

## Chapter Five: The Body Speaks

Although Okehampton was the nearest station, Cotterill Manor lay close to the small village of Lower Fenton, really little more than a hamlet of twenty or so houses. Due to the presence of the manor, it had a telegraph office in the small shop-cum-post office (paid for by Lord Cotterill so he could keep in contact with London), a resident policeman (Sergeant Barnes), a church, and a doctor. It was at the doctor's surgery that Rhodes and Fleming found themselves after a short carriage ride.

"Good afternoon doctor," said Rhodes politely, extending his hand towards Doctor Locock. "I am Professor Rhodes, a detective from London aiding Miss Cotterill in the matter of her father's recent untimely demise."

Locock was a tall bespectacled man of average height and build in his late fifties with a penchant for wearing multiple layers of tweed. "Good afternoon to you, sir," he replied, shaking Rhodes hand firmly but with a look of suspicion in his brown eyes. "I am Doctor Reginald Locock, semi-retired but always willing to help in medical matters."

"This is my friend and colleague, Doctor Bratton Fleming," said Rhodes indicating Fleming. "A medical man like yourself."

"I expect you've heard of me, haven't you?" said Fleming, also extending his hand. A big smile, just visible through his extensive facial hair, was aimed at being friendly but came across more as a psychotic who had escaped from an asylum.

"Er...no, I am afraid I haven't. I know a Doctor Watson from London. He and a Mister Holm..." replied Doctor Locock, performing a perfunctory handshake as though fearing he may never see his hand again if this bushy faced stranger took a liking to it.

"We'd like to examine Lord Cotterill's body, doctor," interrupted Rhodes, trying to stop Fleming launching into one of his regular tirades against Watson. "To establish the exact cause of death."

Doctor Locock's face suddenly hardened. "I may be semi-retired, sir, but I am a professional doctor of many years experience. My report to the local constabulary was completed yesterday. A copy is no doubt available from Sergeant Barnes. I have nothing more to add on the matter."

"Of course, of course" said Rhodes, "but we're not here to question your judgement. We would merely like to re-examine the body for further clues. What was your diagnosis on the cause of death?" Rhodes, ever the statesman, was trying to sooth the doctor by subtly altering the course of the conversation. It seemed to be working.

"Multiple stab wounds to the arms and chest. The frenzied attack of a madman, in my professional opinion. No doubt the one who escaped from the local asylum. The sergeant said that he had been seen heading for this area."

"This matter has not been mentioned to me in person," said Rhodes narrowing his eyes. "But it does explain what our good sergeant was hunting for the night we arrived."

"There was an article in the local paper yesterday. The post office may still have a copy if you are lucky," said Doctor Locock. "I threw mine away earlier this morning I'm afraid."

"I wonder," mused Rhodes, "if it would be possible for Doctor Fleming to merely have a look at the body. Being a London doctor he tends to see more death from disease than from stabbings. It might help him as a doctor if he had the chance to study your techniques for determining such matters." A gentle smile highlighted Rhodes otherwise fairly angular face.

"Well, I don't suppose it could hurt," replied Doctor Locock, his pride restored knowing that a London doctor might know less than he on matters of death. "I can let you have five minutes. The undertaker from Okehampton will be here shortly to perform his services."

"Excellent! Five minutes should be more than enough," smiled Rhodes, ignoring Fleming's wide-eyed stare, his own silent protest at being accused of incompetency in one of the few matters he really understood.

Three minutes and twenty seconds later, Fleming stood over a low table on which lay the body of the late Lord Cotterill. A white sheet covered him from the waist down. To help preserve it from decay the body had been covered in ice and was a little stiff to the touch, and colder than corpses were normally.

"Right Bratton," said Rhodes, "you take as long as you'll need. I shall go and keep the good doctor busy with meaningless talk of a medical nature. You know I have the greatest trust in your skill as a doctor, old friend. If there is a clue to be found on this body then you'll be the one to discover it, not some local doctor."

Rhodes had made it a point never to apologise for anything he said or did in the course of an investigation, and Fleming knew that this was the nearest he would ever hear in the way of an apology for the early comments about Fleming's lack of skill in knife wounds. The door closed with a click as Rhodes headed back towards Doctor Locock's office.

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Twenty-six minutes later Rhodes and Fleming left the doctor's office and began walking down the lane to the post office, which was situated opposite the church. The sky was beginning to darken with the approach of rain clouds, and Fleming, who claimed he knew of such matters

from studying the local witchdoctors in the darkest Africa, predicted rainfall before the end of the day.

"No doubt a very accurate prediction Bratton," said Rhodes cynically. "What did you discover from Lord Cotterill's body?"

"Well," said Fleming, going into what Rhodes often referred to as 'doctor mode', "he wasn't killed by a knife, was he? No, these wounds were made by something entirely different. I'd bet my reputation on that fact, I would. From the pattern, the edging, and the depth, I'd swear that a beast of some sort made them."

"A beast? There are no such beasts on these moors," said Rhodes, a frown forming on his forehead as he contemplated Fleming's diagnosis.

"Oh no? You keep forgetting those huge black dogs with great big fangs, don't you? Anyway, I don't think it was a dog. The wounds reminded me of a lion, or something similar with big claws."

"I don't wish to question your medical expertise, but are you sure about this Bratton? Unless a local circus has lost a lion, I believe the only native wildlife here to be foxes, sheep, goats, and some cattle."

"And ruddy great, big dogs, of course."

"Anyway, we have proven, with evidence to back us up, that our killer was a man." Rhodes scowled, his mind trying to piece together two pieces of a puzzle that were completely different shapes, if not from different puzzles.

"Well, he may have had human feet, but he had sharp claws like a...OH NO!" Fleming shouted suddenly coming to a sudden halt, causing Rhodes to jump with a start for the second time that day. "I've heard stories about jaguar men living in South America. What if one of them is loose here on Dartmoor? I don't have my gun on me either, do I?"

"Calm down," said Rhodes, slowing his racing heart with deep breaths. "I doubt that jaguar men from South America, which are a myth by the way, are living wild in deepest Devon. It's too cold for them over here. Anything else...of importance?"

"Well, if you're sure about the jaguar men then I don't know what could have caused those wounds," Bratton continued picking up the pace again. "Anyway, as you suspected there are marks on the front of the forearms, exactly as if Lord Cotterill was trying to fend off this beast. I've seen similar wounds from lions on natives in the Sudan, you know?"

Rhodes grunted an affirmative. "Nothing of note on the legs, face, or neck. He definitely died from blood loss caused from his chest lacerations. It looks like the beast stood over him and took swipes with both claws, quite possibly for a few minutes. Strange thing is, though, I'd swear

that the beast used its front paws to do the deed. Most lions prefer to use their back claws while they hold on with the front ones, don't they?"

"Any puncture marks?" asked Rhodes. "Remember the initial blood spots I showed you on the carpet? I don't believe they could have been caused by a claw swipe. If they had his lordship may have had time to call out."

"Yes actually, there were. Just under the ribs. Driving upwards into the chest cavity. Would have likely caused his lordship to expel all the air from his lungs, winding him they call that, and probably be carried back a bit. Remember how big the killer was?"

"What?" Rhodes stopped walking. "Are you absolutely sure?"

"Course I am, aren't I?" said Fleming, also halting his forward progress.

"Very curious. Lions, and other beasts, swipe downwards or from side-to-side in order to maximise the power available in the blow. I know of no beasts that use their claws in a manner similar to daggers to drive upwards, even in the ursine family."

"Oh? Who are the ursines, then? Have I met them at a bridge gathering or something? Got a terrible memory for names, haven't I?"

"Bears, Bratton. Ursine is the Latin name for the bear family."

"Oh. Right. As you say though, Rhodes, I don't know of any animal that uses its claws that way, and I've shot most species in Africa at one time or another."

"I know," commented Rhodes. "We have their heads mounted in our study. Come on, I want to get a copy of yesterday's paper."

"Don't know why the elephant had to go, though," said Fleming picking up the pace again. "I liked old Nellie."

"Most people keep elephant feet for the purpose of standing wet umbrellas so they do not drip on the carpet. You had the whole head mounted. I also learnt something from the good doctor, you know?"

"Like I said at the time, it made an excellent pair of coat hooks," he said defensively. "Anyway, I thought you were just making small talk with Doctor Locock?"

"Of relevance to the case, Bratton, of relevance to the case. I rarely make small talk with complete strangers. However, as you rightly imply in your comment, I did not learn much of importance. Apparently Jacobs, who had ridden into town on horseback to awaken the doctor and the sergeant, roused Doctor Locock from his sleep on the night of the murder and asked for his attendance at the manor. Jacobs escorted the doctor back, leaving the sergeant to make his own way."

"Nothing strange there, then?" queried Fleming, expecting a sudden twist or the revelation of a major clue that he had, somehow, overlooked.

