

# Jet

## Contents

Chapter 18.....	2
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	17
Chapter 4.....	21
Chapter 5.....	25
Chapter 6.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 7.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 8.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 9.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 10.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 11.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 12.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 13.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 14.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 15.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 16.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 17.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 19.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 20.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Chapter 21.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
Epilogue.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>

## Chapter 18

The delicate silver button transferred the chill of untouched metal onto his forefinger - a sensation Jet did not find altogether unpleasant. It reminded him that he was alive; a memory that, for the moment at least, was welcome. But only for the moment and that moment passed almost as instantly as it had come.

He gazed at the liquid in the small glass tube, watched it as the plunger displaced it into the needle. He felt it flow into his veins followed by the warmth. That glorious warmth that moved quickly from the sticking point to his chest and stomach and then his head and limbs, from his fingertips to his toes. Now the pain, the memories, were gone in the medicine's warm embrace. Jet's mouth twisted into a slack smile. He turned his head to his friend.

"See? I told you it was good. And it's not addictive like laudanum." His friend grinned back, pushing the plunger down on his own syringe. "Ahhh..." he sighed as the drug coursed through his body.

"Heroin, you said?" Jet had trouble forming the words properly.

"Yeah, from Germany," Arthur replied. "My father's former business partner brought it over to try."

"Well it works." Jet slid down the backboard of the bed until his head rested on the pillow. Arthur let his head roll back against the crest of the arm chair and laughed at his friend. Arthur's head lolled from side to side against the chair back. Suddenly, he jerked forward and heaved. Jet slowly turned his head to face his compatriot with a slightly arched eyebrow. "You oll korrekt, mate?" he drolled with no great urgency.

Arthur was doubled over, retching and clutching his stomach. Arthur turned up his face to his friend, it appeared drawn and pale, but a smile was stretched across it. "I'll be fine, mate, it will pass in a moment."

"Whatever you say, Artie." Jet turned his attention back to the mouldings on the ceiling, he had never really noticed them before - not since his youth, anyway - but now his eyes once again lovingly caressed those intricate twists and turns. He raised his hand toward them, tracing the curving lines with his finger. Arthur stopped retching and the two young men lapsed into silence.

It was some time later that Jet became aware of a breach of the soundless peace enveloping him. From his right he heard what he began to understand to be uproarious laughter. He slowly turned his head to see Arthur wrapped in a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Jet lazily propped himself upon his elbow. "What's so funny?" he slurred. Arthur took a deep breath to collect himself and, for a moment, it seemed to work; but as he raised his head to speak he broke

into another fit. "Oh come off it!" Jet exclaimed, hurling a pillow in Arthur's direction. Arthur raised his hand, pointing upward, the other he put on his chest as he finally slowed his breathing enough to speak.

"I can almost remember exactly the funny expressions on their faces." he panted.

"What are you talking about?"

"When, when you told them that you intended to marry soon... to that... to that sally ann tart, the sergeant major," Arthur managed between breaths. "Remember? Mad Mina even dropped her spoon. Or was that your mum? It's no matter." He waved his hand absently. "And Lord Norbert! I thought he might faint on the spot, the way he dithered with his napkin. As I recall your father was almost as bold and brazen as that sergeant major - he was ready to disinherit you on the spot in front of the entire dinner party. He was correct, you know. She was only marrying you for your money."

"I suppose so," Jet allowed.

"I don't know what lapse in your judgment enticed you to put yourself in such a disgraceful position with such a coarse, common woman as that. Wasn't she one of those suffragists (maybe I should say suffragette) as well?"

"Yes," he answered through clenched teeth.

"She was nothing to look at either, as I recall; but it's always the ugly birds that make the most noise. And a gawdawful racket she made! Cawing here about the Rights of Women, crowing there about saving those degenerates - like you and I mate - from our sins." Here his voice took on a higher pitch, "'Oh you may be poor on earth but in heaven you'll wear a crown of finest gold and jewels - have some soup.' Oh what was her name? It was something ugly, like a fat old cow."

"It was Bertha."

"Oh right! Bertie! As Thomas once said to Richard, mate: 'She's peevish, she's thievish, she's ugly, she's old, and a liar, and a fool, and a slut, and a scold.' You should thank the lot of us for delivering you from her deliverance."

Jet did not answer this indictment. His hands clenched the bedsheets on both sides of his form. He feared what he would say were he to loose his tongue. Would he mock his childhood friend, insult him, defend the woman? Would he scream as a madman - with no intelligible voice but volume? If he did not grip the bed would his hands then place their hard grasp around Arthur's throat? If he attempted to speak would his words fail him completely? Would he fall to the floor sobbing like an infant?

Already he felt a sob come up, but he stifled it. His eyes he shut tightly to block the tears which stung them. Arthur seemed to interpret Jet's lack of response to mean he had nodded off.

"Cheers mate," he saluted his friend with a raised glass of emerald liquid, drained it, and poured himself another. Sometime later, Jet vaguely registered the sound of the glass as it shattered upon the floor.

Without a witness to observe them, the tears which had scorched his eyelids finally found their path across his cheeks to the soft pillow beneath. Almost soundlessly the tune, that song they had sung on the bridge before the infinite expanse of stars above and below them, came: "The young May moon is beaming, love..." the words were lost as his voice caught in stifled sobs, "... and the best of all ways to lengthen our days is to steal a few hours from the night, my dear."

## Chapter 1

"Ha ha ha!" The two young men stumbled from a roughhewn doorway out onto the chipped grey bricks of the street. They were both dressed in a manner that was instantly out of place for their humble surroundings, yet was often seen emerging from those particular quarters. The sandy haired man in the undone blue waistcoat with brass buttons (that was threatening to abandon its owner's shoulders entirely at any moment) took a long swig from a brown glass bottle, gave a whoop, and threw it to the ground smashing it on the pave stones.

