government banned his work. That was six months before he moved to England. I suspect that he has perfected the process and used it on Willy to turn him into the thing in the cave we encountered - the feral Willy."

"Ruddy hell!" cried Fleming. "Do you mean that he can turn people into...into...werewolves?"

"Close enough, Bratton, yes. Is it just me or is the ground getting wetter?"

"I suspect it's the ground. I've taken us on a shortcut through the bog to save time."

"Hell's Teeth, Bratton!" cried Rhodes in alarm. "What on earth possessed you to do such a thing? These bogs are treacherous. People have disappeared out here, you know? Sunk into some bottomless quagmire, their bones rotting unseen by the sun." It was not in Rhodes' usual nature to panic, but he hated the outdoor life, much preferring a cosy chair in front of a warm fire.

"There's not much chance of that happening, Rhodes," said Fleming dragging his right leg from a sticky patch of bog and trying to shake the clinging, foul smelling mud from his boot. "I expect we'll get our boots wet is all."

"I hope not," said Rhodes, taking another step forward and suddenly sinking straight to his knees. Cold water filled his boots and he turned, as best as he could, to look at Fleming. "What did you say?"

"Don't panic; these bogs are only a foot deep on average. Hang on, and I'll pull you clear." Fleming made his way gingerly across to Rhodes, but before he got there his lower half disappeared into the murky brown mud with a soft 'plop'. "Ruddy hell!" he bellowed.

"What were you saying about the average depth of these bogs, Bratton?" asked Rhodes sinking another inch into the quagmire.

"Well," said Fleming trying to walk forward to his colleague, "I'm shorter than you, aren't I?"

* * *

It was five minutes to nine; the sky was beginning to fall black as the sun neared the western horizon, and Professor James Rhodes and Doctor Bratton Fleming were currently sinking into one of the bogs of Dartmoor. Rhodes was not a happy man.

"I don't believe that you could have been this foolish, Bratton. What on earth possessed you to take this route?" he cried, now trapped to his waist in thick mud that refused to allow his legs so much as half an inch of mobility. "I'm completely stuck."

"I thought I'd save some time. I expect it's these heavy packs weighing us down that did it," retorted Fleming, the mud lapping at his armpits and threatening to pull him down further as he continued to struggle.

"Did you never encounter quicksand in Africa?" His voice was calmer, but inside his mind was racing with ideas on how to extricate himself from this predicament.

"Oh yes. I got stuck several times. Almost went under in one particularly nasty patch in darkest Africa. I remember that we were hunting a lion that had been killing sheep on a nearby ranch. We'd been in the jungle for about ten minutes when I..."

"How did you get out?" hissed Rhodes impatiently.

"What? Oh, yes," said Fleming, his concentration lost for a moment as his tale of adventure and daring was cut prematurely short. "Very easily, actually."

"How!?" bellowed Rhodes, sinking another inch as he struggled to move closer to Fleming. If he could just get his arms a few feet closer he could throttle Fleming for his stupidity.

"We had the natives pull us out."

Rhodes head slumped to his chest. Was this how it would end? He could imagine his obituary in *The Times*; "Professor James Rhodes, consulting detective and inventor was lost on Dartmoor, apparently vanishing without trace in one of the moor's infamous bogs. He will be sorely missed."

"Hello there!" called a chirpy, nasal voice from nearby. "You look like you're in a spot of bother. Need any help? I'd be happy to lend a hand, what?" The accent held the trappings of belonging to a class of person Fleming referred to as an 'upper class twit.'

Rhodes and Fleming whirled their heads around. Coming out of the mist was a figure better equipped for traversing the moors than they were; he wore high boots, had a walking stick (as much for testing the firmness of the ground than for support), and, more importantly, wore a compass around his neck on a piece of rope.

"Name's Clancy Trombley," he continued. The man was extremely thin, almost skeletal, and his fingers, though delicately sculptured for fine arts, were no thicker than a pencil.

"We could do with a hand," said Fleming, smiling, and silently wondering how this stick of a man was going to extricate them without a horse to help him. "We were out for a walk when the ground gave way, trapping us here. Must be an old mine shaft or something."

"You've wandered into Grimewater Mire, I'm afraid. Has a nasty reputation for catching out the unwary. Here," he said reaching forward with an inane grin on his lips, "grab hold of my stick and I'll give you a tug. Normally works just spiffingly."

Fleming took the end of the walking stick (which looked thicker than the man's arm) and held on for dear life. Trombley dug his boots into the firm ground on which he stood and started to heave. His face turned redder and redder until Fleming thought he would surely explode. "I'm

afraid you're stuck rather fast, old fruit," he said gasping for breath. "I know, let me help your friend first and then the two of us can pull you out, what?"

"I wouldn't bet on that," mumbled Rhodes beneath his breath as he grabbed hold of the walking stick.

Trombley had an easier time dragging Rhodes free and the two of them swiftly proceeded to liberate Fleming from the suction of his private mud bath. Both men were exhausted by the time they had pulled Fleming free, who lay on the ground gasping for air like a fish out of water.

"Thank you for your gracious assistance, Mister Trombley. I am Professor James Rhodes and this is Doctor Bratton Fleming. We are down from London, staying with friends in the area. We thought a brisk walk after dinner would do us some good, but we appear to have strayed further than we realised."

"Please, call me Clancy. Everybody else does," he beamed. "Do you need help getting back to your lodgings? I'm heading for Okehampton myself. Staying in a lovely little cottage with a beautiful view of the moor, what? You could come back for tea if you wanted? I'm sure my landlady wouldn't mind some company."

"That would be out of our way I'm afraid, Mister Trombley," said Rhodes, clawing large clumps of mud from his clothes and throwing them back into the bog in disgust. "No, we shall rest here for a while and then make our own way back."

"Best you be quick, old boy, there's a mist coming down and it's virtually impossible to see anything when that happens, what? Lucky I have my compass. Do you have one?"

