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Fog of Doubt
By
M.J. Downing

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31 December 1888.

“I don’t care ‘ow you put it Harvey, but this is a rum business, right?” Wiggins asked. They had just retrieved the remains of Tom Hastings and were making their way on this New Year’s Eve to a small but familiar—to them—cemetery north of London proper. London’s air, still for days, turned to a fog that worsened as the day drew on toward evening. Lamp lighters were out early, shortly after the noon hour. The disc of the sun looked more like a pale moon that had lost its way. Wiggins’s chum, Harvey Brewer, walked at the front of the wagon, leading the mare, his lantern a glow that outlined the horse’s head in relief against the dense curtain of fog. His job was to call out the street names as they reached corners to mark their way forward.

“The fog, Bill?” Harvey asked, turning back to the sound of Bill’s voice.

“Well, yes and no!” Bill Wiggins cried. “I ‘spect this fog’ll burn orf, soon enough. I mean somefin’ else.”

“Don’t worry about getting paid, Bill. As soon as Cap’n Jacks gets back—”

“T ain’t the pay at all. Why, just last week, Cap’n Jacks, ‘e gave me ‘alf a crown for me old mum, who’s never lived better in ‘er life, what with all I’ve been able to shove her way. Three meat meals a day, she ‘as now since I became an Irregular. T’ain’t the pay, ‘Arvey. Watch, there!”

The mare gave a wary neigh and shied toward the middle of the road, as a Burton Ales wagon hove up at the road’s side, sitting still in their path. Harvey pulled up just short of running headlong into its broad back side.

“Sorry, guv!” Harvey called to the delivery man loading an empty keg on the rear deck.

“S alright, lad. More like treacle than soup, innit? Can’t see a fing, can yer?” As Harvey guided the mare around the wagon, the delivery man disappeared in the thick air. Dense fog swallowed him and his wagon in seconds. With each block, visibility decreased, but Harvey didn’t dare stop, for fear of some big dray team running over them all from behind.

“That was a close’un, ‘Arvey,” Bill called to his mate.

“Yeah, we’ll be all night, doing our bit for Mr. Hastings, at this rate,” Harvey answered, for the remains of Tom Hastings that they had secured the day before rested under a tarp in the back of the open wagon. They had become accustomed to the journey to the small cemetery where lay the remains of some Royal Marines. In an unmarked common grave, they had placed some of the bodies of poor folks taken by the zombie curse. The wagon, with “Wiggins and Brewer—Plumbing and Gas” painted in rough letters on the side of its toolbox, was one of many trade vehicles creeping along the Kentish Town Road.

Getting in to Briony Lodge and cleaning the scene of Hasting’s sad demise had taken much of the last two days, so Hasting’s burial had been put off, almost too long. Now, the blackest fog in London’s living memory delayed them further, making both boys nervous, in case the remains should begin to stink, which they would, soon. But they could go no faster, and Harvey recognized too well the nervous note in his friend’s complaint about this rum business.

“I’d guess the urgency of our task is wearing on you, right Bill?”

“That, and I suppose that I’d like to be doin’ more to ‘elp Cap’n Jacks and Mr. ‘Olmes, you know? But there’s somefin’ else botherin’ me, that I’d not like to call out. Stop a minute and leave your lantern there.”

Harvey placed the light on the ground in front of the mare and felt his way back to where Bill sat, muffled in the mist. Bill leaned his red head down close to Harvey and whispered,

“‘Cause we are being followed, mate—no, don’t look yet!” Bill advised. “There’s a coach and four on our tail that’s been there since we went past Regents Park. It ‘as a damaged rim that’s set up a regular click in keepin’ with the speed of our rig. One o’ its lead ‘orses also ‘as a funny clip in its stride, like its right fore shoe is loose. With a team like theirs, they should’a passed us easy on this last straight. But they ain’t done it, see?”

“What should we do, Bill?”

“If you was to climb in the back and make a show of tying down those shovels, you’d get a good look as they draw up even wif us. Here’s some rope, mate.”

Harvey relaxed the muscles in his back that had grown tense at Bill’s warning. With a nod of his head, Harvey clambered back onto the open bed to inspect the grave digging articles that lay between the plumbers toolbox on the one side and Tom Hasting’s covered body on the other. Harvey bent to gather the digging tools and lash them to the front of the toolbox. He listened hard for the coach and four as he bundled all the tools together and secured them to the straps that held closed the toolbox. After several long seconds, he heard the sounds Bill had described, along came a coach and four, led by a dark-skinned fellow with a heavy mustache, holding aloft his own lantern. This fellow wore his slouch hat pulled low on his forehead and looked in the direction of the boys in their wagon, drawing his team to a halt. Bill and Harvey grew tense, both of them recalling Cap’n Jacks’ warning that they should bolt at any sign of trouble. However, a loud voice from within the coach barked out ‘Wir geht vorbei!’ and the driver quickened his team. The fellow with the lantern picked up his pace to avoid the team’s sudden surge forward. They were soon past the boys’ wagon, lost in the fog, and the telltale sounds of their team and vehicle faded. Only then did the boys breathe a sigh of relief.

“That fellow spoke German,” Harvey whispered. “Have we ever been followed before, Bill?”

“Not to my way of thinkin,’ ‘Arvey, ‘and as to ‘is talk, I wouldn’t know German from Hindoo. But I knows one thing: we must get hid as quick as quick.”

They left the main road and picked their slow way back to the streets of Whitechapel’s more familiar streets. They took many lanes through which only their one horse and open wagon would pass, but they knew these lanes and alleys from constant use, and though they went slow, they went sure. The air got harder to breathe, and they noted that not many revelers could be found abroad on the streets on this New Year’s Eve. They stopped often to see that they were no longer pursued and kept an eastward heading toward the Thames Estuary. There, at length they found a spot in the Tilbury marshes to dig a hasty, wet resting place for Tom Hastings. Harvey recited a psalm or two over the grave and by late night, moving like snails, they found their way to the small flat they shared above the stable a half block west of 221b Baker Street.

Making themselves a late tea, both boys sat in the dark, one candle flickering on the table in front of them, the fog pressed like cotton wool to their small window. Watson, their trusted Cap’n Jacks, had set up for them the protocol if they were ever followed on one of their grim errands. His orders called for going to ground in the dark, as near as possible, in accord to their normal practices. They lit the candle, thinking that no one could see it, and it was a good thing they did.

Now, as they ate and sipped, they waited, reviewing what they knew of the actions of their leaders in hushed whispers.

“All of ‘ems away north, O’Hara says, and ‘e’s waitin’ for word of progress from ‘em. God only knows what’s goin’ on,” Wiggins offered.