"Nothing at all. Ah, here we are!" They had reached the small shop-cum-post office. Rhodes pushed on the door, which opened with a tinkling sound as it knocked a small bell, and entered. As Fleming stepped over the threshold, a tall, thin man sporting a grey overcoat and matching cloth cap exited the shop, roughly brushing him aside and heading off into the village without looking back.

Fleming gave him a quick stare of feigned indifference, but staring at the back of someone's head has somewhat less effect than staring them in the face.

"Ruddy tourists," Fleming muttered, closing the door behind him and spotting the jars of sweets behind the counter. "Lovely! I'll have a half-pound of aniseed drops please, Rhodes. Keep up my strength on the long walk back, you know?"

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During the walk back Fleming munched on his aniseed drops ("Good for the bowels, aren't they?") while Rhodes read aloud from a copy of yesterday's newspaper that Mrs. Crawford, the elderly postmistress, had found in the back room and given him for free.

*Lunatic Escapes from Local Asylum*

*Kills Local Resident*

*Police Manhunt on the Moors*

*Local police are hunting for a madman who has escaped from the local asylum, according to Sergeant Barnes of the Okehampton District Constabulary Office.*

*The madman, Willy McTavish, also know as the Strathclyde Strangler, was serving a life sentence for the murder of three Scottish prostitutes. Although a death sentence was considered, the judge, Judge Reginald Montague-Fawkes, agreed to a proposal that McTavish should receive care at the asylum on Dartmoor run by German psychiatrist Doctor Ludwig Muelboffer.*

*Although Doctor Muelboffer was unavailable for comment, his aide, Gustav Schenker, told our reporter that the asylum was working with local police to recapture McTavish and said that he was responding well to a new treatment and was no longer a danger to the public.*

*McTavish is 5' 7" tall with short brown hair and green eyes. Sergeant Barnes has warned that he should not be approached. Any sighting of him should be reported to the nearest constabulary station.*

"What?" spluttered Fleming. "A ruddy Hun nut farmer, here on Dartmoor? I've heard it all now, haven't I?"

"What did you call Doctor Muelhoffer?" asked Rhodes folding away the paper as they entered the long driveway to Cotterill Manor.

"A nut farmer. You know, madmen are called nutters, and he has them locked in a special place, like cows on a farm. It's what we proper doctors call them anyway. You can't go around treating the criminally insane like normal people, you know?"

"Doctor Freud is making great progress with the study of the criminal mind in Vienna."

"See, another ruddy German (Rhodes' comment of "Austrian" was lost in Fleming's rant). It's all witchdoctory, you know. No, no good can come of messing with the human mind. You mark my word; it'll all come to nothing, this mind-doctoring. Anyway, just be in time for some afternoon tea I think," said Fleming as they rounded a bend in the drive and saw the house in front of them.

"I'm afraid not, old boy. Fetch the bags. We're going for a walk on the moors."

"What? Now? I haven't eaten since eleven o'clock, and then only a few sandwiches. I've even missed lunch because we walked back."

"Bring your aniseed drops. We have to catch a killer first if we hope to catch the real culprit behind this heinous crime. Oh, and make sure you bring your gun. We may need it this time."

## Chapter Six: The Dartmoor Devil

By the time Fleming had packed his 'exploration kit' (including a pile of roast beef sandwiches hastily prepared by the cook, who had taken a shine to Fleming due to his healthy appetite) and arrived at the rear of the manor, by the window of Lord Cotterill's study, it was almost four o'clock.

The sun would still provide a few hours' light, but the cloud was heavier than it had been earlier, and Fleming strongly suspected that it would be too dark to be of much use by six o'clock ("we'll be back for dinner then Rhodes?"). Still, Rhodes wanted to explore, and that meant he had good reason to head onto Dartmoor late in the evening with the light failing.

"If you'd be so kind as to pick up the trail, Bratton, we can begin," said Rhodes when Fleming had reappeared. "I'd like to get a good start before we lose the light."

"Well," said Fleming, kneeling down to locate the footprints, "they head towards the rear drive over there." He indicated a section of the driveway some twenty feet away. "If I was the killer I'd use the driveway to try and hide my footprints, but," he hesitated, "seeing as how we're dealing with a loony, I suspect he may have just ran straight across. We should pick up his trail easy enough."

The pair walked towards the drive, Fleming's eyes constantly on the ground in front of him. When they reached the drive, which was surfaced in gravel, they walked over it, on the straight line the footprints currently took.

Fleming knelt down again, scoured the vicinity with his eyes, and then stood up. "Well, seems I was right. The tracks head straight on towards that hill, don't they?" He pointed towards a small tor just visible through the gloom in the distance.

"Lead on then, Bratton. We have much ground to cover."

Cotterill Manor lay in the northern part of Dartmoor, some seven miles south of Okehampton and two miles east of Lower Fenton. The tracks were heading in a southerly direction, towards the heart of the moor but, as Fleming assured Rhodes with a slightly nervous tilt to his thick Welsh accent, they would never get more than a few miles before the light faded and night fell upon the desolate moor.

Tracking, you see, takes a great deal more time than simply walking. The tracker, in this case Doctor Bratton Fleming, needs to make periodic stops to check the trail; occasionally doubling back to re-check he is still on the right trail.

A skilled tracker is never rushed in pursuing his quarry. He also needs to understand his quarry, to understand why he is taking a certain route over others, so that he can make an educated

guess as to the direction to follow when the trail fades, such as when passing over rocky terrain. Yes, it took a keen eye and sharp mind to track a man. Well, a sharp eye at least.

"Well?" prompted Rhodes after two hours of slogging across damp grass. "What have you deduced?"

"Well, he's a nutter, isn't he?" replied Fleming, stopping to stretch his back. "If you look at the way we've come," he said, waving his hand behind him in the rough direction of the manor, "he's gone straight all the way. There've been several times he could have gone to stony ground to conceal his tracks or headed for wetlands so his footprints would be swamped, but he just keeps going."

"Do you know what lies ahead?"

"I don't suppose it's a nice warm country pub with good food and real ale, is it?" Bratton checked his pocket watch - half past six and no sandwiches left. By the time they got back it would at least eight o'clock and they would have missed dinner.

"No, Bratton," sighed Rhodes. "By my calculations, just over ten miles straight ahead of our current position lies the lunatic asylum from which Willy McTavish originally escaped. Were I a suspicious man I would suspect that Willy was heading home, although I cannot for the life of me think why."

"I think a loony house is better than being out here at night, even if you are a deranged strangler from Scotland," said Fleming shivering. The air was growing colder and the sky steadily darker. Rain, often a traveller's constant companion on Dartmoor, would soon make its presence felt.

"We'll continue for another hour, Bratton, and then we'll head back," said Rhodes looking at the sky. He was no expert in outdoor matters, but even he recognised rain clouds when he saw them.

They had barely taken a hundred steps when the heavens opened, releasing a torrent of cold water on to the moor. Fleming, who really did know something about the outdoors, shouted across at Rhodes, now a rain sodden shape barely discernible through the rain.

"We'd better find somewhere to hide for a bit. This isn't going to stop anytime soon, and we'll catch our death of cold if we get too wet. Follow me." Fleming strode forward towards a rocky outcropping he had spotted earlier. Yes, he thought, there's an overhang. We can shelter under that until the rain passes.

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"An excellent choice of hideout," said Rhodes pulling himself under the overhanging rock. "We should be able to stay here for quite a while. Did you ever consider becoming a professional guide?"

"For a while, yes," said Fleming, "sucking on the last of his aniseed drops. "But then I thought I'd be more useful as a doctor. Always fancied being a doctor, you know? Plus there isn't a great deal of money in being a guide, is there?"

Fleming leant back on what he assumed was a dark patch of rock and promptly disappeared from sight, falling, it seemed, straight through the solid rock. "Ruddy hell!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I've found a cave! And it's dry!"

"Well done, Bratton!" cried Rhodes pulling a small rectangular object from a pouch on his belt and held it in his left hand. With his right hand he lifted his jacket seam slightly to reveal a bulky box with a small handle on the side. A cable ran from the box to the object in Rhodes' left hand. He began turning the handle as fast as he could and after fifty or so turns a bright light shone out of the device in his hand.

"Ah!" he said to himself. "The patented 'Rhodes' Adjustable Illuminator', finest battery powered hand lamp on the market. Are you there, Bratton?"

Rhodes adjusted the beam slightly and shone the light into the cave mouth, illuminating the prone form of Bratton Fleming. Fleming raised himself on his elbows and winced as the edge of the light caught his eyes. "Ruddy hell, Rhodes," he said turning his face away, "have you been tinkering with that thing again? You could have burnt my eyes out there."