"Yes, thank you," said Fleming, who had been cleaning himself of mud and making sure the little food that remained in the hamper was unspoiled. "I'm an expert guide, so we should get back safely."

"Oh well, glad I could help you chaps, anyway. I'll be off now. Don't want to be caught here after dark. Not with that ruddy lunatic on the loose, eh?"

"What," asked Rhodes, "are you doing out on the moor this time of night, Mister Trombley?"

"I come down to Dartmoor to get a spot of fresh air and some exercise, what? Beats working for a living, doesn't it?" he laughed. It was a high-pitched laugh, similar to the braying of a donkey. "I was having a stroll and lost track of time, much like yourselves, really. Always forgetting what time it is and where I'm supposed to be. I expect that Mrs. Ginster has already finished dinner. Better be off. Nice meeting you chappies; have a safe journey back." He waved farewell and headed into the mist as quickly and as silently as he appeared.

"Friendly chap, wasn't he?" said Fleming, apparently unaffected by his near fatal encounter with the Dartmoor bog. "Shall we carry on, then?"

Chapter Twelve: Expected Company

By Rhodes' watch it was shortly after eleven o'clock when they arrived in the vicinity of the asylum. The trip through the bog had delayed them, and visibility was reduced to practically nothing by the combination of cloudy sky and ground fog. Only the lights from a few upper floor windows had revealed the exact location of the asylum, and the tired explorers were now sat half a mile away, hidden behind a bramble bush.

"What do you think, Bratton?" Rhodes asked, offering him his pocket telescope.

"Well," replied Bratton, not taking the telescope, "we've ran out of food, water is down to a few pints, and we don't have any shelter. I don't think our chances of survival are too good right now, are they? I suppose I could forage for berries and maybe trap a rabbit or two for breakfast, couldn't I?"

"I mean about our chance of success," he hissed. "Do you think we can make it in quietly?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. There aren't any external guards visible. Also a lack of lights, except for that one above the main gates. Of course, they might have dogs," he said shuddering.

"We haven't heard any dogs barking, so I deduce that if there are any, they are kept inside. It seems parts of the courtyard are lit, but we should be able to avoid those spots. I think that entering along one of the walls away from the main entrance is our best point of ingress. Don't you agree, Bratton?"

"Oh, totally, Rhodes. We can hook the rope over one of those iron spikes, like the American cowboys do with cows, can't we?"

"Indeed we can, Bratton. When do you deduce the best time to perform our little climbing act would be?"

"Just before dawn is normally the preferred time for this sort of operation, isn't it? Apparently it's a psychological thing or something. We can ask Doctor Muleherder if we see him, can't we? Shall I make us a quick shelter? I can use some of these bracken leaves and a few sticks to knock up a lean-to within half an hour, if you'd like Rhodes?"

"Muelhoffer," said Rhodes, stressing the last two syllables, "and yes, I think a shelter would be most beneficial, seeing as we have a long wait ahead of us. If you need any light I have my 'Rhodes Adjustable Illuminator'. Keep the shutter to a minimum though - no point in alerting anyone that we're here."

For the next half an hour, Rhodes kept an eye on the asylum through his telescope. Every now and then a shadowy figure would walk in front of one of the illuminated windows but he could not make out enough details to identify the person. Fleming busied himself cutting down small trees with a hatchet he had borrowed from the gardener.

He stripped off the branches to leave him with reasonably straight, flexible pieces of wood that he bound together with twine (another loan from the gardener) to form a semi-rigid framework, through which he fed bracken and fern leaves. The leaves all pointed downwards, so any rainfall would flow down the overlapping leaves on the outside rather than into the shelter and onto the occupants. It was not a work of art, but it would serve their purpose.

Another fifteen minutes had passed before he spoke to Rhodes. "Would you like a cup of tea, Rhodes? I've just lit a fire and the cook gave us some..."

"What?" hissed Rhodes. "You've lit a fire? At night? Everyone for miles will see us. Quick! Put it out! Put it out!" He hastily scrambled to his feet and began tearing clods of wet soil from the ground. Then he saw the fire and stopped.

Fleming had indeed lit a fire, but he had done so within a shallow hearth, protected from both the elements and casual glances by a wall of bracken leaves. It would be near to impossible to see the fire from the asylum, and the mist helped hide the smoke, which nearer the crackling branches was illuminated from the firelight. No, only someone out on the moors would be able to see the fire...

"Ruddy hell, Rhodes, you nearly ruined my fire!" said Fleming, quietly in alarm. "Don't worry. I know how to light a fire without it being seen by foreigners. Did it all the time in the Sudan, didn't we? I've learnt not to light it too close to the shelter, as well."

Without speaking, Rhodes darted back to his vantage point and scanned the visible portion of the building with his telescope. Yes, it looked clear...no, wait! Second floor, three windows from the left, a lone figure stood highlighted in the window, facing slightly to the left of their position; it was signalling with a lamp, a definite series of long and short flashes. But signalling to whom?

Rhodes spun, lowering the telescope as he cast his eyes across the mist-shrouded and desolate moors. Nothing. Rhodes breathed a little easier.

Had someone seen the fire? Who would they be signalling to anyway? Maybe it was just a guard passing the window, Rhodes mused, not really believing his own story. Looking back he noticed that the figure at the window had drawn curtains closed, obliterating Rhodes view of his actions. Not a good sign, he thought.

"Damn," he whispered under his breath, "we may have company."

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Fleming slept soundly under his coat, his snoring for once kept to a bare minimum, whilst Rhodes maintained watch over the camp and the asylum. Fleming had agreed to take the early watch and had turned in about two o'clock, grumbling that he was starving to death and would

have to hunt before he could eat breakfast. Using his hand lamp under cover of his coat Rhodes checked his pocket watch - almost three o'clock. Only another three hours to wait.

SNAP!

Rhodes slammed the shutter on his hand lamp closed, the faint click muffled by the heavy coat. Something nearby had inadvertently stepped on a fallen branch (or maybe one of Fleming's lean-to off cuts), something that had now stopped moving and was undoubtedly wondering if the noise had been detected.