"Aw Jet! You didn't leave none for me!" The golden haired one whined, yet there was a glint in his eye that told this was more playacting than actual hurt.

"Then go give the man your glasses for another case."

"But I need those to read!" the golden haired one protested.

"Oh, like you do a good deal of that!" Jet replied. "Artie the scholar: the reader of great books and doer of fantastic deeds! Go buy us another case."

Arthur took the glasses from his inside pocket and looked hesitantly at them. Just then he cocked his head. "Do you hear that music?" Arthur asked.

Jet stopped tugging at his morning coat to listen. "Nah, you're hearin' things you daft fool." Jet waved an arm in dismissal and turned to head down the street.

"I am not. Hear! It's growing louder." Arthur exclaimed grabbing Jet's sleeve.

"Oi! You're right!" Jet stopped to listen. "Blimey! It's gawdawful! What in the world is making that racket?"

The boys followed the bright cacophony down a side alley to a wooden fence. Jet was the first to reach it and hoisted himself up to see over. At the end of the street he witnessed a crowd walking down toward the market. The blue-trimmed red banner with the great yellow star in the center being hoisted by the marchers in navy blue uniforms - some playing tambourines and tubas, even an accordion (each according to his own "talents" Jet laughed to himself) - was unmistakable. As were the crowd of dingy looking men behind them hoisting up their own darkly grinning banner as well as a few dead rats on sticks that, even from this distance, appeared quite ripe. Arthur arrived at his side.

"Artie, it's the Salvationists! Let's see if we can't have a little fun." Jet lifted himself over the barrier and ran toward the street, followed closely by his friend.

They reached the square only slightly ahead of the Salvationists. One of the men set up a large drum and began to beat it while the others gathered about another man who appeared to be

the leader. He was a tall dark haired man with spectacles and a great imperial mustache. The man stood in front of the gathering crowd and stretched his arms wide "My good people -" he began.

"Stick your sermons up your rear!" came a voice from the back. Jet and Arthur turned to see a stocky mill worker tossing an egg up and down in his hand. The speaker had not even glanced to acknowledge the man - a slight which infuriated the millworker.

"The Lord has promised-"

"You can shove those promises up there with your sermon!" The man threw the egg with great force at the speaker. His aim was true; a large splotch of blue paint stained the speaker's left cheek. The egg must have been blown out and filled with paint. Jet laughed at this revelation of the nature of the projectile. Still the speaker persisted.

The crowd pressed in closer to the Salvationists as more objects and curses flew. From the back of the crowd crude songs were sung in mockery of those common to the Salvationists. Jet picked up a wad of dirt "C'mon!" He waved Arthur to follow him into the throng. The two weaved through the crowd until they found themselves, unexpectedly, on the other side with the Salvationists.

Jet grabbed a hold of Arthur's arm and pulled him low. "Get down!" he hissed, a tomato whizzed above Arthur's head.

"Good catch, mate!" Arthur replied.

Jet scanned the group for a proper target. There, not too far from him, stood a stocky woman. "Oi Artie! How much you bet I can nail that plump biddy over there?" He pointed to the woman.

"Two shillings."

"Only two?! At this distance it's worth at least a pound."

"Well, she's not exactly a small target, nor a moving one. Five shillings, take it or leave it."

"Five it is then." Jet and Arthur shook hands briefly to seal the wager. Jet took aim and threw, striking the woman squarely on the side of her bonnet with a clod of dirt which disintegrated on impact. Her head snapped to face the direction from which the missile had come. Her eyes narrowed at the boys who were doubling over in laughter. She spun on her heel and strode confidently toward them.

"Five shillings!" Arthur slapped the money into Jet's hand.

"Thanks, mate. Pleasure doing business with you." Jet shook his partner in crime's hand.

"Oh ho! You're in trouble now - she's heading straight for us."

Jet looked up to see the woman approaching them, her rounded features were fixed in a hard glare. "She's bold, that one." Jet remarked sidewise to Arthur.

"Well, I suppose we will just have to teach her some proper manners," Arthur replied with a twisted smile, that lecherous look Jet knew so well shining from his green eyes.

The woman stopped directly in front of them. "I am sorry to tell you, but I believe I have ruined your clod of dirt. You see, it came flying so quickly in my direction, rather unannounced, that I had no chance to save it from its dismal fate. I offer you its remains." With that, she dusted off her hands in front of them, stuck up her nose, and turned to walk away in the opposite direction. Arthur's hand shot out and grabbed her wrist tightly, turning her. She pulled to get away from his grasp but, slight as he was, Arthur was powerful.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" he sneered.

"If you would kindly unhand me, then you shall know by observation."

Arthur pulled her in to face him; she was almost pressed against his chest and his coat lapel brushed against her, quivering dangerously. Now he had drawn himself to his full height. Crouched, as he and Jet had been, the woman had likely mistaken them for older boys, she saw her error now. Arthur stood a full head above her and Jet - who circled her - only a few inches below that.

"My, she is a bold one," Jet whispered in an oily tone like a snake hissing into her ear.

"I wonder, are you one of those reformed whores we keep hearing so much about?"

The woman strained against his hold but the vise of his grip only tightened. "Let me be *sir*, before I forget my manners." This was an empty threat and Arthur knew it, he easily had the upper hand.

"I believe my dear friend and I would like nothing better than if you did." Jet replied, his hand brushed the hem of her dress.

The woman turned her eyes to the sky. "My Lord will protect me wherever I go. He is my help and my strength. He will not abandon me!"