"Nonsense," scoffed Rhodes, "and this is the standard market version sold all over the world. I am not known for my tinkering, but for my inventing. It may have escaped your attention but I have five patents, you know? Three of them in the field of electricity."

"I never liked that electricity stuff," said Fleming, as Rhodes moved the light away from his face. "I much prefer gas, don't I? I had a favourite pair of trousers when I was a boy that my mum threw out. She said I'd grown too big, and my trousers had lost their electricity."

"Elasticity. Slightly different principal. Electricity is the...oh never mind," said Rhodes, noticing the trance-like look forming on Fleming's face. Every time Rhodes set out to explain a scientific principal Fleming switched off, as if protecting his brain from learning something dangerous or simply too complex for it to handle. "Anyway, let us have a look at this cave. We might be able to light a...shhhhh!" he hissed suddenly.

Fleming opened his mouth to speak but Rhodes waved him quiet. Both men strained their ears against the wind and rain howling past the nearby cave opening. Hidden in the background noise

was a distinctly animal-like grunting, and it was coming from deeper within the cave. Fleming slowly reached down to his belt and drew his revolver from his belt.

"Ruddy hell, Rhodes," he whispered, "it's one of them giant dogs!"

"Follow me. Quietly," said Rhodes, placing a gauze cover over his hand lamp and reducing the beam strength, leaving him barely enough light to see by but significantly reducing the chances of whatever beast lay ahead of detecting their passage from the light shining before them. The cave mouth grew steadily darker. Both men waited until their eyes had adjusted to the dimmer illumination before starting off.

The cave was high enough for both men to walk through without stooping too much, though Fleming, being the shortest of the pair by a head, had the easier time. The cave was not particularly deep; Fleming had fallen into a small chamber at the mouth of the cave, from which led a single tunnel, heading downwards at a shallow angle.

Following the tunnel, which, luckily, was dry because the surface was quite smooth and slippery enough as it was, led to sharp turn. The sound of the beast, crunching on something unknown, was growing louder. Rhodes halted and ever so slowly turned to face Fleming.

"Whatever it may be," he whispered, "it is just around this corner. Prepare yourself Bratton. On the count of three we'll leap round and take it by surprise."

"I don't think it will be as ruddy surprised as I'll be, will it?" replied Fleming, gripping his revolver tighter.

"One...two...thr..."

"Wait a moment, Rhodes," Fleming hissed through his teeth, grabbing his colleague's arm. "What exactly is our plan?"

"Well, assuming that this is some wild dog...and not a big, black one," he added hastily as he saw the colour drain from Fleming's barely-visible face, "then our presence will be enough to scare it away, and we can use the cave as shelter."

"And what if it's a bear, or a jaguar man, or, Heaven forbid, one of them man-eating black dogs of Dartmoor? What then, eh?"

"Pretend it's a lion and shoot it. Now get ready. One...two...three!" whispered Rhodes, darting around the corner as quickly as a snake after a mouse, as he whispered the last syllable; Fleming was right on his heels, mumbling a swift prayer and brandishing his revolver like he knew how to use it (which was barely the truth).

Both men rounded the corner into another round chamber. Unlike the one at the mouth of the cave, this one was larger, perhaps thirty feet across, and had a ceiling high enough to allow both men to stand. The smell of death assailed their nostrils as they entered the cave; Rhodes

whipping the lamp cover away and strengthening the beam in one fluid motion, Fleming aiming his revolver, looking for a target.

Crouched in the opposite corner was a hairy beast, feasting on the carcass of a recently killed sheep. It was humanoid, crouched down on its haunches, and wearing ripped clothes. Rhodes took in as much information as he could before the beast turned its face to the light, yellow eyes gleaming, and then sprung at him, snarling and slaving like one of the black dogs that Fleming so feared encountering.

Panic ensued. Rhodes stepped back, his right arm outstretched to ward off the creature, which shoulder-barged him backwards into Fleming ("Look out Rhodes!"). Fleming, his gun arm outstretched, lost his balance and stumbled backwards, his gun firing harmlessly into the ceiling and ricocheting into the dead sheep. The sound echoed like cannon fire in the enclosed confines of the chamber, momentarily stunning the creature, and leaving Rhodes and Fleming with ringing ears.

In that split second Rhodes rolled across the floor, reaching into his outer jacket pocket, his hand lamp shining wildly, casting strange shadows across the chamber.

Fleming, not yet fully recovered, fired again, missing his target but causing Rhodes to remain low as the bullet ricocheted off the back wall. A fierce blow from the back of the beast's hand knocked the air from Fleming's chest as he slammed back into the wall and slid down the wall, stunned from the force of the combined blows.

The beast turned to face Rhodes, who had managed to get to his feet but was still fumbling in his jacket pocket. Rhodes stared into its face, studying the creature whilst (finally) extracting a small glass vial from his jacket.

Without warning the beast lunged, a look of fear clearly visible in its eyes. Rhodes barely managed to move his hand before a vicious-looking clawed hand swiped through the air it had occupied a split-second earlier.

"So," Rhodes taunted, "you want this do you?"

In the time it took him to speak, the beast had swung out its left hand, catching Rhodes square in the face. Blood spurted from a lip wound and he felt sure that one of his teeth had been knocked loose.

He lost his balance and fell onto his back, his lamp coming free and shining onto the back wall, into the glassy-eyes of the dead sheep. The vial had also rolled loose and was lying several feet away; the purple liquid within glittering in the backlit chamber.

A quick backwards glance showed the beast stalking closer to him, murderous intent in its eyes. "Not this way. Not without a fight," he said through gritted teeth as he dived for the vial. Strong hands gripped his ankles, pulling him backwards, away from the stoppered vial.

Rhodes threw a quick glance behind him as he clawed at the rock floor; the beast was smiling. Not a polite "would you like more tea?" kind of smile, but one of a fiend knowing that victory over his latest victim was only inches away.

With a final burst of strength Rhodes kicked back and then lunged forward. His plan worked; his feet slammed into the beast's chest, momentarily causing it to loosen its grip. Before it could reaffirm its superior strength, Rhodes grabbed the vial and spun onto his back.

"Goodnight," he spat, hurling the vial onto the floor next to him. The glass smashed, releasing the purple contents into the chamber. A thin, light purple smoke hissed forth from the broken vial as the hoped-for chemical reaction took place, filling the entire cave with its fragrant odour within a matter of seconds.

Violets.

I've smelt them recently, thought Rhodes, his head spinning.

A nearby thud reached his ringing ears.

A last thought passed through his mind. It must have worked.

Then total blackness enveloped him and held him tight.

## Chapter Seven: Mad Man Willy

Rhodes lay in a field of long grass, the late summer sun beating down on his face, a warm breeze blowing over his exposed skin and the knowledge that he was not alone comforting his troubled mind. A perfect day to spend with...a small buzzing insect whizzed past his ear. Rhodes tried to flick it away but his arms would not move. The buzzing grew louder and more irritating; Rhodes grew more concerned about his paralysis. Strange, thought Rhodes, but I'd swear that insect had a Welsh accent.

"Rhodes? Rhodes! Are you awake, man?"

Fighting against the heavy weight pressing down on his eyelids Rhodes slowly opened his eyes. A blurry vision swam before him, and he forced himself to blink several times. Excruciatingly slowly, the vision solidified into the fuzzy-faced image of Bratton Fleming, beaming down at him as if he hadn't seen him for several months.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "You're alive!"

"Yes, Bratton. Quite alive, but a little sore in the head and it hurts to talk. Would you care to talk more quietly please?" Rhodes lifted himself on to his elbows and shook his still-foggy head a few times. "Where are we? What happened? The beast...!" he started urgently.

"Don't worry about the beast," soothed Fleming. "You just take a moment to recover. Have a sip of this medicinal brandy." Fleming offered Rhodes his hip flask, which he took without comment and raised to his lips, grimacing as the alcohol made contact with the newly forming scab on his lower lip. "I've taken care of the beast," said Fleming casually.

"You haven't...?"

"No, no. I just tied him up when I awoke. He's over in the corner there, isn't he?" Fleming indicated the corner opposite the dead sheep. Sure enough, in the corner, illuminated by Rhodes' hand lamp, the sleeping form of something less hairy than it had seemed...how long ago was it?

"How long have we been out, Bratton?"

"Oh, about three hours. I woke up about an hour ago I guess. It's just gone a quarter to eleven. I found this in Willy's trouser pocket when I searched him, didn't I?" He handed Rhodes a mud stained, silk handkerchief. Rhodes examined it briefly and stuffed it into his top pocket.

"How come you weren't so badly affected? My sleeping draught could knock out an elephant in this confined space," said Rhodes, working himself into a sitting position. His head was slowly clearing and his senses returning.

"Ah...well...I guess I was further back, wasn't I? And I was already half-unconscious thanks to that thing over there, wasn't I? I guess I took less into my lungs than you two. You were both

rather close to the impact point, so you had a higher concentration." Fleming had turned his head away from Rhodes.