“This case they’ve been on is a strange one, Bill. Most of ’em have left London in a hurry, like somethin’ bad is after ’em. Have you thought that we might be seeing the end of Department Zed? I have,” Harvey replied.

“Well, why ever would you think so, mate? No one’ll overcome Mr. ‘Olmes and Cap’n Jacks, not while the sun rises and sets and the world spins.”

“Bill, you’ve seen it, though, heard of it. Cap’n Jacks looking like thunder itself every time he has to be around that Egyptian fellow, who does nothing except screech at him like a fishwife: it has all of them wound tighter than watch springs. And this talk of werewolves. Brrr! It sends a chill down my spine to think of it.”

“True, enough, but…” Bill whispered and sat back.

“And how in the name of heaven is our Mr. Holmes come to recovery like he has?” Harvey insisted. “You saw him when we were in Kensington Gardens the other night. He moved like a crippled pensioner, Bill, but only days later, he looks like he could fight Murdoch again.”

“Too right,” Bill agreed. “But ‘ow does that make you think the whole thing will blow apart?”

“It’s magic, Bill. We’ve heard them talk of it, and you saw what happened to Spring Heeled Jack, struck down without a blow. It all smacks of magic, Bill. God knows that Cap’n Jacks has had a belly full of it. Why else would he abandon his friends like he did the other day? Now, I’m all for our Mr. Holmes getting better, but if sorcery is involved, there’s big trouble, isn’t there?”

“I know,” Bill replied, but—

Pistol shots rang out in the night, away down the alley, outside the stable doors. Both boys dropped to the floor, away from the candlelight. Bullets thudded home high on the stable

doors and were answered by the load report of a Webley-Scott revolver from lower down. Bill and Harvey crept low and down the stairs into the stable, letting the horse carry on with its fearful whinnying. Harvey ran to the door and peered out as Bill prepared to lift the latch.

“O’Hara!” Harvey cried. Bill lifted the heavy bar and let the door crack open. Commander O’Hara, Magnus Guthrie’s roommate and aide de camp to former Prime Minister Gladstone, stood without. As the boys looked on, O’Hara crouched low and fired back at unseen foes until he was empty. Harvey reached out and pulled the tall man back into the safety of the dark interior, where they rolled together on the floor, O’Hara scrambling in his coat pocket for more rounds. Bill took the gun from him, broke it open and scattered the empty brass on the straw before he returned it to O’Hara.

“Saw your light. Thank God you’re here, lads,” the tall man whispered as he stilled his shaking fingers to shove fresh bullets into chambers. “They set upon me as I left the 221b. Four remain of the six that set upon me. Laying close to the door, one got me in the leg. Gypsies, four of them are—terrible shots, thank heavens.”

“You’re hit, though, sir,” Harvey said, pointing to dark patches on O’Hara’s coat sleeves and one trouser leg. Blood dripped from O’Hara’s fingers on his gun hand.

“I’ll make it, boys, but you two need to get out of here. Now,” O’Hara ordered. “Take the letter from my inside pocket, Harvey. Get to safety and stay hidden. If you’ve no word from me, meet me tomorrow in Picadilly. If I don’t show, well, then, God be with you both. When the others return, tell them all. I’ve got to go face those German bastards.” O’Hara stood and placed one hand on the bar that Bill had put back in place.

“Wait,” Harvey said. “Side door, back corner. There’s a twin bore duck gun, hanging above it, too, loaded.”

O'Hara grinned and nodded, heading for the small door on the side of the stable as thudding blows fell on the door before them. It rocked back against the oaken bar securing it. A harsh German voice counted, "Ein, Zwei, Drei!" signaling each shocking blow. While the heavy door bar held, still, both boys headed for the short, thick tunnel door that would take them out through to their secret sewer entrance. With three slices of solid oak holding that passage closed, anyone would be all night trying to bring it down by force, unless they brought dynamite.

But even as they reached the sewer entrance the boys heard the two loud reports of the shotgun as O'Hara made his assault from that side door, and they ran on, as ordered, though they did so with tears in their eyes at the thought of Commander O'Hara meeting his doom. The pistol shots were wild in response but faded fast as they made their way through the dark. Harvey led the way, knowing the tunnels as well as Bill knew the alleys above. They didn't stop until they were far away, terrified, alone, and anxious to do something.

"The note, mate, wotsit say?" Bill ask as they sat huddled in the grim doorway of a dark, East End tenement.

"Have you got a light, Bill?" Harvey asked, flattening out the piece of foolscap that had been clenched in his fist the whole way. Harvey dug a stump of candle out of his coat pocket, and Bill produced a lucifer and struck it against the rough brick at his side.

"Oh my," Harvey breathed, "It's from the old man, himself, and the paper is Lord Whitefell's own stationary." Shielding his small light with the paper itself, Harvey squinted to make out the flowing script and breathed a worried sigh. He let his head rock back against the brick as Bill Wiggins leaned in to finish reading the contents.

"They need us to get a piece of evidence from the police?" Bill said in a sigh of disbelief.

“Well, not us, per se, Bill. O’Hara. They’ve charged him to go through Mr. Mycroft’s agent, Sanders, it says, and retrieve it from Gregson’s files. This says that they believe it to be there, a coin, likely, it says, bearing some device of a wolf and a man.”

“Wot’s it mean, ‘device,’ mate?” Bill asked.

“It means with a picture or a figure stamped or carved onto its surface, Bill. Onto the coin’s surface, that is, if it is a coin. Mr. Gladstone also calls it a ‘talisman’ and an amulet, too.”

“In Gregson’s files?” Bill whispered, his eyes widening with fear. “That’d be in CID headquarters, Shepherd’s Bush. Bugger!”

Harvey nodded, bending to read the missive again, as if looking for something he missed. “He says here, Bill, that though the object was last seen in the hands of constables out of the Paddington Station house, Gregson has collected everything about our lads, Holmes and Cap’n Jacks, for a case he his building against them and that Sanders will know the whereabouts of the evidence.”

“And who is this bleedin’ Sanders cove?” Bill whispered. He’d begun to tremble.

“I know no more of him than you do, Bill, but he must be someone that our Mr. Mycroft has who works with the Metropolitan, I’d guess.”

“Ow, in the name of St. Swithins are we to get it?” Bill breathed, “unless we do a murder. The CID don’t come ‘round for petty theft, you know?”

“But it’s O’Hara who’s charged with doing it, Bill. He won’t need us mucking about under his feet if he’s set to find it,” Harvey answered.

“You really fink O’Hara’s survived being shot up by them Germans?”