Arthur looked left and right, then squarely into those eyes which still shone bravely. "My dear, it appears he already has." With his other arm Arthur clutched her to his body tightly; his hand ran up and down the length of her form. He let out a stuttered sigh. "Jet, catch!" He flung the woman backwards into Jet's open arms. Jet grasped her tightly, her face was white, her eyes looking up just as bold and brassy as ever, but in his arms he felt her body fluttering with terror - like that of a baby bird.

"Alright, let's see what kind of woman we have here," Arthur proclaimed as his hand slithered up her dress to her thigh.

"No!" Jet exclaimed, turning his body round to protect the woman.

"Oh ho! What's this now? Is she not good enough for you? C'mon man, we've plowed many a fallower field."

Jet found himself scrambling for an answer, but one presented itself in the errant body of a rat, flung slightly too far off from the main crowd. "There are too many people here, if we were spotted engaging in such... sport... with a woman such as her, it could cause a scandal."

Arthur paused to ponder this argument. "Well one more wouldn't hurt." Arthur eagerly made to undo himself.

"No." Jet repeated in a more authoritative tone and indicated with his head to the crowd in the center of the square which had now become a rather violent mob.

Arthur took in the scene for a moment, sighed heavily, and did himself back up. "I suppose it is beneath my dignity." He turned to face the scene with his hands on his hips as Jet released the woman. She had only gone a step when Arthur's hand painfully seized hers and yanked her to face him again. Jet's heart froze. "And you - " he sneered, "learn some manners!" He sent her sprawling into a pile of manure and spat in her direction.

Jet and Arthur watched as she picked herself up and walked back to the Salvationists, wobbling slightly, but still with dignity. "What a frigid little slut." he remarked to Jet as she rejoined her people. Arthur looked to him. "Well come on, you owe me." And with that the two exited the market square as the constable arrived to break up the scene.



## Chapter 2

Jet walked to the enormous gaping maw that was the entrance to the hall. He shifted uncomfortably in his suit, tugging at the front to help it lie flatter. He scarcely acknowledged the tall man who relieved him of his coat. He unconsciously tested his cufflinks – each one gold encasing a single square of shining black stone - a gift from Arthur, in reference to Jet's *nom de guerre*, he had joked. Jet took a deep breath and began his descent down the large stairway into the ballroom.

"Lord Chester Jenkins Moore the Third" the tall man announced to the crowd. There was a general nod of acknowledgement from some members of the crowd who immediately turned their attentions back to their conversations. At the bottom of the stairwell an older gentleman with a round belly and brown muttonchops tied together at the center by a thick mustache approached him and bowed slightly.

"Lord Moore, how was your visit to the south?" the man inquired politely.

"It was very diverting. I availed myself of the opportunity to observe some of the new farming techniques. There are a few new models of plow I am very interested in purchasing and I was quite impressed by their performance."

"Ah, Lord Moore, you never did learn how to take a proper holiday - always letting your mind come in the way of things." Jet held out his hands in submission.

"I suppose I am guilty, Lord Danvers, but if I am to manage the affairs of the estate I must be vigilant. I can rest once all is properly in order."

"Aye, then you shall never rest!" Lord Danvers admonished his junior. "Enjoy your youth while you have it, you have my word, it will not last." He rested his hands on his round stomach as though to prove the point.

"I shall take your words to heart, Lord Danvers. Will you please excuse me?" Jet bowed slightly and walked over to a middle-aged lady who stood with her hand on the shoulder of a gentleman in a wheeled chair. He bent slightly to address the man. "With your permission, may I borrow the Lady Greenley for a dance?" The man smiled and nodded his assent. Jet offered his hand to the lady who readily accepted it and led her out onto the floor.

"How is the good Sir Greenley these days?" Jet inquired as he turned the lady about the floor.

"He is well. Though he has been a bit dejected as the babies have grown so. They are no longer merely content to spend the day sitting on their father's lap listening to stories of the treacherous Boers."

"And what of you? Are you adjusting to life in England?"

"I do not see how I have much option in the matter. Africa will always be my first home, but I am growing accustomed to the English way of life. Though I must admit it is far too rainy for my taste."

"And the children?"

"They were too young to remember any different life. They are happy, of course. I suppose I will soon need to employ a governess to see to their education." She sighed heavily.

"I will keep a look out for qualified candidates," Jet spoke reassuringly. The song ended and Jet escorted the lady back to her husband. "Thank you, my lady, for the dance." He said, releasing her hand.

"I'm sure I should be the thankful one." The gentleman replied with a grin. "Never much cared for dancing, my poor lady has suffered my two left feet for far longer than she has suffered my loss of them." Jet allowed a smile at Sir Greenley's irreverent treatment of his grievous injury. "I'm sure she was quite honored to take a turn around the floor with such a fine young lad as yourself. It gives the lady something of a distinction among her peers to be attended to by the young bachelors of society."

"Then let us agree we are all of us grateful for our continued friendship," Jet granted. "I must inquire, how has business fared for you this summer?"

"The gem trade has proved excellent this year, though we did lose one ship off the Cape."

"And what of that canal business?"

"I must say, since we have taken control of the area it has been much smoother than dealing with those French. Our Oriental market has been \*ahem\* most profitable." Opium and tea, the two staples upon which England depended and Sir Greenley, among others, provided.

At this remark Lady Greenly placed a delicate pale mint gloved hand upon her husband's shoulder. "Darling, it is gauche to discuss business at a ball."

He coughed and sputtered, "Quite right my dear, quite right. My apologies, Lord Moore."

"No offense taken, Sir Greenley, after all I am the one to blame, it was I who made the inquiry."

"I was meaning to ask you about accompanying me on a fishing expedition -" Sir Greenley was interrupted by the announcer.