It could have been a deer, Rhodes thought, trying to slow his breathing. He pondered whether it was a wise idea to waken his still sleeping colleague but decided to wait a little longer. No point in rousing him for nothing. He strained his ears, listening for any sound over the gentle breeze that whistled across the moor; it was still foggy, and he would have no hope of spotting whatever approached the camp until it was right on top of him.

The creaking of a nearby tree almost drowned out the sounds he was listening for: the sound of slow, deliberate footsteps heading towards the camp.

It was extremely difficult to deduce how many were approaching, but Rhodes estimated at least four, maybe five, people. Deer don't walk quietly, he thought, they either stand completely still or run when being chased; they don't walk. For a moment the image of one of Fleming's black dogs, its slavering mouth full of sharp teeth and red fiery eyes glinting in the pale light, filled his mind, but it was soon dismissed. Nonsense!

He decided to wake Fleming and, placing his hand over his mouth, gently shook his colleague. "Bratton!" he whispered as quietly as he could. "Wake up, Bratton! We have company."

There was a muffled sound from Fleming as he opened his eyes with a start. Rhodes leaned close and placed a finger over his lips. "Shhh!" he said. "There are several people creeping towards the camp. Draw your gun, and keep as quiet as you can. We don't want them to know we're awake."

"Who do you think they are?" asked Fleming, slowly drawing his revolver from under his bag, which he had been using as a pillow. "It might be those ruddy great dogs, come to rend our flesh from our bones!"

"No, I don't think so." Rhodes reached inside his pocket and clasped his fingers round something smooth and cold. It felt reassuring. "If it was a dog it would be snuffling," he lied, hoping that Fleming was still too sleepy to spot the flaw in his argument. "These are definitely people, and they're trying not to be heard - most likely come to do us harm on the orders of the good doctor."

"The fiend!" hissed Fleming. "Doesn't he know it isn't polite to creep up on someone when they're asleep? They might have given us a heart attack or something."

"It's the something that bothers me. Look" Rhodes pointed a slender finger to the edge of the camp. "That shadow!"

Fleming followed the direction of Rhodes' index finger until he saw to what he colleague was referring. A thin patch of high cloud had allowed a brief sliver of moonlight through the grey wall and had revealed the definite figure of a bulky individual creeping towards their camp. The figure held something in his right hand that looked like a pistol - they meant business.

"Wait until I give the signal, Bratton," said Rhodes slowly repositioning himself to lie flat on his stomach. "We want to make sure we get them all." Fleming followed suit, still clutching his revolver.

Seconds ticked passed as if they were minutes, minutes passed with the swiftness of hours. It had not been five minutes since the pair laid down to conceal themselves against any sudden showing of the moon, with its pale, but fickle, illumination.

"Maybe we should have kept the fire lit," whispered Fleming in Rhodes's ear. "It would give us some light to see by and would help them find the camp a bit quicker, would it?"

"Yes, maybe extinguishing the fire wasn't such a good idea," replied Rhodes, peering into the gloom for any sign of movement.

"No, but moving the camp up here was. We have a lovely view of the old camp now don't we? Those ruddy devils down there won't be expecting this, will they?"

"I hope not. We're very exposed to attacks from the...wait!" Rhodes hissed, pulling himself lower and pointing in the direction of the old camp they had abandoned a few hours earlier. "They're in the camp. I saw a shadow moving by the lean-to."

BOOM!

The noise of a shotgun being fired caused Fleming's heartbeat to increase dramatically and he nearly fired off his revolver as he jumped a good three inches into the air. Neither man was looking at the area of the shotgun when it went off, otherwise what night vision they had adjusted to would have been instantly ruined. As it was, both saw the flash on the periphery of their vision, not enough to dazzle them but enough to attract their attention.

"Now!" cried Rhodes, leaping to his feet and opening the shutter on his hand lamp to a happy medium between intensity and distance. The lamp had a maximum range of sixty feet, but that meant the beam had to be very narrow; Rhodes needed a larger area at a closer distance.

Momentarily dazzled by the sudden and unexpected light, the four assailants were caught completely by surprise. Fleming had risen to his knees when Rhodes had given the signal and aimed his revolver in the rough direction.

The light had highlighted the targets and Fleming squeezed the trigger twice in rapid succession. One of the brutes fell to the ground, screaming in agony as the second bullet made contact with his upper leg; the first had injured nothing more than a patch of wet mud.

The thugs recovered and returned fire. Two shots from automatic pistols and a second shotgun blast tore through the area where the light originated. All three missed their intended targets, mainly because Rhodes and Fleming were several feet to the right. Fleming had suggested that Rhodes not be holding the lamp when it was switched on; apparently a friend of his had been killed in Africa making that very mistake.

Fleming fired back and rolled to one side. He knew that the thugs would have recovered enough to be a danger now and would have seen his muzzle flash; no point in being there when the return fire came. The ground where he had been kneeling seconds earlier churned as pistol fire tore into soil.

"Rhodes!" he shouted over the din of gunfire. "If they split up..."

"Don't worry, Bratton!" Rhodes cried back. "I've got it covered." With that he pulled the vial from his pocket and threw it into the middle of their former camp, where it hit the ground with a gentle plop and settled on a patch of spongy moss. "Hell's Teeth! It hasn't broken Arrrgh!"

"RHODES!" screamed Fleming, watching his colleague throw the vial and then stagger backwards, clasp his left arm. They'd killed Rhodes!

Fleming fired again; two quick shots towards a small glass target lying on the soil and then rolled away again. Thud. Thud. They had all missed. Risking a glance sideways, he saw Rhodes lying motionlessly on the damp grass. He would have to see to Rhodes later; staying alive was more important right now.

"One shot left, Bratton," he said to himself. "You have to make this one count. Just think back to when you were hunting that tiger in India and...oh, no, you needed four shots then. Right, try again. Um. Go it! Hunting water buffalo in Rhodesia. Somehow poetic, isn't it?"