"Unusually," said Rhodes slowly, "you haven't leapt about like a young child in a sweet shop when I have revealed one of my new inventions?"

His face still turned away, Fleming replied. "Well, it's not really the time now, is it?"

"Quite." Rhodes rose to his feet, a little shaky but capable of movement. His sleeping draught ('Rhodes' Slumber Inducer'), which he had proposed could serve as both a weapon for the constabulary wishing to capture a suspect alive and unharmed and also aid in medical operations, was his latest invention. Although an expert in the relatively new field of electricity, Rhodes was also a renowned biochemist and had been working on the gas for the last few months in his private lab back at his apartment. The patent office's acceptance had arrived only a few days before the case began, but this was its first trial in anger.

Rhodes made his way over to the sleeping beast, noticing that Fleming had done a good job with the ropes. He studied the inert form carefully. Roughly five feet, eight inches tall, he mused, no more than 12 stone in weight, bare feet but no cuts on the sole, short hair. Yes, this was Willy McTavish all right, but it wasn't the beast that attacked them.

"It must have been the light," offered Fleming from behind him. "In the light he looked different. He looked like one of them barbarous apes that I had a fight with a few years back. Tried to steal my food, didn't it?"

"That was a Barbary ape if I remember correctly," said Rhodes still studying the unconscious Willy before him. "And it was no trick of the light. Ah! He's stirring. Good. I should be able to question him shortly. Do you have your gun ready?" he asked Fleming calmly. "Just in case he gets agitated and tries to escape. Some of these madmen possess phenomenal strength."

"Tell me about it," said Fleming, suddenly remembering the pain in his chest as he drew his revolver and checked it was loaded. "I haven't felt this bad since that fight I had with that over-muscled Chinese prize-fighter in Shanghai last year."

"They call that a massage Bratton; it's supposed to relax you. And that 'prize fighter' was a young girl weighing no more than seven stone fully clothed."

"You call it what you like. She might have killed me if I hadn't knocked her out first."

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"Good evening Willy," said Rhodes softly. "I am Professor James Rhodes, and this is Doctor Bratton Fleming." Rhodes acute ocular perception noticed Willy flinch at the word 'doctor'.

"We're not going to hurt you, but we are going to ask you some questions."

Willy, still firmly bound hand and foot, was now sitting against the back of the wall. Rhodes had dimmed the light slightly and turned it away from his face, much to Fleming's chagrin.

"Firstly, where did you get this?" He showed Willy a silk handkerchief embroidered with the letters 'A.C.' "Bratton found it sticking out of your pocket when he tied you up."

"I dinna remember," grunted Willy, his Scottish accent being of the softer Lowlands variety.

"As I suspected," mused Rhodes. "What exactly do you remember of the events of the last few days? Take your time, please."

Willy's face strained with concentration. "Och, I remember getting my daily medicine and then...then...nothing. I canna remember a thing. Where am I, anyway?"

"You have no memory of escaping from the lunatic asylum? Or of roaming the moor for four days? Not even killing Lord Cotterill, a local landowner?"

"I haven't killed no one since I got put away. I've been having...special treatment, to stop me being so dangerous to people. The doctor (another wince) said I was making good progress and could be let out soon."

"Which doctor?"

"That would be right," interrupted Fleming with vehemence in his voice. "A ruddy Hun witch doctor! No doubt using medicine made from sausages!"

"Doctor Muelhoffer," winced Willy. "He gives me drugs to make me feel calmer. Sedatives he calls them. Makes me feel tired. Then he talks to me."

"Interesting, very interesting. What does he say?" prompted Rhodes, taking mental notes the whole time. He rarely relied on pen and paper, preferring his own memories of not just the words but the facial expressions as people spoke.

"Not sure. Too tired. My head's all foggy from the medicine."

Rhodes straightened his back. "I think I have enough information now Bratton. Come on, we'll take Willy down to the sergeant in the village." He turned away from Willy and lowered his voice. "This man has been subjected to some sort of drug that has dulled his memory. Maybe hypnotism, as well. I think we need to pay a visit to Doctor Muelhoffer tomorrow morning, don't you?"

"If you reckon we must," said Fleming. "I don't like the sound of him, though."

"Just promise you'll be on your best behaviour and not insult him," pleaded Rhodes. "There are likely to be vital clues at the asylum, many of them of a medical nature. I need you on your toes. This case is far from over and more dastardly than a simple murder and robbery."

"Well," said Fleming, "I'll try. But if he starts anything," he added quickly "I'll have to respond. Welsh pride runs deep in these veins, you know?"

"I know." Rhodes remembered the previous dozen encounters when Fleming's pride had gotten the better of him.

"Ruddy Hun quack," mumbled Fleming under his breath as he dragged Willy to his feet and pushed him down the tunnel towards the cave entrance, his gun aimed straight at Willy's back.

\* \* \*

Two hours later, Rhodes, Fleming, and Mad Man Willy (as Fleming now insisted on referring to him) arrived at the house of Sergeant Barnes. Fortunately the rain had stopped, though the grass was soaking wet and there were many puddles. Fleming had, reluctantly, and only at Rhodes' insistence, given Mad Man Willy a few small sips of brandy to ward off the chill ("It's not my fault he didn't steal any shoes when he escaped, is it?" he had argued fruitlessly).

Rhodes had banged on the door until the sergeant, dressed in his nightshirt and brandishing a shotgun, opened it and, somewhat shocked at seeing Willy with them, invited them in.

Mrs Barnes was roused from her sleep, once Willy had been thrown into the small cell that abutted Sergeant Barnes' cottage, to make a pot of tea, and a ham sandwich for Fleming. Over the next half an hour Rhodes slowly explained the chain of events leading to the capture of Willy.

"So you see, sergeant," he finished, "we'd like Willy kept in your cell and not returned to the lunatic asylum. We don't want word of his capture mentioned to anyone until we say so. Is that clear?"

"Bain't nat'ral," muttered Sergeant Barnes. "You may 'ave fancy ways in London, but down yer we got procedures t' follow. I could get the sack for this."

"Let me put it another way, sergeant," said Rhodes, smiling politely. "In two days we shall have wrapped up this crime and brought the true murderer to justice. Once we have returned to London you can tell everyone that you caught Willy single-handed. Doctor Fleming and myself will witness that we saw you apprehend him yourself and will happily inform your superiors as to your bravery in the face of this dangerous criminal."

"Yer mean...?" Sergeant Barnes looked stunned at what Rhodes was proposing. "Yer mean yer'd let me take all the credit for 'is recapture?"

"Totally," smiled Rhodes. "But you must promise that no one will ever learn of this conversation nor of the true means of his capture. Do we have a deal?" He stuck out his right hand.

Sergeant Barnes leaned over and shook it firmly. "I reckon we does, mister detective, I reckon we does. Yer ain't such a bad sort, af'er all."

"Oh, one more thing sergeant. Were you out on the moor again tonight? As we were bringing Willy back into custody I thought I saw a lantern light, not far from the village. It would have been about an hour ago."

"No, no, I were tucked up in bed by then. It might o' been a poacher going t' set 'his traps. We got deer on the moors," Barnes yawned. "Well, if yer'll excuse me I's goin' back t' bed."

With the deal struck and Mad Man Willy safely behind bars, Rhodes and Fleming departed without further comment. As they neared the end of their journey Bratton spoke for the first time since they left the village. "I don't remember seeing any lantern near the village, Rhodes. You are sure it was there, aren't you?"

"Quite sure, Bratton. As the sergeant said, it was probably just a poacher going about his nocturnal business. Nothing to worry about, I'm sure." His voice was confident but his furrowed brow showed that he was still thinking about the incident.

"Well, a quick bite to eat and then some well deserved sleep for me. Be nice to have a lie in tomorrow morning, won't it?"

"Yes, it would," smiled Rhodes, putting aside his thoughts. "But, all being well, we will be having company for breakfast. The game is still being played, Bratton."

"So long as it's not a ruddy foreigner," mumbled Fleming as he pulled the bell handle to summon Jacobs.

## Chapter Eight: A Partner in Crime

21st May 1889

The sun was shining brightly when Rhodes and Fleming, washed and dressed, descended the stairs of Cotterill Manor early the next morning. Both had small black bags under their eyes; a leftover from the previous day's exertions and the side effects of Rhodes' previously untested sleeping draught, but were in good spirits having caught Lord Cotterill's killer and solved part of the case.

Miss Cotterill was already seated when they entered the dining room. She greeted both of them as they filed in. "Good morning gentlemen. Did you both get enough sleep? Jacobs informed me this morning that you had arrived back rather late."

"Indeed, Miss Cotterill," said Rhodes, taking a seat and pouring himself a cup of strong coffee. "We were taking air on the moor and completely lost track of time. Weren't we Bratton?"