“I know,” Harvey said, with a nod of his shaggy head. “Looks like you get your wish, mate. We’re to go into action. It’s up to us now. But Bill, it’s a magical thing, this piece of

evidence. You read yourself that it's an amulet or talisman. Those terms, Bill, suggest that it is used in some sorcery. Who knows what we'd be getting into if we got it into our hands?"

"Lord knows, Harvey, but Gladstone 'imself says it's—what's that word—that it be fetched," Bill replied, eager to get started.

"'Imperative,' Bill. It means that whatever our men have gotten up to up north, they need this piece retrieved immediately."

"That's us, then innit?"

"But how do we get into the CID office, Bill? We don't know this Sanders fellow and unless we do a murder or see one done, we have nothing to report," Harvey protested. Bill smiled as he replied,

"But we do has ourselves a corpse, don't we?"

"You two," Lestrade said, cocking an eyebrow at both Harvey and Bill as they perched on the edge of their chairs opposite his cluttered desk, "are up to somethin'."

"Yessir," Harvey answered. "As I said, we're reporting a vicious murder, sir, as good citizens." Bill sat at Harvey's side. "We think it was the work of the Ripper, sir, or worse yet."

"Shh. Hush, now. Keep that talk low, now. There's constables pryin' about here that would love nothin' better than to line their pockets with silver for reportin' such like to the news boys. But just between us, like, tell me about it."

"We found 'im, like, all in pieces, lyin' in an alley," Bill replied. "An' when we saw that 'e adn't any papers on 'im, we gave 'im a good christian burial."

“You what?”

“Bill is right. We buried him, sir, just last evening, the poor soul, but we can take you to his resting place, first thing,” Harvey added. “It was Bill, here, who reminded me of our civic duty to report such things, for all the good it’ll do, what with him bearing no identification, sir.”

“No good, huh? CID not much good these days, so you just up and bury ‘im? What about this: you find a man cut to pieces and dispose of the body, after you rifle his pockets for valuables, hm?” Lestrade said. “Ow do I know that you didn’t kill this fellow yourselves in a robbery gone wrong?”

“You have our word on it, sir, plus, once you see the body, you will know that we didn’t do it,” Harvey answered. “And if we had, we’d be smart enough to not turn ourselves in. We are here for evidence—to give evidence, sir.” Bill had nudged him in the ribs.

“And just where did you find him, this poor soul?” Lestrade asked.

“Off Brick Lane,” said Bill, at the exact moment Harvey said,

“Isle of Dogs.”

Lestrade’s grin widened, and his narrow eyes gleamed as both boys turned startled expressions toward each other. They had not thought through to that question, though they should have.

“Gets around, does ‘e, this corpse of yours?” Lestrade asked.

“Bill’s right, sir. It was Brick lane, in an alley near a pub. We were on our way to Isle of Dogs,” Harvey replied.

“To do what?” Lestrade demanded.

“Why, to bring our lads the tools they needed, sir. We’re plumber’s helpers, we are,” Harvey answered with a measure of dignity.

“Pull the other one. It’s got bells on,” laughed Lestrade. “You ain’t plumber’s ‘elpers.”

“Too right, we are!” Bill put in, showing Lestrade his filthy, callused hands, as evidence of his industry.

“Well, then,” Lestrade said, “suppose you tell me where you found ‘im, and I’ll send along a man with a shovel to retrieve this here ‘evidence,’ hm?”

“That would do little good, sir, for he isn’t any longer in Brick Lane,” Harvey said.

“Took ‘im to Tilbury, we did, along the cut in some evergreen shrubs. Dug ‘im a nice little resting spot,” Bill added.

“And there’s no more evidence in that alley,” Harvey said. “You won’t find a thing. We looked.”

“Ah, did you now? Did yer own investigation of the crime scene?”

“Yes, with this,” Harvey said, producing his much-diminished candle, Bill shook his head in agreement.

“No footprints, telltale bits ‘o paper, or greetin’ cards wif the murderer’s name on, not a bit of proper incriminatin’ evidence,” Bill put in.

“Oh, ‘incriminatin evidence,’ is it?” I suppose that’s just the lingo that you picked up in your work for Mr. Holmes, eh? Oh, don’t even kid yourself that you ‘ad me fooled, lads. I have identified many a face that keeps company with Holmes and Watson, this Cap’n Jacks as you call ‘im, and do not worry that I will keep that last name to myself. I know that there after bigger fish to be caught, an’ I want to be there when they land’em, see? ‘Olmes an’ company have put feathers in my cap right along, and I’m for ‘em, no matter what Gregson thinks,” he said, seeing the boys’ eyes widen in sudden fear. “I don’t know what game you two are playin,’ but I’ll nose it out, and I’ll work it to do me good, see? Now, where’s this body?”

Harvey gave him directions, but Bill added, “Only, you won’t need ’em, if you take me and ‘Arvey, ‘ere, along.”

“I won’t be doing that,” Lestrade said, motioning to a group of constables milling about the corridor outside the CID office. “You, Beacham, I ‘ave a job for you.”

A constable as wide as a wardrobe lumbered across the room, his dull eyes fixed on the boys. Unsmiling, he cracked knuckles on each hand as he approached, and each lad settled back in his chair as far as he could. They had heard of Leonardo “Peachy” Beachem before, who sat before them, looking like a bear tethered for bating.

“This is better ‘n I ‘oped for, ‘Arvey,” Bill whispered to his pal.

“But, Bill, isn’t Peachy known for crowd control?” Harvey whispered back.

“That’s ‘im, a one-man gang, is Peachy. But you wait an’ see, mate. Jus’ let me talk to ‘im.”

Lestrade snapped his fingers in front of Peachy’s face and drew his attention. “Look ‘ere, Peachy. I want you to mind these ‘ere lads. See that they stay ‘ere and get up to no mischief. It’ll be a three-hour bit, ya see?”

Peachy nodded the oversized cabbage he called his head, took off his helmet and drew up a chair to confront the boys. Using just his fingertips, the constable pulled their chairs nearer to him and fixed them with calm, unblinking eyes.

In a tiny whisper. Harvey said, “It’s like being stared at by a tree.”

Lestrade smiled at the scene and said, “Now that you lot are fixed in place, I can see to this matter. Wot I turn up will determine your fate, lads, and I don’t know if Mr. Holmes or any of ‘is high placed friends will be much ‘elp to get you out if it.”

Peachy, in the meantime, extracted a walnut from a bulging tunic pocket and crushed it between a thumb and index finger of one hand. He popped the whole mass in his mouth and crunched contentedly, staring at the boys as though it was his mission in life. Lestrade commandeered two more constables and left, confident that Harvey and Bill would be there upon his return.

Harvey stared into Peachy's eyes for a long time before he muttered, "It's uncanny, Bill. He can look at you, through you, and never blink."