"His Grace the Duke of N-shire, Arthur Wyndham." A hush fell over the room. Down the stairs Arthur descended in an almost sideways manner, the very picture of high society fashion from his brightly shining pointed shoes to his silk top hat. The lights of the ballroom reflected off his diamond crowned walking stick creating a momentary dazzling effect for anyone who chanced to look upon it. He smiled widely at the crowd and condescended to give a small, good-natured bow of his head to his audience. Then he waved his hand at the musicians indicating that they might continue, at which point they struck a spritely tune and many of the couples returned to dancing.

"Pardon me, Sir Greenley, please send further details of the excursion to my house for me to examine."

"Very good!" the older gentleman replied. Jet quickly extricated himself from the pair and aimed himself for a group of young ladies gathered around the tall Duke. Jet gripped Arthur's arm with his gloved hand. "Save me!" he hissed into his friend's ear.

"Not enjoying yourself? Tsk, you never were one for a party." His Grace winked in reply. "Let's see if I cannot assist in furthering your discomfort." He turned his attention back to the ladies. "My dear ladies," Arthur raised his arms expansively as though bequeathing a benevolent gift upon his followers. "This is my dear friend and compatriot, Lord Chester Jenkins Moore III. Lord Moore, this is the lovely Miss Katherine Williams," he indicated an open faced auburn haired beauty who curtsied, "Miss Geraldine Foxham" a small featured raven haired woman inclined her head. "Now now, Miss Foxham, don't be rude," he teasingly scolded. She performed a deep curtsy that Jet could only interpret as sarcasm, he indulged her with a half-smile and a deep bow with a flourishing hand. "Countess Angelina Erlyton," a plainfaced but shapely blonde woman gracefully lowered herself in a curtsy. "And of course, my darling Miss Bernice Mareton." He proclaimed raising her hand in his and reflecting her beaming gaze.

Of the group she was easily the most comely with shining brown hair gathered upon her head finished with ringlets and small rosettes. She had all the radiance of a woman enraptured in her first great love. Jet observed her gown with a smirk as Arthur and Bernice joined the other revelers on the dance floor. The neckline was cut so low as to almost be scandalous and, in case the viewer did not notice, a large red garnet dangled from her neck, resting gently on her chest. Jet had to acknowledge Arthur was, in this manner, a model gentleman, his eyes never wavered from her face. The waist was cinched tightly, the slippers too prominent in shade, there were far too many bows and ribbons of fabric and lace borders attached: as though the family were begging for their wealth to be acknowledged.

The nouveau riche, he chuckled. He had never heard of the Mareton family before and it was instantly clear as to why. They were attempting to climb the social ladder and prostituting their daughter in exchange for a faster ascent. Of course, Arthur would take full advantage of their lack of scruples, if only to teach them a lesson in respect for the nobility. Likely, her innocent glow would be but a memory by the end of the season. Never mind the end of the season, he corrected himself, it would likely be gone by the end of the night. Arthur never was one to suffer fools.

He heard a short, mocking laugh from beside him. There stood Miss Foxham. He had recognized her family name from his papers. Investors. They had sponsored a few of his own boats in their travels up the coast of Africa, though they had less potential for high returns than Sir Greenley's ships and thus the family had changed loyalties, despite the greater risk. "How long do you think she has?" She remarked caustically.

"How long did it take for you?" Jet replied without looking over. He knew he had struck the heart of the issue by the sharp intake of breath he heard in response.

"Why is he allowed to continue in such a scandalous manner?" It seemed she had misperceived Jet as an ally; she could not have been more mistaken.

Jet turned to face her, his physiognomy as black as his namesake. "I wonder who you are to judge a man for accepting what a woman offers him of her own free will. You have no right to speak against him, you are but the daughter of an upstart speculator who made a few good gambles - and you thought you were worthy of his hand in matrimony! No man here would fault him for casting aside a woman of so low character as you. He has been generous enough to spare you the humiliation a whore, such as yourself, has earned. Be gone from my sight and don't speak a further word on the matter to anyone or I shall expose you to the ridicule and derision you deserve. You are nothing more than a six-cent strumpet who should consider herself honored to have known the caresses of a Duke. Or did you give it away for free?" he enunciated every syllable so that, even though he had never raised his voice above a whisper, the full impact of the words could be felt.

Lady Foxham stared in utter disbelief and shock, then the terrible weight of what was said sunk in. She turned away quickly and walked over to a side room. Though she never shed a tear in his presence, from the fluttering movements of her hands about her face, Jet could tell she was weeping. The proper tears of a fallen woman, he thought.

How dare she even presume to think she was worthy to address a gentleman? Particularly in such a familiar manner! And she believed she had the right to accuse Arthur of scandalous behavior? These coarse people who believed sudden wealth made them worthy of acknowledgement disgusted him. He took a glass of champagne from the server's tray and returned to the company of Lord Danvers - the so-called "ladies" at this event were scarcely worth his attention.

"My boy, you seem distracted," Lord Danvers remarked after having gone on for a number of minutes on a topic Jet had not followed in the slightest.

"Oh, sorry," Jet replied placing a hand gingerly on his brow. "I seem to have developed something of a headache."

"Perhaps you should find some young lady to dance with - it will set your blood to flowing. And they are all such pretty girls, such a selection of lovelies I could only wish had been collected in one place in my youth," Lord Danvers suggested helpfully.

"No, no thank you. While they may hold the eye, the interest is another story."

"You are far too picky my boy, one would think you desired the solitary life."

"If being a bachelor all my days saves me from the discomfort of a course, ill-tempered, imprudent wife; then so be it."

"My you are harsh on the fairer sex." Lord Danvers chuckled.

"Do you seriously believe me in error?" Jet replied archly.