"If you say so, Rhodes," said Fleming thoughtlessly. "These sausages look good again today." He placed several thick pork sausages on his plate, along with scrambled egg, button mushrooms, and a pair of kippers. "Pity I missed dinner last night though. And lunch, and afternoon tea, and supper," he added. "Still," he said taking his seat and tucking in his napkin, "breakfast is the most important meal, and the way this case is going, it might be my last today."

"We do have some good news though, Miss Cotterill," said Rhodes between sips of his coffee. "During our walk we came across a bag on the moors. Judging by the sum involved it contained the money from your father's safe."

"No doubt it was dropped in the thief's hasty escape, and he could not find it on the moor. More by luck that we found it. It is currently safe in my room and shall be returned to you shortly." Rhodes avoided Miss Cotterill's eyes as he spoke. Theatrics were not his speciality and he already feared he had over-acted.

"Oh, that is wonderful!" exclaimed Miss Cotterill, almost dropping her fork onto her plate in surprise. "Thank the Lord. I was beginning to worry that all was lost in this case."

"We are making great progress," said Rhodes idly. "In fact, I am expecting to question another suspect shortly, although I feel that his part in this terrible crime is innocent. Still, he must be eliminated from our enquiries."

At that moment Jacobs knocked quietly on the door and entered. "Excuse me ma'am," he said, bowing politely, "but Mister Burtle is here. Shall I show him to the study?"

"If I may, Miss Cotterill?" enquired Rhodes. She nodded and he continued, "Please show him through to the dining room for a spot of breakfast. He is likely to be hungry after his journey."

"As you wish sir," replied Jacobs turning to leave.

"Before you go, Jacobs," said Rhodes. "I have informed Miss Cotterill about the money we found on the moor yesterday. Would you be so kind as to fetch it from our room and place it in the study?"

"Certainly, sir. It would be my pleasure." Jacobs left, closing the door behind him.

Moments later the door reopened and Mister Edington Burtle entered the room, his bowler hat held in the hands. He looked around the room, half-bowed to Miss Cotterill, and then took a seat. "Dear Claire," he said, "I was so sorry to hear about your father. How are you coping?"

"Not sorry enough to return to Cotterill Manor, though?" interrupted Rhodes, more rudely than he would normally. "Perhaps hoping that your presence here on the day of Lord Cotterill's murder would be forgotten?"

"Steady on Rhodes," said Bratton, wiping a piece of scrambled egg from his moustache. "Give the man a chance to eat before you question him like a common criminal."

"You are right of course, Bratton," said Rhodes, acknowledging his partner's comments. "Please," said he to Burtle, indicating the food on the sideboard, "do take breakfast. We have all morning to carry on with our questions."

The remainder of breakfast passed in silence. When Burtle and Fleming had finished eating Miss Cotterill excused herself, saying that she could be found in the library if she were needed. Her attitude towards Burtle was decidedly cold, but she did not know the same information as Rhodes.

"Well now Mister Burtle," he said with a wry smile, turning to face the houseguest. "Shall we continue? I am Professor James Rhodes, consulting detective, and this is Doctor Bratton Fleming, my colleague and a skilled practitioner of medicine. Miss Cotterill has hired our services to solve the murder of her father."

"Really?" said Burtle, apparently not impressed by Rhodes' words. "I was under the impression that an escapee from the local lunatic asylum was to blame for Arthur's death."

"He was," answered Rhodes. "However, he did not rob the safe. Ah!" he smirked, "I see that you did not know of that piece of information. It is never wise to make assumptions, especially when you do not have all the information to hand."

"Now Mister Burtle, whether you like me or not, you will answer my questions. If, as I believe, the safe held what I suspect it did, there is more to this case than a simple murder and robbery. I would like you to tell me anything you believe to be of interest regarding this matter. Shall we start with Lord Cotterill's latest invention?"

Burtle looked resigned. "It starts before then," he said, helping himself to coffee and taking a cigar from his top pocket. "Arthur and I have been partners for fifteen years. For the most part,

Arthur did all the design work, I merely aided him and used my contacts to get all the materials we needed for the prototypes." He lit his cigar, a thick cloud of smoke rising towards the ceiling. "I ran the company for him while he came up with new ideas."

He paused briefly, as if searching his memory. "I suppose it all started two years ago. Arthur had just finished his latest design and had sent it off to the Ministry for approval. He was confident they would accept anything he sent them, arrogant fool that he was.

"Arthur had designed a new long-range torpedo, a sort of self-powered underwater shell, for one of those new deep depth submarines the navy is experimenting with. Too expensive they said, especially given that the submarine was still highly experimental. It cost us a fortune in designing and testing."

"Submarine?" asked Fleming. "What's that then?"

"Please excuse Bratton, Mister Burtle," said Rhodes. "Bratton is a fine doctor and an excellent tracker, but he does not keep up with technological advances. I, however, am a scientist and inventor myself. Please continue. I will translate for Bratton later."

"Well, after the torpedo, Arthur designed a sort of three-legged armoured walking machine that could carry a small field gun. He said it would make cavalry redundant. 'It will revolutionise warfare' he used to say. It was capable of crossing difficult terrain at a fairly steady speed and its shock value alone was worth its weight in gold.

"Once again, the Ministry rejected it on the grounds of cost. They also added that it would be...how did they put it? Oh yes, too complex to repair and operate in the field. Once again, we had a fully working prototype already built and tested. They didn't even want to look at the thing."

"Like those Martian war machines, you mean?" interjected Fleming excitedly.

"They are rather similar to Mister Wells' imagining's, yes."

"I thought Martians really used them?"

"No. Just a fanciful notion, I'm afraid. It seems they..."

"How was this affecting the company? Financially, I mean," interrupted Rhodes, eager to bring the conversation back on track.

"Terribly." Burtle took another long drag on his cigar. "The two prototypes had cost us thousands and thousands of pounds, especially the walking machine. Arthur wouldn't listen, said that every company had set backs, but I saw that it was driving us to ruin. His next invention, and his last, was our most costly risk yet.

"He had designed a form of computing machine that would automatically calculate the range to a target and then work out the elevation needed to hit it. It used our own patented rangefinder

and one of those new analytical computing engines. Frightfully complex and delicate piece of machinery."

"And the Ministry turned it down?" asked Rhodes.

"Yes. About ten days ago now." Burtle puffed on his cigar, his voice lowered. "A good idea but come back in five years, they said. Apparently it was too unreliable. Arthur even visited them, tried to explain that he needed funding to improve on the prototype, but they wouldn't listen. It was the last straw. We had wasted too much money on failed designs. We needed money and urgently."

"And the Germans were going to offer you money for your designs?"

"How on earth did you know about that?" asked Burtle, his eyebrows arched and his cigar hanging halfway to his mouth. "We agreed never to mention this to anyone."

"Jacobs informed me that a Herr Oberst von Steinhagen had visited just over a week ago. I know of Herr von Steinhagen from reading The Times and wondered why the German military attaché would be visiting one of our country's top armaments designers. I suspect that it was to make an offer."

"Yes, it was," said Burtle lowering his eyes. "I have no idea how the Germans found out about our plans, but they did. They approached Arthur and offered to buy the designs for his latest invention. They were offering £20,000 in gold bullion. Naturally Arthur refused, without even consulting me. 'Can't trust the Bosch', he always said. He telegraphed me and told me of what happened."

"And that is why you came to visit?"

"Correct Professor. As soon as I could get away I came down to try and convince him to change his mind. It would take the Germans years to build a working model. With their money we could have a working version in six months and our finances would be back in order. But no, he kept to his principals and refused to deal with 'a foreign power'. For the love of God, our queen is related to the Kaiser. We're all friends."

"Bah!" snorted Fleming. "If you ask me Lord Cotterill did the right thing in not selling. You can't trust these ruddy Johnny foreigners not to use this stuff for the wrong reasons. What would happen if we ever go to war with them, eh? Lord Cotterill would have been called a traitor."

"There's no chance of war between Germany and ourselves. We have different agendas. Anyway, business is business," retorted Burtle.

"So you and Lord Cotterill rowed and then you left. Was he alive when you left, Mister Burtle?" asked Rhodes patiently, ending the hypothetical discussion over what might have been.

"I don't appreciate your insinuation Professor Rhodes, but yes, very much so," he spat. "He had just rung for Jacobs to remove me when I stormed out. Ejecting me, his own business partner, I tell you! Anyway, I met Jacobs in the hallway and told him not to bother escorting me off the premises."

"Did you notice anything strange about Lord Cotterill that day? The way he acted? Anything amiss in the study?" questioned Rhodes.

"I don't think so," said Burtle.

"The left-hand study window was not open when you entered?"