"E 'as a settled mind, you might say," Bill replied, looking around the room. With a small gesture of his head, he asked, "Which of these d'you fink it is?"

Harvey, breaking away from Peachy's stare with effort, whispered, "I have no idea. What's your plan?"

"Me? I 'ave no plan, mate. I leave that to you. Remember, this is war. Wot I got is knowin.'"

Though the two had talked through the matter of getting into CID by revealing the location of Tom Hasting's corpse, the matter of finding Gregson's desk and whatever evidence he had collected had been lumped into Bill Wiggins' sense that Harvey would think of something. In Bill's mind, there was no one smarter than Harvey—other than Mr. Holmes. Now that it came to it, faced with this placid, mountainous minder, the shortcomings of their plan occurred to them, and Harvey was unsure about further plans to help them. Only Bill had a sense of assurance that Harvey would come up with something and never asked why they had made a quick, quiet return to the stable that morning. At this minute, though, Bill decided to throw of the dice on his own. After about half an hour under Peachy's unwavering gaze, Bill asked,

“Constable Beachem, ‘ow is yer mum, now? I woulda asked after ‘er sooner, only I didn’t want to pry. See, me mum tol’ me that she was ailin’ in ‘er joints, like.”

Peachy’s thick brows contracted, and he nodded, turning his full focus on Bill Wiggins, who beamed a charming smile at his host. Harvey rose to his feet, as though he would stretch, but Peachy’s hand shot out and caught his shoulder, sitting him down again with a heavy thump.

“You know, Constable, me mum ‘as a mixture she uses for ‘er own crooked fingers, the poor love, that I’ll bet she’d be glad to make up a batch for yer own mum. On’y it takes a trip to the chemists to get a tiny bottle of laudanum. I was finkin’ that if I was to give you the coin for it, you could get it to ‘er, and she and my mum could fix it up, see?”

Bill Wiggins, who never wasted a penny in his young life, pulled out a handful of coins as evidence of his generous intent, but Peachy Beachem only shook his head and muttered,

“Musn’t take favors.”

“Well, it’s not a favor to you or me, see? Just one between our mums. I know ‘ow ‘ard it is on a constable’s pay to care for the poor bodies at ‘ome. Why, I want to join the Metropolitan P’lice meself, one day, when I get tall enough, and ‘Arvey, ‘ere, why he’s called to the preachin’ an’ ‘e knows ‘ow important it is to take care of the widows and orphans, right, ‘Arvey?”

Harvey nodded with enthusiasm as Bill explained himself, extending a half crown between two grubby fingers and turning away his eyes. “Jus’ fer yer mum, see?”

The half crown disappeared into Peachy’s tunic, though his stare never changed. And Harvey began to see a way to start his slender idea of a plan.

“If I know you, Bill, you will be in this office one day,” he said, “Working alongside of the cleverest investigators London has to offer. Now, we have seen where the great Lestrade works, and it’s a model of industry, isn’t it?”

Lestrade's desk, a litter of tin teacups, ashtrays, and piles of loose paper sagged under the weight of other case files that begged his attention. Industry, it might show, but one of greater efficiency sat uninhabited across the room. This one, Harvey had had his eye on.

"Jus' look at the work 'e does. I'd bet that when Constable Beachem 'ere rises through the ranks, he'll best even Lestrade 'imself."

"But, you know, I hear that Mr. Gregson is the sharpest of all of them, even old Baynes. I'd bet money that his desk is twice as busy as Lestrade's. I'd bet its this one right next to Lestrade's."

He nodded to the desk next to Lestrade's, where files stacked six inches high all across its surface.

"Tis Lestrade's, too," Peachy muttered, casting a slow glance at the mess. "Paperwork needin' done."

Harvey stifled a laugh. No wonder Lestrade had hurried off to check their report himself. He was months behind in the reports that CID demanded.

"Gregson's be'ind me, back 'gainst the wall," Peachy added in a low rumble. "Fanks for finkin o' me mum." And with that friendly word, Peachy lapsed back into his ever-patient watchfulness. Bill nudged Harvey, who simply nodded. They weren't going to get more out of Peachy, unless they tried something desperate. That, they both knew, would only amount to the constable taking them in hand, which neither of them wanted, remembering the fate of the walnuts.

They both sat and waited for their plans to unfold and though it was only an hour later when they got their chance to act, it went by like an eternity, with neither of them saying a thing and Peachy's unrelenting gaze boring into them. Harvey had counted on some break in the

constable's gaze for his plan to work, something to indicate that the man was tired of just watching them. He thought it only natural. Lestrade, for all his inefficiencies, though, knew his manpower and knew that Peachy Beachem would keep the lads right where they were wanted. Harvey realized this and asked.

“What’s the matter with you, Bill? You’ve gone all pale and green around your mouth.”

“Wot, me? No, I’m—” Harvey’s sudden sharp nudge to his leg brought him back to the gravity of their situation. “That is, I was. Now, me tum’s actin’ all dodgy. Must be them wheelks I ‘ad for brekkers.”

“Yes. I don’t wonder. I told you they smelled a bit off,” Harvey added.

“Oh, yeah,” Bill went on, wrapping his arms around his middle and moaning. “You was right enough. I gotta get to the loo, Peachy. I swear I do.”

The folds of Constable Beachem’s forehead furrowed as his brows drew down. He waited through a long series of pitiful cries from Bill before he produced a pair of manacles and clamped Harvey’s wrist to the leg of the chair. With his nut-cracking fingertips, Peachy took hold of Bill’s coat and half dragged the boy away toward the hallway. As soon as they turned the corner, Harvey glanced around the room and saw that no detectives were present and the constables that passed to and from the room took no notice of him.

Now, Mr. Holmes had made sure that when the boys moved about the city on their various errands for Department Zed, that the contents of the ‘Wiggins and Brewer-Plumbing and Gas’ wagon gave the lads an air of authenticity. So, Harvey knew that it was well stocked with the tools of the plumbers trade, one of which, a plumber’s smoke rocket, he had picked up when he and Bill stopped at the stables before they went to Lestrade. Moving with slow caution, his head swiveling about, Harvey moved his chair over to the desk to his right. With his left hand,

he tried the desk drawers and found the top one farthest from him open. It held only a truncheon and a broken pistol. Bending low, he extracted a plumber's rocket from his right boot-top, struck its ignition cap, and tossed it into the drawer. With great care, he moved his chair back to its original position and sank his head down onto his chest, feigning sleep. He waited as the sulfurous smoke began to charge the air around him. He ignored it, until one constable, on his way into the room, muttered, "Wot's this? Smoke?"