Lord Danvers thought for a moment before he solemnly answered, "No. There are many women who would make a man yearn for his lonely days. Women who chase a man from their bedrooms into those of others. Who, through neglect and bad temper, lead a man into a life of sin or miserable solitude. Or those insipid creatures who disgrace him at every turn and lead his children down shameful paths. And there are even those terrible women who make of their man a cuckold raising a dark eyed child not his own. These women who make the household a barren wasteland and a hearth a hell. But then there are those women who brighten the corners of every room they enter, who can warm the soul from the deepest chill, the women who compliment us so completely as to make a half into a whole. Women like my dearly departed Millie, or your mother, Mary. Goodly women who remind you that you cannot abandon the sex entirely."

"Such women seem to be an endangered species, I have yet to meet one outside of my household." Jet responded darkly.

"Well, perhaps you merely have not been looking properly," Lord Danvers suggested with a wink and a nod to the staircase.

"The Right Honourable the Viscount Mason, the Right Honourable the Viscountess Mason, The Honourable Ingrid Mason." The announcer pronounced. Jet looked towards the staircase to behold the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. She was tall and slender with a graceful long neck. Her skin was pale as milk and her long flaxen hair sat, exotically braided, atop her elegant head. Her eyes were clear and blue as the sky on a cloudless day. Her gossamer white and blue dress only further complimented those eyes. She smiled widely at the crowd below - it was as if the sun, itself, had decided to grace those below with its presence.

"She is exquisite! Did they say only 'the Honourable'?" Jet asked Lord Danvers eagerly, though he could not face his conversation partner for he had yet to find the wherewithal to turn away.

"Yes. It seems your ears have begun working properly again." Lord Danvers chuckled.

"Did they say her father is the Lord Frederick Mason? Why have I never heard of her?"

"Her mother is a Swede. She insisted the child have a proper Swedish upbringing rather than languishing under the smoke of London."

"I must say, seeing the result, I can agree with the wisdom of that idea." Jet allowed himself to smile. "Lord Danvers, you are familiar with the family, how do you suggest I approach her?" Lord Danvers smiled.

Some minutes later Lord Danvers had managed to bring Jet in front of the young lady. "Miss Mason, how lovely it is to see you again," he said taking her hand.

"My dear Lord Danvers! It has been far too long. I believe you were much taller on our last visit" she replied in accented tones.

"Ah yes, I suppose I have shrunk since." The two laughed. "Anyhow, I have a friend I should like you to meet," he said, gesturing to Jet. "This is my business partner, the young Lord Chester Jenkins Moore III."

"It is a pleasure to meet you, Lord Moore." She beamed offering him her hand. He gently took it in his own with a low bow.

"Du är väldigt vacker i kväll," he replied. Her face flushed deeply and she put her hand to her mouth to cover a giggle. Jet was suddenly panicked. "What? What did I say?" He begged Lord Danvers.

The young lady leaned over and gently whispered in his ear, "You are very beautiful tonight." Now it was Jet's turn to flush. She giggled at his reaction. "Thank you, Lord Moore, I am most flattered that you would pay me such a compliment."

"It is no flattery," he said, regaining his charm. "It is merely the truth as I observe it." Miss Mason had now turned a fine shade of pink. "If you are willing, would you care to accompany me to the dance floor?" The lady nodded in assent.

The morning bells had begun to chime by the time Jet escorted Ingrid and her parents to their carriage and waved them off. It seemed his heart would soar from his chest. Such a lovely lady, and so accomplished! The daughter of a Viscount no less! He would have to thank Lord Danvers. The man's irreverence sometimes made Jet forget the shrewd businessman his father had long ago chosen for a partner; that old man was always one step ahead of the game. He made his way to the terrace to watch the rising sun and was quite surprised to find Arthur leaning upon the thick stone balustrade staring blankly at the horizon.

"I thought for certain you would be nestled in bed with your lady friend by this hour," Jet remarked. Arthur's gaze remained fixed outward. "Pass me a drink." Without looking over, Arthur handed him a flask from his inside pocket. Jet took a swig of the reddish brown stuff.

"As did I, old chap," he replied absently.

"Did she turn you down?"

"Oh no, she was quite eager. But my heart wasn't in it so I sent her home."

"You sent - you sent her home!" Jet stuttered. "Since when has your heart ever had anything to do with it?"

"Since now, I suppose." Arthur mused. "Where was Elizabeth tonight?"

"She's home with a cold," Jet answered offhandedly. "Oh... I see."

"It was the first ball since Philomena married; I was hoping to finally see her properly in society where she belongs."

"If it brings you any cheer she was horribly disappointed to miss it. She has been so long delayed in coming out! But father would not have it until Philomena was properly wed. I thought sure Elizabeth would be an old maid before he finally gave up on Philomena's nuptials. I must say I have found my new brother to be a rather dull sort - but then, I am surprised anyone took her at all."

Arthur feigned horror at Jet's words. "Do not insult Lord Norbert! It cost a princely sum to encourage him to even consider her - she is the odd sort, you know, not mad per se, but odd in her way... in the set of her eyes and the form of her mouth. Nothing to entice in looks either - there can be no question: your father's face is much better suited to members of the male gender." At this remark both gentlemen briefly chuckled.

"Ah, so that is how it happened. It did seem strangely sudden. You really love her that much?" probed Jet.

"Nonsense! It was merely done in the service of a friend who would otherwise have been saddled with her care and... Yes, I truly do." His tone was serious now. "Every sin I have ever committed in my life I intend to make up for in my devotion to her. I shall be a slave to her happiness."

"You have been a slave to her happiness since the moment she curled those tiny plump fingers around yours." Jet grinned at the memory.

"She was so small then, and yet I could barely hold her for her weight - which would be nothing now but to a mere child as I was... As I recall she had a nasty predilection for punching you in the nose."