"Not when I entered, no. Arthur never liked having the windows opened. He said it was bad for his back." Fleming harrumphed his agreement. "I opened it during our argument. Arthur hated me smoking cigars near him and the breezes helped keep the smoke down."

"Did you close the window when you left?"

"Er...No, no I didn't! I left in such a rage that I must have forgot. You don't think I'm in league with the killers, do you?"

"No," replied Rhodes off-handily.

"Any chance I can try one of those?" asked Fleming innocently. He looked up at Rhodes. "Might help clear my head," he said. Burtle passed him a cigar, which Fleming sniffed before placing it in his jacket pocket. "Maybe later then," he added, seeing the look of distaste on Rhodes' face.

"Why all the questions about the Germans, anyway?" asked Burtle. "You said a madman killed Arthur?"

"Yes I did, didn't I" replied Rhodes. "But someone else opened the safe. Lord Cotterill's keys were still secured in his desk drawer but the safe had been opened. Our killer did not perform that particular crime, but someone wanted us to believe he did."

"Cracked wide open," said Fleming.

"Surely you don't think it was me?" protested Burtle, rising to his feet. "I returned straight home. I have my train ticket somewhere to prove it."

"Sit down please, Mister Burtle," continued Rhodes. He waited until Burtle had slowly lowered himself back into his chair. "No, for all your greed as a businessman, I do not believe for an instant that you would murder Lord Cotterill. I believe that you are a man of words rather than action and that your respect for Lord Cotterill would have stopped you doing anything so foolish. No, I needed you to confirm one piece of missing information, which you did at the start of this conversation."

Rhodes rose quickly to his feet. "I needed you to confirm my suspicion that Lord Cotterill's safe held the plans to his latest invention at the time he was killed. The reason he was murdered lay in that safe, and his true killer remains free."

## Chapter Nine: Three Men with Funny Accents

After concluding the questioning of Mister Edington Burtle, Rhodes summoned Jacobs and asked for the carriage to be made ready for a trip to Okehampton station. "I have business at the station, Mister Burtle and so will ride with you," he said. "Bratton, would you be so kind as to remain here? I shouldn't be long. I just need to check something out regarding the case."

"Is that wise, Rhodes?" asked Fleming. "That ferocious dog is still loose on the moor and you aren't a very good shot. I should come with you."

"I shall be quite alright, and as I have told you, there is no ferocious dog on Dartmoor."

"There might be," Fleming mumbled into his moustache, looking dejected at the prospect of missing out on part of the investigation.

Rhodes let out a heavy sigh. "Get your coat then, Bratton." Fleming immediately brightened up and left the dining room to fetch his coat from the hall. His sulking routine worked every time, but, of course, Rhodes already knew that.

Two hours later Rhodes, Fleming, and Burtle arrived at the train station, which was deserted as usual. They shook hands with Burtle and promised to let him know how the case ended. "Right," said Rhodes when Burtle had disappeared from sight into the small rest room on the platform, "let us pay a visit to the stationmaster. I need to ask him a few questions."

\* \* \*

The stationmaster was, if that was possible, even older than the porter who had greeted them the night they arrived from London. Fleming was beginning to think that there weren't any people under forty living in Devonshire.

They were sat in his cramped office, the stationmaster sat behind his cluttered desk; Rhodes and Fleming sat on uncomfortable high backed wooden chairs that lacked padding of any description. The stationmaster, Mister Royal, peered at Rhodes and Fleming through his thick spectacles as he stirred a mug of tea absentmindedly. "A foreigner, you say? A week ago?"

"Yes," sighed Rhodes for what seemed like the tenth time during their short conversation. "A foreign gentleman. He would have been wearing a blue military uniform with medals and wearing a funny hat with a point on top. He may have been travelling with others dressed in a similar matter."

"May have smelt of sausage," said Fleming helpfully, smiling his I've-just-escaped-from-the-asylum smile.

"Oh yes! Those gentlemen," said Royal, clinking his teaspoon twice against the side of his mug and laying it on his desk. "I remember now! There were three of them. Two were wearing those funny hats and the third was in a dark suit and top hat; all very smartly dressed and speaking in

some funny language. One of them, he had lots of medals, ordered the tickets back to London. I remember that he spoke English with a funny accent, like he was from somewhere foreign."

"Indeed," said Rhodes. "For where did they purchase tickets?"

"London, all three of them. They caught the one thirty-five train back to Exeter. They have to change there for London."

"We know. Are there any stops between Okehampton and Exeter that pass closer to the lunatic asylum?" Rhodes waved away the offer of a biscuit; Fleming did not. "It is highly important that we know."

"Only one. Ricksborough," replied Royal through a mouthful of tea and biscuit. "I guess the station is about five miles from the asylum by road and half of that as the crow flies. Any inmates being sent there get off the train at Ricksborough."

"Thank you," said Rhodes standing and shaking the stationmaster's hand enthusiastically. "You have been of great assistance to us and maybe to the Crown."

"Have I?" asked Royal somewhat bemused by the whole situation. "Two lots of foreigners in a week," he thought. "What is Devonshire becoming?"

"Come on Bratton," said Rhodes as he turned to leave. "We have a train to catch!"

"Lovely," said Bratton as he too stood. Before he left the office he turned back to the stationmaster. "I don't suppose you've ever seen any big, black dogs on the moor, have you?" he asked. Whatever answer the stationmaster gave was unheard; Rhodes had grabbed hold of Fleming's collar and hauled him from the office onto the platform.

The train to Exeter was just arriving as they emerged from the office and they saw Burtle exit from the rest room. They waited in the doorway until he had boarded the first class carriage and then headed for one of the second-class carriages, purchasing two return tickets to Ricksborough from the conductor as they took their seats.

"Shouldn't be a long journey, Bratton. Just need to ask the stationmaster at Ricksborough a few, quick questions," said Rhodes, taking a seat by the window. "Damn!" he exclaimed. "I forgot to inform Jacobs. Hopefully he'll be waiting when we return."

"I do hope so," said Fleming taking the seat opposite. "It's a ruddy long walk back otherwise, isn't it? How did you know that Mister Burtle would be arriving this morning, Rhodes?"

A noise in the corridor distracted Rhodes from answering immediately. A scrawny man in a grey coat and matching cap was just pulling his hand left hand back from the door handle. He swiftly raised his right hand over his face to touch his hat peak in silent apology, turned and walked away. No doubt, thought Rhodes, after an empty compartment.

With the man out of sight, he quickly remembered Fleming's question. "I sent a telegram to him yesterday when we were at the post office. I believe that you were looking at the picture postcards at the time and therefore were rather distracted."

"More than likely," said Fleming smiling and inhaling deeply. Rhodes opened the small top window as Fleming finished lighting the cigar he had acquired from Burtle. At least it didn't smell like diseased monkey - more like a garden bonfire.

The trip to Ricksborough was over in less than fifteen minutes, and Rhodes and Fleming were the only passengers to disembark.

As Rhodes turned to follow the sign to the stationmaster's office, he got sight of the grey hat-wearing stranger, watching them from the window of his compartment. Rhodes raised his hand to the peak of his deerstalker in acknowledgement, causing the stranger to quickly raise a copy of the Strand newspaper over his face. The guard blew his whistle and the train recommenced its journey.

The pair soon found their way to the stationmaster's office, and after politely introducing themselves, although not going so far as to mention their real reasons for being in Devonshire, the stationmaster had agreed to see them. There were no trains due for another hour, and talking to strangers was better than reading the local paper for the third time that morning.

"Well, yes, sir. Three gentlemen matching the description you gave me did indeed stop here a week ago. Their tickets said Exeter, but they said they were planning a surprise visit to a friend who lived in the area. I noticed that they had foreign accents. I'm very observant like that, sir." He seemed pleased with his powers of observation but failed to notice Rhodes taking a train timetable from his desk and securing it in his coat pocket.

"I don't suppose you saw if they walked after leaving the station?"

"No, Professor. It was Professor wasn't it? Good. I like to get titles correct; shows proper respect. No, they got in a carriage that was waiting for them. Drove off on the asylum road. They could have been heading for Dunny-on-the-Moor. The turning is about a mile down the same road. They serve very good food in the local inn there, sir."

"Oh?" Fleming started. "Really? Do they serve beef? I like a bit of roast beef, don't I, Rhodes?" Once again his stomach had taken control of his senses, though in his defence it had been four hours since breakfast, and he was anticipating a long walk back to Cotterill Manor.

"Oh indeed, sir," cooed the stationmaster. "They serve a lovely plate of roast beef, boiled potatoes, and two vegetables, sir. All the beef is from local cattle, sir; very tender when cooked properly. The beer is also locally brewed and very welcoming after a long day at work. I can give you directions if you'd like?"

"I'm afraid that won't be necessary," interrupted Rhodes. He hated to see Fleming go without food but missing pieces of the puzzle were starting to fall into place and they still had a house call to make. "Would it be possible to find transport to take us to the asylum?" he said politely. "We'll be happy to pay a good rate."