Harvey's head snapped up, and he yelled "Fire! Spontaneous combustion! Heeeellp" Fiiiiire!" The smoke had risen to the ceiling, like a storm cloud hanging in the room. The files on the desk next to him were obscured by the smoke that billowed out all around the top of the desk. Constables ran into the room and began coughing, some taking up the cry of "Fire!" With all of the running about, Harvey rose, taking his chair with him and dashed across the room to Gregson's efficient desk. He yanked open drawers, bending low in the fading light, peering hard at the names on files and paperwork.

Constables shouted, milling about around him, searching for the source of the smoke. Contained in that drawer, the rocket had caught something in the drawer afire, and in the heat, one round left carelessly in the old pistol's chamber went off with a loud pop, which scattered constables and caused a flurry of shouts and much cursing. Flames began to lick at the papers on the desktop, and they saw the fire at once and hurried to it with buckets of water. Soon, the floor around that desk was aswim with wet paper in widening puddles

Harvey, in the melee of shouting and smoke, bent to his task and found a file in a bottom drawer marked, 'Sherlock Holmes.' He opened the file, his quick eyes scanning the contents. Gregson had notes of his own and official reports of arrests made, thanks to the consulting detective's genius. Several envelopes lay buried under it. Harvey scanned them for the one with

the most recent dates. One he found was labelled 'Pinder, 27 December.' It contained one old watch, an awful looking garrote, its wooden grips dark with use and old blood, and a handful of coins. Harvey whispered a prayer of thanks and took the coins out.

Constables swore and coughed, hurling accusations at the absent Lestrade, but Harvey concentrated. The smoke made it impossible to see much, but only one of the coins gave him the feel of an amulet. It had a different feel, uneven around its edges. Bringing it up to his tearing eyes, he beheld a Janus-looking device, a vaguely dog-shaped face paired with a blunt but human face. Harvey knew he had what he needed. Thrusting the envelope and file back into the drawer, Harvey fell to his knees, dragged his chair towards a window near Gregson's desk, and gulped as much clean air as he could. He leaned out the window, his right hand still manacled to the chair inside. He coughed in violent spasms.

"'Ere, you," Peachy's voice came from behind him, as the constable's massive hand hauled him back into the room, "let's get you out." Peachy had Bill Wiggins by the back of his coat, hauling him along so that his feet barely touched the floor, and Harvey was treated likewise. Constable Beachem half-carried them both out to the front of the Shepherds' Bush building and let them collapse together. He unlocked the manacle from Harvey's right hand. Harvey passed the coin to Bill, certain that he'd be searched, but Peachy, a kind soul at heart, had no intention of doing anything. Bill didn't know this, though, and when Peachy stood them both upright before him, Bill popped the coin into his mouth and swallowed. Harvey's eyes went wide when he saw what Bill had done.

"Run 'long, now," Peachy said. "My mum knows your mum, so we'll know where to find you when we need you." With that, the constable charged back into the building. Its windows were open, and the smoke would soon be gone. Harvey, though terrified by Bill's

actions, hurried them both away, for the remains of the smoke rocket would soon be found.

Harvey knew that he would be suspect.

“That was brilliant, mate,” Bill enthused as they lost themselves in London’s back alleys. “Now, if we just waits a bit, we’ll have that evidence, though it’ll be a right mess getting’ it in hand again.”

“True, and we can hope that nothing bad happens to you. Bill, why in the world did you swallow it?”

“Well,” Bill answered with a shrug, “truth to tell, I done it once, like that, in the old days, before I went to work for Mr. ‘Olmes and Cap’n Jacks. Can’t pin anything on you, if they—”

“Bill, that was no ordinary coin.”

“Yeah. Was a bit ‘ard to get down, really, rough ‘round the edges,” he answered. “Figured the bad part may be its comin’ out, like—but ‘Arvey, why you looking’s at me like that?”

“I’m looking for any sign of its effect on you,” Harvey said. “Do you feel alright, Bill?”

“Yeah, I’m—well, nows you mention it, I am a bit shaky, but that can’t be from one little ol’ coin, can it?” Bill’s voice began to tremble. “Wot d’you think...might...’appen, ‘Arvey?”

“I don’t know,” Harvey cried. “I wasn’t expecting you to swallow a thing we figured was a magical artifact, Bill Wiggins. I don’t know what it was used for.”

In a squeaky voice, Bill asked, “Could it ‘ave been, you know, just a reminder, like a saint’s medal?”

“I suppose it could, but I just don’t know anything about it, except that it’s magical. It could...could turn you into something else, make you invisible, maybe. It’s an arcane artefact, dark sorcery, Bill!”

“Oh, strewth!” Bill cried in a quavering voice, “I ‘ope it don’t turn me into a toad ‘r a newt, like. What’ll me Mum say? Oh, ‘Arvey, you’ve gotta think o’somefin!”

“Well, it hasn’t yet,” Harvey replied in calmer tones, anxious to keep Bill from making a scene in front of all the coppers, “so maybe it won’t. But we don’t know. We must find O’Hara and tell him. He might know more about it, yeah?”

“Yeah. If ‘e’s alive,” Bill said, gulping hard. “Lord, ‘Arvey. Now, I don’t feel so good.”

*

Not knowing what else to do, the pair of them wandered back to the center of town, toward Picadilly round about, where they were to rendezvous with O’Hara, if he did survive his encounter with the men behind the stables. Harvey kept a protective arm around Bill’s shoulders as they went, for poor Wiggins was certain that vile things were happening inside him. He trembled at each step and shouted out loud after a burp. The fog, thick enough now to keep them both from seeing more than a foot or two in front of them, added to Bill’s sense of doom. He shied away at every face that broke through the mist in front of him.

Still, their very feet knew the streets of Old London and they found their way at length to Picadilly Circus. There, young Limeberry, spotted them as he talked to a group of crossing sweepers who were taking turns doing tumbling tricks. The bigger sweeps turned cartwheels and handsprings in the glow of a streetlamp, seeming to appear and disappear like magic in the thick fog. An appreciative crowd of well-heeled gents and ladies had paused to watch and toss pennies at them, while the smaller sweeps lifted pocket handkerchiefs from their unsuspecting benefactors. Harvey and Bill narrowly missed running in to a springing sweep, but Limeberry

stopped them both and towed them away by their sleeves. Despite their protests, he wouldn't say a word until they were well within the dark recesses of alleys that ran behind the clean, bright store fronts. When they gained the dark recesses at the rear of Jermyn Street, he paused and looked at them both.

“What is it, Johnny? You look near done in,” Harvey said.

“An' so I am, bein' shaken from sleep in the middle o' the night by some bloke claimin' to be an agent o' the Grand ol' Man 'imself.”

“Wot? Mr, Gladstone sent you out after us?” Bill asked.