"She still does, I'm afraid to say. My nose has suffered greatly from her abuses these past twenty years." Jet smiled, rubbing that feature. "So when can I expect to call you my brother?"

"I suspect by the end of the season - if she consents, of course."

"So, the end of the season then, as I have no doubt in her acceptance of your proposal."

"I wish I could be so certain. All of my indiscretions, my habits, have never been a secret to her. It would be a challenge to ask her to accept one who has made himself so low." Arthur took a draught from the flask.

"She loves you, Arthur! No one adores you as she! There is no crime you could commit that she would not forgive you! She would follow you to hell, if you asked, and make a heaven of it for you."

"Yes, she would follow me to hell..." Arthur looked back to the horizon where the sun was fully above the hills now.

Jet attempted to change the subject. "I believe the largest obstacle you face is gaining father's approval. He does not believe a man should marry before he is thirty. He says a young man is often a fool in love and will follow his heart where reason would fear to tread; while an older man who is established in the world will properly weigh the consequences of a match."

"Perhaps that is where long acquaintance and title will win the day. There is no sense in delaying the inevitable. Besides, it will greatly raise the rank of your family and business to be so closely tied to a Duke." Arthur said with some sense of assurance. "I imagine your father's rule will make things quite difficult for you and that elegant Swedish swan you passed the evening with." Arthur glanced over at Jet with an arched eyebrow.

"She is perfection! If it were my decision, we would wed tomorrow - but alas Gretna Green is no place for the business of being bound to one so wonderful. Still there is something to be said for delay - it allows for defects to make themselves apparent."

"Ah, so you don't fully accept her perfection?" Arthur smiled mockingly.

"I have never been one for willful blindness, though I do admit if she promises to be even half so good as she has presented herself to be, there is no question on it being a very propitious match."

"Then I congratulate you." Arthur raised the flask to the sky before taking another dram. He offered the bottle to Jet.

"And I you, my soon-to-be brother." Jet slapped him on the back and emptied the bitter contents into his mouth.



## Chapter 3

The ball bounced gently just before the line and then over it. The racket passed by the spot where it had crossed a moment too late. "I believe that's game, mate." Arthur grinned from his position on the opposite side of the court, leaning gently on his racket. Jet tossed the errant ball in the air and caught it behind his back. "Hodgson, bring us a drink." Arthur called out to the servant who waited at the sidelines.

"I suppose I'm off my game today, mate," Jet said by way of an apology.

"The score would seem to indicate that," Arthur teased. "Something on your mind?"

"Nothing out of the ordinary, I suppose," he answered. "Tired from last night. I won't say you were right in leaving the game before its conclusion; but I can't fault you in your valuing of sloth over avarice." He took a sip from the glass Hodgson had brought over.

"How long did the game continue after I took my leave?" Arthur inquired.

"Oh hours! Until we had bled the bloke dry. Run of bad luck that one had. Most of us wanted to call it a night but he begged us 'Just one more game! Just one more!' Of course Lord James was in his glory - once property rights went on the table his scruples went out the door."

"I suppose that 'conversation' we had with Lord James about his playing techniques was forgotten entirely?"

"In totality. No sense in stopping him, though, the man was intent on ruining himself. At least Lord James sped up the process."

"Seems there is a use for his kind after all." Arthur smirked. "How did you make out?"

"Only a few hundred, but it will be useful on my trip to London next week." Jet took a sip of his drink.

"Business or pleasure this time?" inquired Arthur.

"I'm not sure I prefer the former without a touch of the latter - though in this case I believe both will be readily accomplished."

"Going to see Lord and Lady Cox then?" Arthur raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, and I must thank you for the introduction. While I initially found her unnatural proclivities and voracious appetites off-putting, I have since learned to appreciate their hidden values. And as the Lord's match the Lady's I cannot find any grounds to object to her charms - certainly he has encouraged me in that arena - and I have taken great pleasure in indulging her

whims. Though, I can very honestly say, there would be no amount of money you could pay me to spend the day as his valet." At this statement the two men laughed heartily.

"Do you think Miss Mason would object to your choice of leisurely activities?" Arthur glanced at Jet slyly.

"I wouldn't doubt that she would. But there is no need for her to be aware of such things. It is only the affairs of gentlemen, after all. I'm quite sure you would not tell Elizabeth all of your doings."

"On the contrary, I keep no secrets from her. She is fully aware of my nature and dalliances. It is the only way I can protect her from those who would seek our separation."

"Since you mention it, Miss Foxham laid a rather serious charge against you at the dance last month."

"She said this to you?"

"Yes, and I gave her to know such intimations were not acceptable and that it would be in her best interest to desist in her accusations," Jet replied.

Arthur looked thoughtfully at the glass. "This is certainly true. Her bitterness is justified but the proclamation of the cause of it will only bring about her downfall."

"Well, she was the one who allowed herself to be tempted."

"Also true. But I did promise to marry her if she gave in." Arthur said offhandedly.

"You seriously proposed to her?" Jet stared at his friend, astonished.

"Oh no, I was never serious. It was merely a means to an end. A challenge to be conquered by the muscle of the mind over the muscle of the arm. She was a fool to accept that a proposal that was only known to her and I would be in any way binding once the deed was accomplished. Scandal has thus far bought her silence, but she has obviously proven to be unequal to the task of discretion. It truly is a shame that she lacks even the most basic animal sense of self-preservation but seeks her own ruination." Arthur told this tale without even the vaguest hint of remorse, rather his tone was one of general disgust. "If not for the effort required in obtaining the conquest I should feel wholly ashamed that I denigrated myself with a female of such low upbringing."

"It is fortunate your quest did not result in offspring."