"And what is the name of this inn?" asked Fleming. "Just in case we feel like a bite to eat on the way back, you know?" he added for Rhodes' benefit.

"The Black Dog."

## Chapter Ten: In the House of Madness

Rhodes bundled the wide-eyed, slack-jawed Fleming from the stationmaster's office before he could recover his senses and pulled him towards the station gate. He'd rather find his own transport than let Fleming talk about ferocious black dogs for the next hour. When he got back, he promised himself, he would ask next door not to talk about their cases quite so loudly. It wasn't doing Fleming any good at all.

Fortune was evidently smiling on the intrepid pair this particular day, and Rhodes quickly located a baker who was taking a delivery to the asylum. Three shillings later, Rhodes and Fleming, who had been reduced to muttering "The beast! The beast!" under his breath, were riding across Dartmoor on the back of the bread wagon.

The driver, a young lad of no more than eighteen, was a little disturbed by Fleming's semi-catatonic state, but another two shillings eased his mind, and he was happy to make small talk on the journey.

Forty-five minutes later Rhodes and Fleming, who had recovered somewhat after eating three iced buns and taking several large mouthfuls of his medicinal brandy, found themselves outside of the asylum.

The asylum was surrounded by a high stonewall, fenced with iron spikes cemented to the wall. A pair of large ironbound doors seemed to be the only point of ingress. A thick rope, attached no doubt to a bell inside, summoned a guard after a few tugs and a short wait.

A hatch in the door opened and a folically-challenged, piggy-eyed man of thuggish appearance (or so muttered Fleming) peered through. The baker's boy handed him a piece of paper, and the gates were heaved open to reveal a courtyard. Rhodes and Fleming were about to walk through when the thug (as Fleming would later refer to him) stepped in their way.

"No entry," he grunted. "Only the baker."

The baker's boy shrugged an apology as he mounted the cart. Using the reins, he spurred the horse into action, and the cart trundled through the gates, leaving Rhodes and Fleming to face the guard.

"We have come to see Doctor Muelhoffer," said Rhodes pulling one of his calling cards from his inner jacket pocket. "Please hand him my card and tell him that Professor Rhodes and Doctor Fleming would like a few minutes of his time. It concerns Willy McTavish."

The thug looked at the card and then back at Rhodes, as if he were having difficulty linking the card and the face. Eventually he grunted again. "Wait here." He swung the gates closed again and Rhodes heard a bar being slid into place, locking the gates shut.

"Ruddy hell!" exclaimed Fleming when the gates had clunked shut. "You don't suppose he's an escapee as well, do you? I wouldn't fancy meeting him on a dark night."

"Nor I, Bratton," Rhodes replied adjusting his tie a fraction. "He didn't seem to be the most intelligent of guards."

"I think he had some ape blood in him. Maybe his father was a gorilla or something. We had to deal with them in the Sudan when I was working over there, you know? Always attacking out supply lines, they were. Ruddy troublemakers."

"I think you'll find that it is a different type of gorilla Bratton. I hope we don't have to wait long. Jacobs will likely be most upset by our tardiness in this matter. We were only supposed to be a few minutes at Okehampton."

"At least he can't steal anything if he's waiting, can he?"

"I believe he has learnt his lesson regarding that matter. Ah! I hear the bar being removed. Let us hope it means we can now see the good doctor."

One of the gates swung open, and the thug waved them through. "The doctor will see you in his office," he grunted. "Follow me."

Entering the courtyard Rhodes and Fleming had their first good look at the asylum itself. Constructed from local grey granite, the building was functional in design but was never going to win an architectural award. It had a cold, soul-destroying look.

Perfectly square in design, the asylum sat in the centre of the courtyard and reached up two stories. Along the visible wall were a door and a series of barred windows. Rhodes noted that the windows on the top floor were smaller than those on the ground floor. No doubt, he thought as they crossed the courtyard to the main door, where the patients reside.

Once inside the front door, which was also guarded by another thug of dubious intelligence, they turned right and climbed a set of stairs to the second floor. The corridor they found themselves in was narrow and dimly lit by gas lamps. The cries of the mad echoed along the corridor, like disembodied spirits howling in torment. It gave Fleming cold chills as they walked steadily forward, following their silent guide.

Turning round a corner, the guide halted and knocked twice on a solid wooden door on which was a name plaque, functionally declaring this to be the office of Doctor Muelhoffer - Head Doctor. *Top right corner of the building*, thought Rhodes, mentally placing the location of the office. After a momentary wait, the guard opened the door and beckoned Rhodes and Fleming to follow.

Doctor Muelhoffer's office was the epitome of organisation. Row after row of stout shelves held neatly stacked books and papers of a medical nature, all arranged by the author's surname

and categorised into topics. A collection of human skulls, no doubt authentic, sat upon a filing cabinet, a series of lines drawn over the white bone. Jars containing human organs in preserving fluid sat on more shelves, all neatly labelled in gothic script. Behind an oak desk at the end of the room sat a monocled gentleman who rose as they entered.

Muelhoffer was tall, maybe a few inches taller than Rhodes, but had more muscle mass; not the physique of an athlete, but of someone who looked after themselves through regular exercise and a balanced diet. His hair was dark with only a few streaks of grey around the temple and was cut very short in what Fleming called "Hun fashion." Grey eyes were sunk deep into his angular face, the left holding a gilded monocle. He wore a grey suit of English tweed, no doubt tailored in Saville Row, thought Rhodes, as he moved forward to shake Muelhoffer's extended hand.

"Good afternoon, Herr Doctor," he said, gritting his teeth as Muelhoffer's grip threatened to crush his hand. "I am Professor Rhodes and this is my colleague and friend, Doctor Bratton Fleming." He removed his hand from the vice of Muelhoffer's grip and indicated Fleming, who nodded politely.

"Good afternoon, gentleman," Muelhoffer replied, his English strongly accented but perfectly understandable. "How may I help you? Ve do not often get visitors out here." His shoulders shuddered and he laughed a short, silent laugh. "Please," he said, indicating two nearby chairs, "how do you English say? Pull up a chair? May I offer you refreshments? I believe you English drink tea?"

"Thank you kindly," said Rhodes, sitting down.

"I'll have some cake if you have it," said Fleming. "We've come a long way today to visit you, doctor. Be a shame not to sample some of your German hospitality, wouldn't it?"

"Ah, doctor, I am sorry to say zat we have only English hospitality here. Ven in Rome." He shrugged his shoulders as if in apology, but his gaze was cold and fixed firmly on Fleming. "You are not English, Herr Doctor? Scottish perhaps?" A wry smile played over Muelhoffer's face.

"Ruddy cheek!" exclaimed Fleming, his face reddening. "I'm a Welshman and proud of it. And I'm not a hair doctor, I'm a general practitioner."

"And your accent?" asked Rhodes trying to defuse the potentially volatile situation. "Prussian by chance?"

"Correct, Herr Professor. You are familiar vis my homeland?" Muelhoffer's expression became more serious.

"A lucky guess."

"Of course. Now, how can I help you both?"

"We're here regarding Willy McTavish. I believe that he was an inmate here until he escaped?" said Rhodes, taking a slow look around the room as if taking a mental inventory.

"Yes, he vos. A most disturbing case indeed, but ve ver making excellent progress before he absconded."

"You don't seem particularly worried that a dangerous lunatic has escaped your care. Did you know that he has already killed someone since he escaped? Lord Arthur Cotterill of Cotterill Manor. Stabbed him to death and then robbed his safe."

"Villy is a changed man," said Muelhoffer leaning back in his chair and clasping his hands together as if praying. "His aggressive tendencies have been curbed by my revolutionary new techniques. I do not believe zat he vould harm a fly."

"Well, you're right there, aren't you?" said Fleming. "He hasn't hurt a fly; he's killed a man."

"I refuse to believe that Villy is responsible for zis crime. It is no longer in his nature."

"How many other escaped madmen do you think may be roaming the moors as we speak, Herr Doctor?" asked Rhodes. "Have you lost any more that the police do not know about?"

"I am not liking your tone, *Professor Rhodes*," responded Muelhoffer, his face tensing, lips drawn thin across his mouth. "Zis facility has an excellent record. Villy is the only man to have escaped und he vill be ze last. On zat I give you my verd."

The study door opened and a new thug (Fleming mentally labelled him 'Thug C') entered, carrying a tray holding a tea pot, a milk jug, sugar bowl, small silver tongs, and two tea cups adorned with a floral pattern. He set the tray down on the table in front of Rhodes, straightened his back, and clicked his heels together, nodding sharply to Muelhoffer.

"Zat vill be all for now, Hans. Please vait outside until I ring," said Muelhoffer, not taking his eyes off Rhodes.