“Not 'im, but this man 'oo claimed to work for him and Mr. 'Olmes's brother. Said I was to get 'elp and find you. So, I up and call out Nowicke, an' 'e's looking for you too, though I dun't know 'ow this 'ere Gladstone's man even knew where to find me.”

“Well, you've found us, now what?” Harvey asked, trying to calm down the small fellow in front of him.

“I'm s'posed to take you to this address,” Limeberry said, drawing a business card from his pocket, its front embossed with “William Ewert Gladstone” in flowing script. On its back in crabbed letters, it bore an address.

“Strewth, I'm hungry, 'Arvey,” Bill said, drawing his friend's stare. Limeberry, too, screwed up his eyes and looked at Bill Wiggins like he didn't know him.

“Well—” Harvey started to protest, but Bill went on.

“Just them bleedin' sausages—and, and bread, that cooked meat smell has my mouth waterin'.”

“Wot'n'ell is 'e on about, 'Arvey?” Limeberry whispered.

I don't know, Johnny,” Harvey replied, “but it—”

Two men, one of them chewing on something, turned into the alley where they stood. Without a word between them, the three boys ran. Limeberry was wicked fast, and soon he was yards ahead of them. When they took a turn that would put them back out into the stream of folks on the sidewalk, Limeberry was already lost, though neither Bill nor Harvey knew what doorway or bolt hole he'd gotten into. Meanwhile, the two men followed them. Johnny had already put into effect the usual avoidance mechanism: turn, turn, then turn again: stay small and avoid eye contact with anyone, walk when you can, find someone to speak with, keep an escape route in mind, and cry piteously if handled. Both Harvey and Bill were set to do just that as they sprinted towards the pale lights of Regents Street, though their pursuers were just steps behind.

Harvey and Bill heard one say something to the other in German, Harvey cursed the fact that the Germans had found them, but Bill put on a burst of speed that he'd never shown before. Usually, the two were well matched in footspeed, but Bill shot forward with a wild cry like he'd been shot out of a canon. He narrowly missed a huge constable, who loomed in the opening of the alley. It was Leonardo "Peachy" Beachem, but even Harvey saw that he wasn't there after them. Beachem swung a black net around his head, cast it in a smooth throw over top of Harvey, who heard the 'whoosh' of its weighted ends going over fast. He had seen Guthrie and Cap'n Jacks use such weapons.

The Germans went down, tangled in the silken cords. Constable Beachem rushed by Harvey and with two swift blows of his truncheon had both men unconscious. Harvey looked after Bill Wiggins, who had turned to the right, as planned. With the speed he put on, Bill would prove impossible to catch.

"Wait a second, Mr. Brewer," Beachem's voice came from behind Harvey, making the boy spin 'round to stare into the oddly penetrating gaze of the constable. It was a much different

look for Beachem, one Harvey had not thought possible in the Beachem with whom he'd spent the better part of the morning. "Please wait here for your ride. O'Hara needs you." Peachy's dull voice had sharpened

Peachy's knowing smile puzzled Harvey no end, but there was no threat in the big constable's demeanor. Nor was there that pervading sense of slow stillness that had characterized Peachy's interaction with them before. Instead, there was intelligence and urgency. So, when a large, black four-wheeler pulled up at the alley's entrance, the transformed constable said,

"Here's your ride, Master Brewer." Harvey looked at the driver and gasped. It was the old Japanese sensei, Mr. Uyeshiba at the reins. Harvey realized, then, that things in Department Zed must be in turmoil, to call the old gentleman into active service. He realized, too, that with Mr. Uyeshiba driving, he was under the safest guard he could have. He smiled at the sensei as Peachy told him, "I fear I've put the wind to young Master Wiggins but I hope he won't have gotten far. One of our men will have him by now." Turning back to Harvey, Peachy smiled, shook his hand and said, "In the future, if you need me, know that among Department Zed agents, I am Sanders. It might save you some time and energy, but as for this," Peachy said, producing the burnt-out stub of a plumber's rocket, "that was a first-class ruse, my lad."

Harvey, somewhat stunned by the turn of events, mounted the steps of the carriage, and entered its luxurious confines. Within, John Limeberry, his eyes wide and staring, sat in a far corner. Harvey climbed in and nodded to his young friend, as the carriage rolled away slowly in the fog.

"Did you fetch this four-wheeler, Johnny?" Harvey asked.

“Not me,” Limeberry answered, his voice shaky. “Peachy nabbed me when I ducked into McCarthy’s rag and bone shop, on’y he ain’t so much like Peachy anymore.”

“No, he isn’t, is he,” Harvey murmured. He sat in silence for a moment before he asked, “Johnny, what went on in Picadilly before we arrived?”

“I didn’t get to tell you, but the lads said there was Germans askin’ after you two.”

“By name, Johnny?”

“No. The plumber boys, one red headed, one dark. Knew it was you two, right off, I did, an’ I tol’ the lads to clam up. ‘S why I dragged you away, like, quick as I could.”

“German blokes,” Harvey repeated. “And Peachy is our Mr. Sanders with the police. Johnny, I don’t mind telling you that we’re right in the middle of this one, again, like we were last Fall. If they dismiss you where we are going, you go up in smoke, lad, quick as quick. I’ll get word round through the regular channels as soon as I can.”

“But what about Wiggins, ‘Arvey? ‘E took off like a coney. I never knew ‘e could run like that. ‘E looked faster than me.”

“I’m frightened about him,” Harvey said. “Something...different is happening to him and I think I know why. It’s a danger, though, Johnny, so you might spread the word to the lads to keep track of him, if you can. Just—if he doesn’t look or act right—don’t go near him, okay?”

Limeberry nodded and repeated his orders, while Harvey’s dark thoughts turned back to his partner, Bill. Bill had said they were at war, and Harvey’s quick mind leaped to the conclusion that it must be with the Germans, but it hadn’t gone public, which was a funny old way to conduct a war.

Harvey thought back to Bill’s wish to take a more active role against the forces of evil. Bill’s prophetic wish made him shudder. He came to the swift conclusion that, in swallowing

that coin, Bill had exposed himself to the evil workings of the enemy, and if the gypsies were in on it with the Germans, they were the source of the dark magic. The driver of the coach that followed them looked more like one of the local dark gypsy tribe. There were gypsies in Germany, he'd read, so it wasn't hard to believe that they could be in league with foreign agents.

Not for the first time, Harvey suspected that Department Zed would always be fighting wars that no one else knew about. He'd seen it the previous summer and autumn, when they'd gone up against the forces of Moriarty. More than anything, though, he worried about Bill, alone, fighting a different war inside himself, brought on by some gypsy magic, Harvey believed. Sorcery. The Bible was dead against it, he knew, but his one wish at that moment was that he had better knowledge of it, of the things that poor Bill was fighting. Bill ran faster than he ever had, and Harvey thought back to Bill's words that he smelled sausage and fresh bread just before the Germans chased them.