"I will not deny that. An illegitimate child is troublesome enough; but to have that child born of a mother who lacks a proper sense of propriety is rather an unpleasantness I care not to repeat." Arthur took a sip from his drink as though these words were of no more consequence than an observance of the weather.

Jet was struck dumb - he stared at his friend trying to find his voice, but his mouth only moved wordlessly, gaping much like a fish that has suddenly found itself on the shore. For all their years of friendship this was a revelation. Arthur glanced over at his comrade and let a sly smile cross his lips. Jet found his voice. "Repeat? You mean there is a child?" He rasped.

"Oh yes, I am a bit surprised I neglected to mention it before." It seemed Arthur was quite pleased with the affect this information was having on Jet.

"Who is the mother?"

"Miss Eloise Gilbert. A rather unsuitable choice, I will admit - but, as my part in the matter was decidedly brief, I had not truly considered her fitness." Arthur frowned slightly.

"Miss Gilbert? I can scarcely recall her" Jet thought hard for a moment to locate the memory. "It's been years since she's been to any society event, hasn't it?"

"Seven years, approximately," Arthur supplied.

"Yes! I recall her now. She was quite the toast of the town the season she came out. Very lovely and mild in manner from a wealthy military family. I had wondered what became of her... I suppose I have no need to wonder further."

"She was lovely, but mild of manner... I beg to disagree with you on that point. She possessed an initially unforeseen passionate nature - much the same as her father. She and her father came by the house some months after I knew her, fat with child, and making accusations that I was the responsible party. Her father demanded I marry her as soon as arrangements could be made in order to save myself from scandal. Young as I was, I likely would have acquiesced out of fear if not for my own father's wise intervention."

Jet could not help but picture the meeting of the belligerent General Gilbert with the imperturbable, yet fierce, Duke Wyndham. "Father made very clear that no such arrangements would ever be made, that his son would never be tied to such a licentious woman. Of course, General Gilbert demanded satisfaction but Father merely dismissed his demand by reminding him that should Father kill him then there would be no one to guard his daughter from the life her lack of morals had purchased for her and that were he to try to raise a scandal against our family it would only expose his daughter's condition and leave the family's reputation in ruin - a situation undesirable with two younger daughters still to come out." Arthur smirked at his father's wisdom.

"What became of the child?" Jet's curiosity was piqued.

"Her father recommended the child be put up for adoption so that she might still be matched with a suitable young man - a soldier, perhaps - but she would not hear of it. She refused to part with the child and carried it around for months for fear it would be stolen from her were she to let it out of her arms for a moment. She arrived at the house one day, quite mad, insisting that I see the child. Of course, I would not indulge the ravings of such a lunatic and had

her sent away but oh! How she screamed as they forced her from the grounds! Her illness became such that they had to lock her away in the house. They claim the child to be that of a servant and his wife, orphaned by cholera and charitably adopted by Gen. Gilbert - as sensible a conclusion as could be reached under the circumstances," Arthur finished.

"Well, that's a pity, for she seemed such a fine girl. Is Elizabeth aware of even this?" Jet remarked.

"Yes, she has been aware from the first. I would never hide such a secret from her, lest she find out my deceit at a later date from a yet unknown interloper and despise me. Do you still think me a suitable match for her?"

"If she has no objections I cannot see why I should; as for me I would rather call you my brother than any other man." He offered his hand to Arthur. The two men clasped palms briefly in a sign of their continued fraternity.

"Mark my words," Arthur advised as he walked back to the boundary line. "Stick with the whores and the married ladies. For the former can never prove the parentage of the child and the latter has every reason not to."

"Like Lady Cox." Jet winked, taking his position.

"Precisely." Arthur grinned. He bounced the ball a few times.

A curiosity struck Jet. "What is his name?" he asked.

"Who?" Arthur inquired, absently.

"The child."

Arthur stopped for a moment and thought. "You know," he replied, "I haven't the foggiest. Love all." And with that he served the ball to Jet.

## Chapter 4

The air within the dingy white plaster walls of that well frequented, but oft maligned, establishment was thick with the flowery haze that emanated from the long narrow pipes of its patrons. Men lazed, barely conscious, in rough-hewn wooden bunks that lined the walls on both sides. Women, scarcely clothed, walked along the bunks; occasionally climbing in with some half senseless man who was perfectly content to accept their company in exchange for a few puffs off the pipe or a palmful of pence. If luck were with the woman her customer might fall into a sound slumber and she could avail herself of his personal property. The feculent den was infested by rats and fleas which found the warm, passive bodies a source of comfort and sustenance - the floor was ripe with their droppings.

Recessed away from this scene was an alcove reserved for guests of means who had the desire for greater privacy. In this room was a larger circular bed. It possessed no bed frame and was heavily stained, the mattress was grey and worn thin. It appeared the only care the bed received was the occasional restuffing with straw. A thick, greasy red blanket was spread over it while an excessive spray of pillows of various shapes, sizes, and fabrics concealed where the bed met the wall.

On the bed two women attended to a spare young man who lay propped up between them, taking a drag from his long, thin pipe, and holding each in opposite arms. The first woman was worthy of little note. Her tightly curled dark hair framed her piqued ashen face in a manner that, while not especially unpleasing, gave the impression of desperate poverty. Her eyes were great and dark with a vague hollowness. Her clothes, what little she wore, were grey and tattered with no ornamentation - they hung from her thin frame as a wet curtain over a wire cage. In age she could not have exceeded her early twenties yet she seemed much more worn and ravaged than her years would suggest. She kneeled next to the man with a hand stroking his bared chest.