He took careful aim at the vial, which shone brightly in the light of the hand lamp. Thud. Thud. Boom. Three shots were fired to the left of his current position, but he had rolled back right last time. Another useful hunting trick he had learned in Africa.

BOOM!

The sound of Fleming's revolver discharging sounded louder than he had ever heard it before. The vial disintegrated under the impact of the bullet long before Fleming had recovered his wits,

although later he would dine out on telling interested parties how he watched the bullet streak from his gun and hit the vial, as if the whole world had gone into slow motion.

Whether he actually witnessed the event or not is quite irrelevant at this juncture in the story; it happened. The violet liquid reacted with the air, fizzing into a thin, purple gas that spread out to fill an area thirty feet across. It hovered for several seconds, just enough time to cause the thugs to slump into an unconscious state with a satisfying thump as they hit the ground, before dispersing on the wind.

Ignoring the now unimportant thugs, Fleming rushed over to Rhodes; he lay on his back, eyes closed. Fleming fell to his knees; tears formed in his eyes as he gently lifted Rhodes' head into his lap, cradling it as if it were a wounded cat. The skin felt cold to his touch.

"Oh, Rhodes!" he muttered, staring down at the white face of his colleague. "You were my best friend, my only true friend, I'd say. You were so brave and tireless in your pursuit of thwarting evil, not like that fake next door. What will become of the world now that your guiding light has..."

"Good Heavens, Bratton," said Rhodes opening his eyes. "You do go on sometimes, don't you?"

"RHODES!" Fleming cried, ignoring the fact that there may be more thugs in the vicinity. "You're alive! It's a miracle! You were so cold I felt sure you were dead!" Fleming was still crying, but this time with happiness.

"Hardly," smiled Rhodes. "In your haste to lament my passing you neglected to perform any basic medical duties, such as checking my pulse or seeing where the wound was inflicted. You also failed to take into account that we are spending a late spring night on Dartmoor without any form of heating and that it is a half past three in the morning. I am bound to feel cold."

"Crikey! You're right, aren't you? Does it hurt?"

"Of course it hurts, Bratton, I've been shot. I don't think it hit the bone; a flesh wound I believe it is called. What about the thugs? Did they escape? The vial didn't..."

"Calm down, you're not well," said Bratton seriously and laying Rhodes' head on the ground as he scurried off to fetch his doctor's bag. "I shot the vial and the thugs are sleeping like babies. One may be dead. I think I hit him; he went down early on." He returned with his doctor's bag and stretched over to turn the hand lamp around, softening the intensity as he did so. "There," he said. "Now we have some light."

Fleming carefully removed Rhodes' coat and rolled up his bloody (and holed) shirtsleeve. He examined the wound (the bullet had indeed passed straight through the flesh, missing the bone)

before pulling out a bottle of iodine and a long bandage. "This is the best I can do for now. You'll live, but we'll have to get you sewn up back at the manor, won't we?"

"Thank you, Bratton. It will suffice for now. We still have a task to complete." He flexed his newly bandaged arm, wincing at the pain. "Yes, It's still usable. We'd better check on those thugs, make sure their definitely sleeping."

Ten minutes later all four dozing thugs were tied up securely and bundled together. True to his Hippocratic oath Fleming has bandaged the wounded thug's leg wound as best he could. "We'd better not leave him here all night. He's quite badly wounded, you know?"

"Don't worry. I've calculated that they should only be asleep for a few hours. The sleeping gas doesn't work as well outdoors; it gets dispersed very easily. I recommend that we untie one so he can aid his comrades. We should be well away by they time they regain consciousness and raise the alarm."

Fleming did not like the idea of leaving one of the vicious thugs free to follow them if he recovered prematurely, but neither could he allow the wounded brute to remain untreated for too long. Eventually he agreed, and the pair packed away their few belongings and jogged quietly towards the asylum.

"Do you think they will be expecting us, Rhodes?" Fleming asked. Although exercise was something he had done in his youth, when his frame had been slimmer, Fleming had a strong constitution and was still as fit as he had been twenty years ago. He just weighed twice as much.

"Indubitably, Bratton. The sounds of our fight would have carried for many miles, even with sound dampening effects of the fog. I suspect that the thugs were to return with our bodies as proof they had completed their unpleasant task. At best we have an hour to complete *our* task. Any longer than that and the alarm is likely to be raised."

"But you said the thugs wouldn't raise the alarm for a couple of hours, didn't you?" Fleming protested. He did not fancy walking into a trap, even one that had an hour before it was sprung.

"They won't, but their master will. Think of it this way, there will be fewer guards inside to bother us." Rhodes stopped and uncoiled the rope from his aching arm; they had reached the base of the high perimeter wall.

"Not much consolation though, is it?"

"Chin up Bratton, we have a wall to climb," said Rhodes, handing Bratton the rope. "Be a good fellow, and hook this up there, will you? My arm hurts."

Chapter Thirteen: The Doctor's Secret

Fleming had successfully managed to fix the looped end of the rope over one of the wall spikes on his third attempt, amid much silent cursing and dodging falling rope. He had then hauled himself up first and, after making sure the visible area of the courtyard was devoid of guards, dragged up Rhodes, whose arm hurt too much to climb unassisted.

Once both men were sat atop the wall and had recovered their breath Fleming lowered Rhodes down and then climbed down himself, leaving the rope attached for a quick getaway, assuming no patrolling guard passed this way and noticed it dangling there like a string of sausages in the meantime.

Looking around for signs of approaching guards, they sprinted silently across the courtyard and pressed themselves against the outside of the asylum. The front door lay to their left, but Rhodes decided to investigate the long way, searching for an unguarded point of ingress.

"How do we take care of the front door?" asked Fleming in a whisper. "It's bound to be locked, isn't it?"

"Were I dealing with the criminally insane then, yes, the door would be locked," he replied, "and guarded, though my patented sleeping draught will take care of the guard. Best be careful though: I only have one vial left, and we may need that to escape. I thought I had more, but I couldn't find it."