"Johnny, back in that Jermyn ally, could you smell the food that Bill mentioned?"

"No. No, not at all, if I think back to it, all I smelled was the tobacco from Astley's back door."

"Right. That's right. I remember that, too," Harvey said. "But Bill smelled sausages and fresh bread."

"Must've been 'ungry. I know I am. Been on me feet since before the sun was up."

Harvey fished a few shillings out of his pocket and passed them to his young friend and said, in an absent manner, "That'll see you right, as soon as you get clear."

*

Bill Wiggins, however, was anything but clear at that moment. As long as he heard loud footsteps and shouts behind him, he ran faster than he ever had before. He had careened off of

people, horses, carriages, and the odd building, racing headlong through the fog. And, since the haste of his passage along the refined streets of central London had earned him quite a few shouts of outrage, he ran far past his pursuers. If he'd known that they were sent on behalf of his Department Zed superiors, he might have avoided the disastrous chain of thoughts that ran through his head. Wiggins, as Sherlock Holmes knew, was a quick study, observant and sharp-eyed. His senses, attuned to the chancy life of a London crossing sweeper, kept him apprised of all that went on around him. His thoughts ran in this order: I have the amulet; the men who chase me want to get their hands on it; they'll know that I have it since they can't find it on Harvey; they'll have our guts for garters to get it out of us. Oh, strewth.

So torn was he about going back to Harvey's aid, that he took many turnings that would lead him back to the center of town. However, he turned away from these directions with the thought that he had to think more about getting this evidence in his belly to the rightful parties that knew what to do with it. But how? He simply could not think of anything except food. He was never hungrier in his life, which was saying something, and it near drove the sense from his head, so that all that was left was fear—and hunger.

The fear came from Bill's deep distrust of magic, near as deep as Doctor Watson's. Harvey's suggestion that swallowing a magical device was, in itself, exposing him to its influences fueled his fear and the desire to run.

"Always finkin' with your stomach, William," he muttered under his breath. "Serve you right to get turned into somefin' unnat'ral."

Huddling behind a spent beer keg, Wiggins stopped and sat still. His knees bent to his chest, his thoughts a jumble of the impulses that had taken control of his body, which had begun

to ache, deep in his bones. His skin, too, itched everywhere, and he trembled from head to foot with the slightest noise in the fog that hid him.

When the barman entered the alley, a bucket of slops hanging from one hand, he caught sight of Bill and raised his voice just loud enough to cause a lightning-like flash of anger to run through the boy. Bill heard the growl escape his lips as he shot to his feet, high over the keg, and he heard, too, the frightened bleat of the barman who fell back from him, shrieking, "Bleedon' Ell!" as Bill took to his heels.

He had pains in his feet, hands, and mouth, and he whined as he ran. His one clear thought was that he had to get hidden, as fast as he could. The only sanctuary he could think of was the sewer tunnels.

Finding a more or less familiar looking sewer grating, he lifted its heavy iron cap with ease, as never before, and plunged down into the noisome depths, making his way into larger tunnels that ran deep with the cold winter run off. He found a place that was more or less dry, a ledge where he could lie and think, if think he could.

His stomach growled with intemperate desire for meat, fresh meat, too, meat into which he could sink his aching teeth, but he dared not try to seek anything on the streets. His reaction to the fellow from the pub had been so violent that he feared what else might happen if he went above again. Soon, he'd have to try, but his next clear thought was to wait until after dark. Thoughts of the nighttime brought him a strange excitement. They soothed him somewhat as well, and as he drew up his legs to his chest again, he drifted off into a sleep brought on by a sudden ceasing of excited effort. And in his dreams, he ran and ran, out in the countryside, over meadows lit by the thin sliver of moon, through forests where deer ran. He raced after them and leapt at the tantalizing flesh of their fleeing haunches...

He woke to the sound of his own growling and the shouts of protest from a familiar voice. A hard blow to the nose set him back a bit, and he saw that he had Johnny Limeberry pinned to the brick wall of the tunnel, the boy's eyes wide with fright.

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The carriage stopped, as Harvey figured it would, at the south London address on the back of Gladstone's card. Mr. Uyeshiba secured the horses and followed him to the door. Harvey entered the front door of a tall, narrow tenement and climbed the dark steps up to the third floor. There, he found the right door and knocked once. It took a minute before O'Hara's voice answered, "Come in," and Harvey entered. He was staring down the bore of the long duck gun that had been in the stable. O'Hara held it as he lay propped up on a sofa in a dark room. Mr. Uyeshiba pushed his way around Harvey and disappeared into an adjoining room through a dark hallway, and the clatter of teapot and kettle made Harvey breath easy.

"Glad you made it. Sanders reported that you must have found the article in question. That was a foolish—but courageous thing to do, lad. Where is Wiggins?"

"He...he got frightened and ran off, sir," Harvey answered, helping his superior lay the long, heavy gun on the floor, within reach. "He has the coin, er, amulet, sir."

O'Hara had a fresh bullet wound to his leg and several knife cuts on his hands and lower arms. These still bore evidence of bleeding, so they probably needed stitching up. O'Hara had lost blood but was still alert, though he looked pale in the wan light. Harvey debated about asking O'Hara about the amulet's properties but settled only on,

"It's a strange thing, this coin. I can't tell why it would be important."

“I don’t know either, but I know better than to question my orders. All our other agents have gone to ground in light of these German lads searching for you two. Can you fill me in on what all has happened since you were sent to bury Hasting’s remains?”

Harvey gave him the report, omitting the fact that the amulet rested in Bill Wiggins stomach. He added his suspicions about the German’s gypsy confederates, to which O’Hara replied by brandishing the bandages on his hands and forearms as his evidence for acknowledging the gypsy presence. At length, with a sad shake of his head, O’Hara said,

“I need to trust you to find Wiggins and bring him here. We must turn over that amulet to the elder Mr. Holmes tomorrow. As I said, all of the local clandestine agents of Department Zed are aware of the enemy presence in London and are searching them out. That leaves only you and me to secure that artifact, son. And I am not much use in the field. Can you, will you, take on the job of finding Bill and bringing it back here?”

“Yes, sir,” Harvey said and rose to go, anxious to try and pick up Bill’s trail. “But before I go, sir, I have to ask, do you have you any idea what that artifact does?”

“Harvey, I am not sure, but it is a deadly weapon, one I think that has magical powers, if you can believe that.”