"Jawohl, Herr Doctor!" snapped the thug. He wheeled on his heel and strode from the room, closing the door firmly behind him. An uneasy silence filled the room.

"Shall I play mother, Rhodes?" offered Fleming, leaning forward and preparing the teacups. "How many sugars today?"

"Ah, you English und your playing mother," laughed Muelhoffer. "Vhat is it about your mothers zat you feel you must emulate zem? I feel that Herr Doctor Freud's theories may hold some vater after all, und all zis time he thought he vos an amateur vis a mother-fixation."

"If you're saying anything bad about my mother I'm going to come round there and..." rumbled Fleming, starting to rise. Rhodes put a firm hand on his shoulder and pushed him back into his seat.

"Make the tea, Bratton," said Rhodes coldly, his eyes locked with Muelhoffer's across the desk. "I believe that the good doctor was just trying to say how quaint he found some of our unique British customs and how much he had come to respect the theories of Doctor Freud."

"Ja! I meant no disrespect to your family, Herr Fleming." He glanced down at the fingernails of his left hand and casually rubbed them against his jacket. Rhodes could not help but notice that they were immaculately clean and well filed.

"But I did mean vot I said about Freud; he simply wishes to talk to his patients about zheir mothers, finding something wrong in everyone's childhood. I, on ze other hand, am at ze cutting edge of psychoanalysis and drug therapy. My theories vill revolutionise how ve treat ze criminally insane in ze future." His eyes gleamed with an inner fire that made Fleming feel extremely nervous.

"Would you care to reveal some of your techniques to us?" queried Rhodes. "I am no medical man, but Fleming here is an excellent doctor."

"Don't be so hard on your self, Rhodes," said Fleming handing Rhodes his full teacup. "You may not be a medical man but you're a brilliant biochemist, aren't you?" Rhodes flashed a stern glance at Fleming, as if he had revealed some hideous, dark secret.

"Ah! Exclaimed Muelhoffer, leaning forward in his chair and waving an index finger at Rhodes. "I vas suspecting zat it vas you! So, you are ze great Herr Professor Rhodes. I have been reading your article about zis new drug you have created for use in surgical procedures.

"I myself have been verking on something similar but have not had time to finish my studies due to other, more *practical research*." The last few words were clearly emphasised as a slight on Rhodes' recent breakthrough, but Rhodes did not rise to the bait, and Fleming missed it completely.

"No cake, then?" he mused aloud, scouring the tray as if the cake were somehow hidden. "Ruddy poor show, isn't it?"

"I must admit to being flattered," said Rhodes, "that you have heard of me, especially as you are so far away from anywhere of interest...or importance."

"Touché, Herr Professor! Touché!" said Muelhoffer smiling. "I find ze air here healthy for me personally und also for my patients. Ze other benefit of being so remote is zat I am allowed to continue my verk visout constant interruption. I prefer to verk away from prying eyes, so as to perfect my theories." His eyes narrowed as he spoke, but his mouth remained fixed in a polite smile.

"You keep mentioning these theories. Would you care to explain?" Rhodes took a sip of his tea. "Ah! Earl Grey. How predictable. Why does everyone assume that we all drink Earl Grey? Must be another stereotype, what?"

"My theories are, in layman's terms, extremely simple. Through ze use of my patented sedatives I take ze patient to a peaceful level, where he feels relaxed und safe. Zese sedatives do not merely make ze patient drowsy; zey make him completely calm. Even a raving lunatic would be able to sit amongst sane people visout risk of harming zem in any vay. Zen I tell ze patient zat he is cured over und over until he believes zis for himself."

"Like stage hypnotism, then?" said Fleming sipping his tea.

"No, not like stage hypnotism!" Muelhoffer shouted. Fleming had apparently hit a raw nerve, to Rhodes' silent glee. "Zis is not some circus side show und I am no quack! Zis is ze future of medicine! My techniques take hypnotism further zan zey have ever gone before, reaching a new depth of the psyche. I do not make people cluck like chickens, I cure ze incurable through ze power of my vill!"

"Ruddy touchy, isn't he?" said Fleming to Rhodes. "No way to treat a guest who shows an interest in his quack theory."

"I can assure you that Bratton meant no offence by his remarks," soothed Rhodes. "He just gets a little over-excited at new theories."

Muelhoffer regained his composure, so Fleming decided to push his luck. "Do you have any of these sedatives around?" asked Fleming, switching into his serious medical voice. "I'm a bit of an expert of sedatives. I'd be happy to test them for you. All in the strictest confidence, of course."

"Alas, ze beauty, und single drawback, of my new drug is zat zey are tailored for ze individual person."

"Pity," said Fleming. "I'm very knowledgeable on sedatives of all sorts."

"Yes," Muelhoffer said slowly, "I am kvite sure zat you are."

"So," asked Rhodes thoughtfully, "what would happen if you accidentally mixed up two samples? What if Patient A received the drug for Patient B? Any nasty side effects that you haven't mentioned?"

"Not really. Ze drug would ezer have a greater or lesser effect, depending on its strength und ze needs of ze individual patient. Many tests are required before ze drug is administered. I have not yet been able to do away vis conventional therapy."

"Is this a sample of your drug?" asked Rhodes, darting forward from his chair to grab a small bottle of green liquid standing on the doctor's desk. Rhodes thought himself fast, but Muelhoffer moved like a snake striking a mouse, snatching the bottle away before Rhodes' hand got within

six inches. However, seizing the bottle was not Rhodes' intention. His jacket sleeve caught the rim of his teacup, spilling its contents across the top of the desk, soaking various piles of neatly stacked papers.

"How terribly clumsy of me. Here, let me help," said Rhodes quickly, grabbing a nearby diary and starting to dab at it with his pocket-handkerchief. "I hope I haven't ruined anything important. I'll be happy to pay for any damages."

"No harm done," snarled Muelhoffer snatching back the diary and placing it in a desk drawer. "Just routine paperwerk of no consequence. No need to alarm yourself unnecessarily."

"If you would permit us a few more questions Doctor Muelhoffer we'll leave you in peace. You are obviously a busy man." Rhodes sat back down, still dabbing at patches of tea. "Do you keep your patients sedated often?"

"Yes," said Muelhoffer, "the drug needs to work through the body for a period of time before the next stage begins. All our patients are kept sedated at all times."

"So how did Willy escape, then?" asked Fleming, eager to use up the as yet unstated quota of questions and be back on the moor. Even snarling black dogs were better than a snarling German doctor of highly variable temperament.

"It seems that the very scenario we discussed earlier occurred. Von of my orderlies administered the wrong drug. When we took Willy to the therapy room he overpowered his guards and escaped. We think he hid on the laundry wagon from the village."

"Does sound like he was cured, does it?" Fleming continued.

"I said he was nearly cured of his homicidal tendencies, not his wishing to be free. Humans are not animals, no matter what Herr Darwin would have us believe. As I said, Willy is no harm to anyone."

"Until his drugs wear off," said Rhodes standing. "Thank you for your time, Doctor Muelhoffer. It has been of great benefit to us. Say goodbye, Bratton."

\* \* \*

Thug C escorted Rhodes and Fleming from the asylum, closing and locking the main gates after them. They began walking back to the station at Ricksborough.

"Well," said Fleming lighting his pipe inside his jacket, "he was a weird sort, wasn't he? Not sure I liked his attitude one bit."

"No," said Rhodes absentmindedly, "he was a bit peculiar."

"Fancy you spilling your tea all over his desk as well. That really got him riled. Did you see his face? Red as a beetroot it was." Fleming's pipe lit, and the smell of monkey was discernible on the wind.

"I was too busy looking elsewhere. I did not spill my tea on accident. It was a ruse to take a closer look at something he had written in his diary for the day after tomorrow."

"What did it say? Anything important?"

"I'm not sure yet. It may be. Come on. Quicken the pace. We have to return to Cotterill Manor with all haste and pack."

"Are we leaving then? Have we solved the case?"

"No, but we are going exploring across the moor again. We have a date back at the asylum later tonight."

"Are you sure? I don't remember the doctor inviting us back for dinner or anything?" Fleming looked confused. Had he missed something of importance? It wouldn't have been the first time.

"He didn't, but that isn't going to stop us taking a private tour of his facility."

"Can I get a bite to eat first? That Hun quack didn't even give us cake."

"Half past two now," said Rhodes, consulting his pocket watch. "If my train timetable is correct we can be back at Okehampton by three and, assuming Jacobs is still present, we can be back at the manor by...oh...say, a quarter past four if we have a good run? A bite to eat will take an hour. We'll still have good light until nine. Yes, Bratton," Rhodes said patting Fleming on the back affectionately, "You can have a bite to eat before we go for a stroll."

"Thanks Heavens for that," beamed Fleming. "I'm ruddy starving, aren't I?"