"Oh? Really?" said Fleming trying to look innocent. "I could punch his lights out. Bit of a dab hand with my fists in my youth, wasn't I?"

"Quite true, Bratton. That would save on sleeping draught as well. Once the guard is knocked out, I can pick the lock on the door."

"Won't he have keys to open the door, though?" asked Fleming, suspecting that Rhodes was trying to test his powers of logic and observation.

"Er...yes, of course he will. Well deduced, Bratton. Just making sure you're still awake," lied Rhodes. He kicked himself mentally for making such a stupid oversight - mistakes like that could cost them both their lives.

"Where are we headed once we get in, Rhodes?"

Rhodes paused for a moment. "Where would you keep incriminating papers if you were doctor Muelhoffer?"

"Not in my office, that's for sure. First place someone would look, isn't it? No, I'd have them somewhere else, maybe in a safe." Fleming sounded pleased with himself.

"Precisely! The first place you think of looking is the obvious place not to look, so that is where they will be kept! Simple reverse logic, eh, Bratton?"

Fleming let his mouth open and close a few times; his brain unsure as to whether he had followed Rhodes' chain of logic and paying little attention to what the rest of his body did at that moment in time. "Let's just find a way in," he suggested quietly, his mind still trying to work out if the secret papers were actually going to be located in the office or not.

* * *

Breaking in was easier than they had hoped. There was a tradesmen's entrance at the back of the building, and after listening intently at the door, they decided that the space beyond (whatever it proved to be) was empty. Rhodes drew his lockpicks from his jacket and knelt in front of the lock. A minute later, the door was unlocked, and Fleming pushed the door half open and stuck his head through.

"Seems to be a storeroom of some sort," he said. "No sign of anyone and there's another door on the opposite side."

Rhodes entered the storeroom, closing the outer door quietly behind them; it would make for a quick escape if their presence were detected. He drew his hand lamp and wound the lever until the lamp flickered into life. The room was piled high with crates and barrels, mostly containing foodstuffs and clothes, if the labels were to be believed. He quietly walked over to the inner door and tried the handle; it was unlocked.

"There's a bit of luck," he whispered to Fleming, who had opened a loose crate and was holding up a straight jacket for size. "Leave that alone! It's not for casual wear - it's to restrain mad people."

"I know," said Fleming, sounding hurt. "I was just seeing what they looked like. I've never seen one up close before. The sleeves are very long, aren't they?"

"That's because they tie them at the back."

Fleming looked at the jacket again, a frown on his face. "How? Your arms aren't long enough to reach round the back and tie them up. You'd have to be an extortionist to do that!"

"Contortionist. The wearer does not tie them; the guards do them up. They're to stop the insane harming themselves or others. Have you never seen one been worn?"

"No. We didn't have them in Africa. We'd just hit any dangerous natives with sticks until they passed out and then tie them up with rope. Basic, but functional."

"Same principal really, only we don't use sticks on them in England; unless they're particularly violent, of course. Now come on! We don't have all night to discuss the principal of the straightjacket. If you're good I'll buy you one for Christmas."

"Lovely," beamed Fleming, replacing the straight jacket in the crate and closing it again. "I can try and escape from it, like that Mister Houdini. I've read about his exploits in the paper, I have. It'll give me hours of fun!"

"Hopefully," muttered Rhodes, opening the door a crack and listening carefully; the area beyond sounded quiet. He pulled the door open further and had a quick look round. The storeroom opened into a corridor that was in darkness; Rhodes adjusted his hand lamp to give minimal illumination and, beckoning Fleming to follow, crept silently in the corridor.

"Which way, then?" asked Fleming, looking left and right.

"Which way indeed. The left hand part of the corridor is much shorter, running only ten feet before it turns, but there is something wrong with the right side."

"What do you mean? It looks fine to me."

"Tell me what you see." Rhodes turned his lamp towards the right hand part of the corridor, illuminating its entire length in the soft light.

"Nothing much, really. Um...two walls, floor, ceiling, and then the corner at the far end."

"Precisely!" Fleming look bemused. "Look," continued Rhodes, "it's quite simple, really. We entered round the back of the building and entered a storeroom measuring some fifteen feet in depth. This corridor runs for twenty five feet before it turns at what I calculate to be the inner side of the outer wall."

"So?"

"So, that means that between here and the outer wall is a space measuring approximately twenty five feet by fifteen feet that has no access. We passed no other outer doors, and there are no visible inner doors. No one in their right mind builds a structure with over three hundred square feet of dead space."

"Maybe the architect was mad?" offered Fleming. "This is an asylum."

"Unlikely, my friend. Although this place was built *for* the mad, I doubt it was designed *by* the mad. No, between here and that far wall," he gesticulated towards the end of the corridor, "is a secret space, and I intend to find it."

They walked slowly down the corridor, Rhodes staring at the floor, Fleming watching front and back for any signs that their illegal entry into the building had been detected. Rhodes halted suddenly and knelt down, examining the floor in more detail.

"It's here. Notice the marks on the floor? As if something heavy has scrapped along them in a circular motion." He began to feel the wall with his spare hand. After what seemed an eternity, there was a soft click, and a section of wall swung outwards into the corridor, grinding against the floor.

"Do you think we've been heard?" asked Fleming, alarmed at the noise the secret door had made when opening.

"Let's get inside quick and close the door. It's very unlikely that the guards know about this chamber."

Once inside, Rhodes pulled the door closed and adjusted his hand lamp to provide more light. As Rhodes had deduced, they were in a large space, but it was far from empty. Two long wooden benches lined the far wall, both covered in test tubes, gas burners, bottles, vials, books, handwritten papers, pipettes, and tongs.

A veritable alchemist's den hidden within the asylum, away from prying eyes. In the middle of the room was a large table, similar in design to a hospital operating table but with leather straps to bind the patient's hands and feet. Rhodes found the main gaslights and lit them, putting away his hand lamp in the process.

"Well, well, well," he muttered, "look what we have here."