“What if, er, it was swallowed?” Harvey whispered.

“Swallowed?” O’Hara said, struggling to sit up.

“You know, for safe keeping,” Harvey whispered.

“Well...I don’t know that it will do anything on its own, but if it is somehow connected with others of its kind, it might do something when they are used—maybe. I do know that the men I fought would go to any lengths to get it out of Bill, if you know what I mean.”

“I can’t let anything like what I fear happen to Bill, sir,” Harvey whispered.

“Then you had best go and find him.”

“Aye, sir. I will.”

Harvey declined the benefit of the coach to take him back into the heart of town and slowly made his way across Blackfriar’s Bridge on foot, wary of anyone who so much as glanced at him. But he soon found the comfort and invisibility of the sewer tunnels he’d learn to navigate since he was a small lad, under O’Doole’s tutelage. Jimmy O’Doole had been his greatest friend, but now, that honor belonged to Bill Wiggins, who fled into unknown dangers under the threat of foreign agents who hunted him and some strange force that worked on him from within.

He and Bill had often thought that they mirrored the great duo, Holmes and Watson, but they never had a secure sense of which of them was the Watson and which was the Holmes in their pairing. They each desired the skill, abilities, and courage of their leaders, though all they saw in themselves was the lack of those things they desired. Though Harvey read everything his hands could grasp, all he experienced on his lonely journey was a profound lack of what he needed to fight the evils that confronted him. But fight them, he would, for Cap’n Jack and Mr. Holmes were fighting them too, somewhere. The safety of the sewer tunnels might help him stay hidden, but the gypsy allies of the German agents would soon turn their attentions to them, knowing the ways of London’s toshers, crossing sweepers, and assorted street children. Time was against him, as well a force of enemy agents and a magic whose grip lay on his best friend.

Wandering back toward Picadilly, Harvey moved with care in the dark, listening to the flow of the drains and the street sounds that filtered down to him. In the midst of winter, in the worst fog he’d ever seen, darkness had taken London early.

Harvey believed that night would only serve to aid the magic that gripped Bill Wiggins. He found himself, like most men in a war, worried more about his mate than his cause, and he moaned aloud, “War is Hell on earth. Help me, Lord, my rock, my strong tower.”

Reciting such snatches of Psalms as he remembered helped him, so he went on like that, his voice growing louder as he listened to its echoes come back to him. They comforted him, making him feel that he wasn't a boy, alone, in a war. And at length, amidst the echoes, he heard his own name called, and a light wavering behind him.

“Who's there?” he called and was delighted to see the small figure of Anthony Nowicke hurrying towards him, bearing a flickering candle.

“Ant'nee, sir,” the boy answered, “and, Lord, am I glad to see you. Wee've got him, got Wiggins, sir, sort of.”

Both boys turned and went back the way Harvey had come, Nowicke explaining that Bill Wiggins was to be found in one of the big drains down by the Thames. He would not say anything else about Bill's condition, though judging from the shaking hands that held his candle aloft, and the wide eyes in his pale, narrow face, Harvey knew that he'd seen something horrific.

At last, they found Limeberry peering down a gaping dark tunnel. And Harvey demanded, “Is he down there? Is Bill Wiggins down there?”

“It was...and it wasn't...Wiggins, sir,” Limeberry whispered, “but these here are his clothes, and...well...” The familiar coat, shirt, pants, and shoes lay in a pile on the dry stone above the water's edge, and Harvey peered at them, seeing that they were no better than rags, now. “When I saw 'im, 'e was naked, sir, and covered in hair as red as that on Bill's 'ead, sir, and he growled at me, so I thumped 'im hard on 'is nose and ran. B,Bill, I fink, took off, and when I calmed down and called after 'im, he roared back at me to stay away, sir.”

Harvey, holding the clothes before him in clutched hands nodded and turned his eyes down into the tunnel. On quiet steps, he made his way down the tunnel, trying to remember the words of a Psalm, but they would not come to him. He hummed, as best he could, the tune of a hymn, but his own voice was shaking so that it sounded more like moaning, which soon was mixed with other moans not his own.

“B, Bill? Bill Wiggins?” Harvey whispered.

“Yes,” came back to Harvey in a whisper. “Don’t...look at...me.”

“Well, I must, if I am to help you, and I’ve brought your clothes, Bill,” Harvey said, for Nowicke and Limeberry had come after him, with the stump of the candle. Bill sat naked on stone, hugging his knees to his chest, face buried in his arms. Not far from him sat a small pile of Bill’s waste, toward which he made a flicking gesture with one hand.

“It’s in...there, that, that thing wot’s wanted, an’ ‘Arvey, I fink you were right about these bein’ the last days of Department Zed,” Bill said, in a near sob, lifting a tear-streaked face to his friend, who squatted down before him.

“Why’d you say so, Bill, for surely, you’ve saved the day,” Harvey replied, as he pressed Bill’s clothes into his hands.

“But, ‘Arvey, that awful magic! It ‘ad me, changed into somefin’ ‘orrible! Why, I almost bit poor Johnny, before he smacked some sense into me. I didn’t know myself, ‘Arvey. It was me an’ not me tryin’ to take a chunk out of my own mate. If Mr. ‘Olmes and Cap’n Jack don’t know about it, they’re as good as lost.”

A chill ran through Harvey, for he had been thinking something similar about Holmes and Watson, away north, in the thick of this business of Germans, Gypsies, and magical amulets. A second shiver ran through him, one of recognition of truth.

“No, Bill. It’s their friendship that’ll save them both. Like you and me, right?” Harvey said, earning a troubled nod and a sniff from Bill, who pulled his tattered clothes on.

“I ‘ope so. I surely do ‘ope so,” Bill said.

Harvey ripped a length of cloth from the bottom hem of his shirt and used one end of it to cover his finger as he poked about in the filth, fetching the soiled amulet. Finding it, he wiped it as clean as he could and wrapped it in a handkerchief that Nowicke had filched earlier that day—old habits, like relieving gentlemen of the occasional pocket kerchief, die hard on the street. At this, though Harvey was of a mind to fuss at the boy for stealing, he stopped and thought about things for a minute.

“Bill, we can trust the habits of our hearts, and I’m sure that our lot away up north are in the habit of doing good. Even if they need to handle such dangerous things as this amulet, they have true hearts, like yours, Bill. Even now, I’ll wager that they are still fighting on the side of the angels, no matter what the magic tries to do to them.

“Now, I think we should hurry this thing back to O’Hara and then get you something to eat, like a good fresh steak and kidney pudding,” Harvey said.

“Bread, maybe, an’ some tea for my nerves, ‘Arvey, but no meat. None for me, mate. I want to be done with that cravin’ for meat!”

THE END