"Looks like your laboratory, only bigger and cleaner, and with better equipment."

"Thank you for that observation, Bratton." Rhodes didn't sound particularly amused. He walked over to the long table and began studying the labels on the bottles and vials while Fleming thumbed through a few books.

"It's beyond me," he said, "All scientific gobbledygook, written in Latin. Looks like it's to do with chemistry, though. That much I do know."

"I suspect that Doctor Muelhoffer designed his new sedative here and probably tested it on unwilling subjects. Have you seen the operating table?"

"I had noticed that, yes. It's a bit big to miss, really." He walked over and gave it a cursory inspection. "Looks clean though. I'd say it hasn't been used for any medical procedures involving blood. Blood tends to stain the wood, you know? A real nightmare to clean, it is."

"Mmmm," said Rhodes, distracted by the myriad of chemicals arranged before him. "This really is a first rate laboratory; all the latest scientific apparatus and science journals. This must have cost a fortune. I wonder how he paid for it all?"

"Rather too expensive for a simple asylum doctor to purchase, isn't it? This must have cost thousands of pounds. Have you found anything incriminating yet? I'd like to get out of here before we're caught."

"I believe I have." Rhodes was thumbing through a notebook of handwritten pages that lay near a vial of green liquid. "These are his notes on how he developed his sedative; priceless to a biochemist, such as myself! And this," he said, snatching the vial from the table and holding it up

to the light, "is the secret sedative that he claims can work miracles. I'd like a chance to study this in my own laboratory."

"Why don't you take it then, Rhodes? I'm sure Doctor Mulesnuffler won't mind, will he?"

"Muelhoffer. While I'm sure he *will* mind, he doesn't really have much say in the matter, does he? Let's go then, Bratton. We have a long walk to the manor tonight and the sooner we leave the sooner we can get back. No point in outstaying our welcome, either."

Rhodes released the catch that opened the door and it swung open. "This drug, if it works, could mean..."

"HALT!" called a German voice from somewhere up the left side of the corridor.

Rhodes and Fleming whipped their heads round to see a group of three guards advancing towards them from the direction of the storeroom. Each held a wooden club in a menacing posture; the lead guard also held a lantern.

"Quick Rhodes!" cried Fleming fumbling for his revolver. "If they catch us before we can escape we've had it, haven't we? Throw your sleeping draught!"

"We'll never make it through without passing out!" Rhodes drew the last vial from the pocket.

"We can go for the front door. All this noise is bound to summon other guards, and I've got Betty loaded. Quick!" The guards were walking slowly towards them, smiling the smile of men who were looking forward to causing the intruders a great deal of physical harm. "NOW!"

Rhodes hesitated for a brief second (he did not like having to make quick decisions at the best of times) and then threw the vial at the feet of the lead guard. As the purple smoke began to billow forth into the narrow corridor, Rhodes and Fleming covered their nose and mouth with handkerchiefs. They sprinted to their end of the corridor, hearing four distinct thuds as each guard succumbed to the noxious vapours, but not stopping to look back as they rounded the corner at the end.

It had all gone horribly wrong.

They ran past closed doorways and barred windows, Rhodes shouting back at the slower moving Fleming that he was sure the entrance hall would be at the end of the corridor. They rounded another left-handed corner and ahead Rhodes saw the entrance hall. He ran forward and realised too late that he had made a horrible mistake.

Chapter Fourteen: The Truth Revealed

Trapped!

Sure enough, Rhodes had led them back to the entrance hall but instead of an empty hall there stood four burly guards in a rough semi-circle, each armed with a revolver levelled in the direction of Rhodes and Fleming.

Doctor Muelhoffer, still wearing his grey flannel suit, stood nearest the door, a wicked grin on his clean-shaven face. Rhodes spun on the spot, reversing his direction, hoping to be able to flee back up the corridor they had just fled down, but two more guards blocked the way. With no sleeping draught left and Fleming unlikely to get off one clean shot before they were gunned down, Rhodes resigned himself to diplomacy.

"So this is how it ends, Doctor Muelhoffer?" said Rhodes calmly. "Your men shoot us, you dispose of the bodies in the bog, and no one is any the wiser. A fiendish plan!"

"Not kvite, Herr Rhodes, not kvite," leered Muelhoffer. "I had not planned on shooting you, zough ze idea of placing your spent bodies in ze bog is von I had not considered myself. No, for you zhere is much verse in store."

"I suppose you're going to declare us insane, eh? Keep us in your filthy asylum for the rest of our natural lives, are you? Well it won't work," spat Fleming. "I'm also a doctor, and I can declare myself sane! Ha! Bet you never thought of that, did you?"

Muelhoffer raised one eyebrow. "Vonce again, I must profess zat ze idea did not cross my mind. You English, you are so melodramatic about death. No, for ze pair of you I have planned a most inelegant ending. Shall we go, gentlemen?" He gestured to the stairs that lead to the second floor.

"Before we go, Doctor" said Rhodes, "there are a few things I would like to know, idle curiosity from a condemned man and all that. I trust you are honourable enough to grant me a last wish?"

"Vonce again vis ze melodrama! Oh, I am going to miss you, Herr Professor Rhodes. You have played ze game vell, but sadly not vell enough." He rubbed his smooth chin thoughtfully for a few moments. "I have sought it through and I will grant you your last vish. Shall we say five kvestions?"

"Is that each or all together?" blurted Fleming. "Oh! I hope that doesn't count as one of our questions, does it? I didn't mean it to, did I? I was just trying to make sure I understood the..."

"Shut up!" ordered Muelhoffer impatiently. "Herr Professor Rhodes vill have five kvestions; you vill have two. I like you much less." He turned his attention back to Rhodes, politely ignoring Fleming's mumbling about "Ruddy Germans."

"Where to begin?" said Rhodes. "Let me start at the beginning, always the best place. I know that Herr von Steinhagen was involved, but how did you become involved in this affair?"

"Ah! Straight to business!" smiled Muelhoffer, pausing as he removed his monocle, cleaned it on a silk handkerchief, and replaced it over his eye. "I like zat. Ze embassy knew zat Lord Cotterill vos in financial trouble und zat his last two designs had been turned down by your government. Zey also knew zat zees designs ver extremely ingenious - zat zey could make a difference to our plans for territorial conkvest.

"Herr Oberst von Steinhagen, our military attaché to England, vos a friend of mine from ze old days und he knew of my secret research projects ven I vos living in Germany. Good old von Steinhagen has been secretly funding my research for years through German agents living in England. He also knew from recent communications I had passed to our ambassador zat I had perfected my new drug und, entirely by coincidence, vos living near to Cotterill Manor.

"Ven Lord Cotterill's third design in a row vos rejected, our spies informed us almost immediately by ze vay, he contacted me und arranged a visit for ze following day. He said zat he may have had some verk for me. Herr von Steinhagen approached Lord Cotterill vis an offer but he refused to accept; too patriotic for his own good.

"After he had spoken vis Lord Cotterill, von Steinhagen visited ze asylum as planned und asked for my assistance in akviring ze plans by any means. Of course, I was only too happy to aid ze Fatherland in its hour of need."

"So," said Rhodes, "I was right to suspect that Herr von Steinhagen had paid you a visit."

"A good guess, Herr Professor."

"I had my suspicions when I learned that he did not take the train directly back to London but got off at Ricksborough station, but I had nothing concrete until I saw your diary whilst I was wiping off the tea I spilled over your desk. That confirmed that you and von Steinhagen had met, but nothing more. You have just supplied the missing piece of that particular puzzle."

"It vill do you no good in ze long term, but please continue. It is most amusing for me to votch your tiny brain try to grasp ze genius of my verk."

"Question two," said Rhodes. "This new drug of yours, I assume that it isn't actually a sedative?"

"Not kvite. It is a sedative but von vis other, more desirable effects. You see, ven it is injected it makes ze patient relaxed and susceptible to hypnotic suggestion, a form of mind control drug. Vis it I can make people do exactly as I vish. Clever, yes?"

"You fiend!" hissed Fleming. "You'll never get way with it, you Hun devil!"

"I sought ve had finished vis ze melodrama?" Muelhoffer snorted, turning to face Fleming. "I have already managed to 'get away vis it', Herr Doctor. My drug verks perfectly, as I have already proven vis Villy. He performed admirably. A pity zat he fell into ze bog und drowned."

"What makes you say that?" asked Fleming.

"I vill take zat as von of your kvestions, Herr Doctor. Villy vos completely under my control; his orders ver to kill Lord Cotterill und zen return to ze asylum. Sadly he only managed to carry out ze first part successfully. Obviously my drug still needs verk."

"There you are wrong, doctor," said Rhodes with a wide grin on his face. "Willy was not completely under your control; we found him on the moors, hiding in a cave. Oh, I suspect that when he killed Lord Cotterill he was obeying your ghastly orders, but at some point on the return journey your drug wore off, or Willy's own personality broke through your programming. Either way, he is safely in the hands of the local police sergeant and soon to be handed over to Scotland Yard."

"You lie!" hissed Muelhoffer. "My drug verks perfectly!"

"I'm afraid it does not. However, there may be another reason why it failed to work as well as you expected. Tell me, what else did you do to Willy before he killed Lord Cotterill? When we encountered him he was not quite...human."

"Ah! That vos the second part of my ingenious plan," gloated Muelhoffer, regaining his composure. "You see, I vos unable to continue my research in Germany because I vos dabbling in matters ze German scientific community found...distasteful. I vos perfecting a new drug to unleash all zat is vild in man, ze bestial nature if you like. It gives ze imbiber ze strength of three men, but zhere ver inadvertent side effects."

"Yes, it makes him grow in height and build, as well as turning nails into claws. You really did awaken the beast, didn't you?" said Rhodes. "A pity it obviously can't be tamed. It would seem that you foiled part of your own plan by trying to be too clever, Herr Doctor."

"Do not fear. My next generation drug vill have none of zees extra effects."

"I assume that this first generation drug was based, at least in part, on the work of Doctor Jekyll? You really should have read his notes more carefully. His experiments were failures."

"Unfortunately Herr Oberst von Steinhagen could not vait until ze drug vos perfected und I did not trust Villy to kill Lord Cotterill in his normal form visout being caught. Before he left I gave him instructions to take ze drug just before he killed Lord Cotterill. At least he managed zat part."

"Which would explain why we caught him eating a sheep," explained Rhodes. "I suspect that his baser side overrode your mind control, but left him confused and still bestial in thought. Perhaps a deranged maniac was not the best choice of subject?"

"You must use vot tools you have to hand, Herr Professor. It does not matter. I vill pay ze good sergeant a visit, offer to pay some money to his favourite charity, und Villy will be returned. Should the good sergeant not vish to play cricket, as you English say, zen it vill be a pity zat Villy escaped und killed him before drowning in ze bog.

"Zhere vill be no loose ends." He straightened his tie and smoothed down a patch of hair that had started to stand. "Now, I believe zat you have now used three kvestions. Do you vish to continue or are you ready to come kvietly?"

"I'd rather like to continue," replied Rhodes. "I'm learning so much."

"A pity you vill not have chance to use zis knowledge. Would you prefer somewhere more comfortable? Maybe ve could move to my office?" Muelhoffer gestured to the stairs again. "Ve could at least sit like civilised men vile ve talk. Maybe dvink some of your English tea?"

"No, I'm quite comfortable standing here. Are you all right with this, Bratton?"

"Oh, yes, Rhodes. I'm just fine and dandy, aren't I?" Fleming gave Muelhoffer a stare that would have made lesser men quake in their boots. Muelhoffer simply scoffed and returned his attention to Rhodes.

"Please, continue zen, if you are ready."

"Question four," said Rhodes ticking it off on his hand. "We now know how you got involved and how you used Willy to perform the deed, though I think it can be safely said that he was not himself, in purpose or in body, during the murder.

"What did you do with the plans when your man stole them from the safe? I assume they are here as Lady Henrietta is not due to visit you until tomorrow night, when I assume she will collect them for transportation back to Germany."

Muelhoffer laughed a hollow laugh that echoed around the entrance hall. "Maybe I have over estimated your talent, Herr Professor? The plans left here ze day after ze murder. I had von of my men take zem to London ze very next morning to deliver to ze Embassy. Ze plans are safely out of your reach now and soon vill be in the arms of our beloved Kaiser."

"But Lady Henrietta?" he prompted, unwilling to believe for a moment that a maniacal German alchemist had somehow outwitted him.

"You foolish little man," he chided. "Have you not verked it out? Lady Henrietta is not a person, she is a ship!" He laughed loudly again. "She sails tomorrow on ze evening tide, carrying ze plans back to Germany."

"How did you know we were here?"

"Simple. Ven you activated ze secret door to my hidden laboratory it rang a bell in my office. I knew at vonce zat it vos you. Whilst you ver snooping I had my men check ze entrances to ze building und vot did zey discover? Ze rear door had been picked. By pure fortune you encountered zem as zey were returning to inform me of zis fact. Catching you vos very simple." He laughed his hollow, evil laugh.

"I should have guessed. No one would leave a secret laboratory unguarded in some manner. Bravo, Doctor, bravo. It seems that you have held all the cards in this game."

Suddenly Muelhoffer stopped laughing, his humour spent and his patience exhausted. "Und zat vos your last kvestion," he snapped.

"How stupid of me!" spat Rhodes, slapping a hand against his forehead. "If I had figured that out we needn't have returned here until *after* we had retrieved the plans." He turned to his friend, his eyes downcast. "Bratton, my friend, can you forgive me for leading you to your doom?"

"Oh, don't worry, Rhodes. It could have happened to anyone, couldn't it? You're only human, after all." Fleming gave Rhodes a friendly smile.

"How touching!" scoffed Muelhoffer. "Now, you have had your kvestions und I have verk to do. Guards, please bring zem to ze operation room. I have a lobotomy to perform! Yes, ze great Professor Rhodes, consulting detective und inventor, will be reduced to ze mental state of a simpleton child! Wahahahahaha!" Still laughing, he turned and walked towards the stairs.

"Er, hang on a moment there, doctor," said Fleming casually as the guards moved in to lead (drag?) them away to their doom. "I still have one question left, don't I?"

"Vot?" Muelhoffer stopped walking and whipped his head around to face Rhodes and Fleming, his right hand gripping the banister in frustration. Slowly, his grip lessened and his more pleasant smile returned. "Oh, very vell," he sighed, "ask your final kvestion und make it kvick."

"Do you like the smell of violets?" asked Fleming, reaching into his jacket side pocket and withdrawing a vial of purple liquid. Before Muelhoffer or the guards could react Fleming smashed it by his foot, the familiar purple mist quickly expanding to fill the small room from floor to ceiling.

"See you after your nap, Doctor Mulefodder!" he shouted.

"Muelhoffer," gasped Rhodes, as he blacked out.

* * *

For the second time in as many days, Rhodes found himself lying in a peaceful summer meadow. This time, he thought, I'm ready for him! Ah, here it comes, the buzzing insect that will turn out to be Bratton's voice when I awaken, which should be any time...

"Where are we?" groaned Rhodes, his head thumping and his throat dry. "Have I been lobotomised?"

"Not unless your sleeping draught has a nasty little side effect you never warned me of you haven't. We're still in the madhouse, aren't we?" Fleming's blurry hair-covered face loomed into view. "And as an added bonus we're safe and sound."

"How? Wait, I remember; you had a vial of my sleeping draught. You threw it to the ground and we all passed out. What happened to Muelhoffer?" Rhodes tried to stand, wobbled, and fell onto his rear. Fleming bent down and held Rhodes under the arms as he tried to stand again. "Just a little woozy."

"Muleclogger escaped," explained Fleming. "I threw down the vial, and you and the guards passed out within seconds. That swine doctor was further away and managed to escape upstairs before the gas could affect him, didn't he? I thought about giving chase but then I decided I'd better make sure you were all right."

"I've put all the guards in an empty cell and locked the door, so don't worry about them. By the time I'd done that and gone upstairs to hunt down old Mulechopper I found out he'd fled into the night. Apparently he had a secret stairwell in his office that lead down to a tunnel. He fled to the outside. Ruddy rat, he is."

"Well done on all counts, and don't worry about Muelhoffer; I'll wire Scotland Yard in the morning and have them pick him up at the train station. That's the last we'll see of him and his foul potions, I'll wager. We'll ask Sergeant Barnes to contact his superiors to take charge now. Come now, we have to return to London on the morning train to stop that ship from departing!"

"Be nice to be home again, won't it, Rhodes? A bit of peace and quiet."

"Er...Bratton, from where did you get the vial?" quizzed Rhodes remembering that although he thought he had brought four vials to Devonshire he had actually only brought three, and that he had used all of those during the course of the investigation.

"Ah! I took that the first night we were at the manor, just after we went to bed."

"So that's where it went! I felt sure I had brought four with me. A clever idea that, old friend! If you hadn't taken it I may have used it elsewhere in the investigation, and then we'd be in a right pickle." Rhodes patted Fleming on the back and smiled kindly. "There's one thing I don't understand though, Bratton?"

"Oh? Really? And what would that be, Rhodes?"

"Why didn't you pass out along with myself and the guards?"

"Ah! Well, I've been sniffing your sleeping draught ever since you first told me about it, haven't I? It's been helping me sleep the last month. I guess I've built up a bit of tolerance to the ruddy stuff now. No idea how I'm going to get to sleep now, though."

Rhodes looked shocked that his old friend had been quietly testing his secret research behind his back but did not pass comment; instead he just raised an eyebrow at his colleague. "Well," said Fleming, a little embarrassed, "I've had insomnia, haven't I?"