The second woman was quite the opposite of the first. Her figure was full to the point of plumpness. She had no shame in it and bore it for all who passed by to see. Her sleek auburn hair shined as it cascaded in waves down her shoulders and back. Her eyes, though lined, glimmered and her rose coloured lips glistened as she pressed them against the neck of the man repeatedly. He smiled lazily at her and stroked her hair then he took another drag. In such a place as this the magnificent Lady Cox was as shameless as only the most brazen harlot. If this Stygian lair were not heaven, Jet mused, it was certainly as close as he ever cared to get.

From down the hall he vaguely heard what sounded like a scuffle - not an unusual occurrence in this place - yet there was something off about the tone. It didn't quite strike him as that of a man desperate for even the smallest sampling but unable to lay down so much as a penny for it, or the furious tones of a man who had lost his belongings to his temporary bedmate who haughtily denied her involvement in the matter.

A gruff voice hollered, "Get out of my shop!" to which a ringing, high pitched voice answered "A shop? More like a den of robbers! And I shall just as happily turn you out as our

Lord did the moneylenders at the temple. It is on His errand of mercy I am here. These people have been subjected to such a degenerate and miserable state that the fires of hell would likely seem a dear relief - and you stand as their tormentor!" the voice accused.

"Their tormentor!" the gruff voice howled with laughter. "My pet, I am their benefactor!"

"Some benefactor you are. When did these people last know a decent meal?" the voice seemed to be moving down the hallway.

"Well I'll bite, little lady! Let us see for ourselves whether these poor sinners prefer my Hell to your Heaven."

"Ladies, gentlemen: I invite you to come to our meeting this evening and fill your bellies. There is no need to be ashamed, we are all children of God." She continued in this manner down the hall followed by lewd and obnoxious callbacks from the patrons.

Finally the owner of the voice appeared in the alcove flanked by two men. She wore a navy blue uniform with shining buttons and brown gloves. Her black shoes were somewhat worn but highly polished. On her head she wore a stiff matching modest blue bonnet which was tied in a neat bow in the front. Her face was plump, as was the rest of her form, and softly framed by a halo of soft mouse brown ringlets. Her cheeks were round with a slight rose hue at the apples which, when placed in the context of her complexion, gave the overall impression of ripe peaches. Her mouth was fine with full lips reddened from the exertion of preaching.

But it was her eyes that were her most arresting feature - they were deep, heavily lashed, and of the softest brown - like those of a fawn. The mere fact they were open wide staring with the little mouth momentarily agape only further cemented the impression of a baby animal to Jet. Apparently, the sight of Lady Cox had caught her by surprise. But this only lasted for a moment. Those fine eyes suddenly fixed on Jet and narrowed into slits and her small Irish nose scrunched up, those lips pursed as they enunciated one solitary syllable heavy with accusation: "You!"

"Oi, me?" Jet pointed at himself with good-natured surprise.

The woman seemed to assume recognition, she approached the trio in a haughty manner, completely ignoring the other parties and addressing Jet directly. "I see your friend is not with you today? Or is he indisposed?" She announced loftily looking at him from the side of her eye.

"My friend?" Jet could not hide his confusion in charm, the drug had retarded his wits entirely.

She fixed an icy stare upon him causing an involuntary shiver to shoot down his spine. "Oh, have you forgotten me? For I have not forgotten you or your accomplice." She arched an eyebrow and turned her little nose up away from him adding coyly, "And neither has my bonnet."

He sat perplexed for a second, suddenly his eyes flew open wide. "Oi! Oi! It's you! The plump biddie from the rally in Worthing!" He heaved forward pointing a finger at her; displacing his companions. "What are you doing here?"

She paced the room leisurely, kicking up her toes in a staccato motion with every step as she replied, "Father felt it was no longer safe for me in the South with the Skeleton Army, so he sent me here."

"What? Because it's safer in a London brothel?" Jet exclaimed.

She glanced around the room and then allowed her eyes to rest on him. "Relatively speaking, of course."

"Of course." Jet gave a half smile that was met with complete indifference.

Finally, one of the men accompanying her spoke. "Sergeant Major Bertha, do you know this man?" the bespectacled gentleman inquired.

The realization of an audience caused a sudden change in Jet's tone. "Woahoho! Major! I didn't know I was in the presence of an officer." He made a mock salute, from her face it was evident she was not amused by his antics. "Major Bertie! Come into our presence to battle the demons for our souls." He relaxed back into the arms of his ladies.

Major Bertha also seemed to become aware of their companions. Her tone became deathly serious. "It's Sergeant Major Bertha to you and if I could physically battle demons for your souls I would gladly take up arms against them, but as it is I arm myself for the spiritual battle with the sword of the spirit, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation in the hope God will use me as a soldier in His war for your souls."

"Hang God!" ejaculated Jet with stunning force. The dark haired woman next to him was so scandalized by the sudden exclamation that she unconsciously made the sign of the cross over herself - a motion that was caught by the Sergeant Major.

She gently approached the woman. "Dear," she ventured tenderly. "If you find you are interested we are serving soup and bread in the square this evening, you are welcome to attend."

"I'm sorry, I'm quite sure she won't be able to attend your *event* as I have retained her services for the evening," Lady Cox interjected. "Please be gone immediately, you are upsetting my guests."

"Unless you want you join us." Jet raised his eyebrows salaciously. "It would even the odds." He jerked his head towards the two men who, until this point, had been making every effort to avoid looking directly at the scandalous scene before them.

"If you can't join us tonight we will be serving supper all this week and we will be having a rally this Friday," the Sergeant Major continued, reaching a hand out to the woman.

"Guard!" Lady Cox bellowed. A large man appeared behind the Salvationists. "Remove these interlopers immediately."

"And bring your children!" Bertha called out as the large man pulled her brusquely from the room.

"I will!" the dark haired woman cried back reaching for the other. There were the sounds of scuffling and the door slammed.

"Well, that was bothersome," Lady Cox sniffed. "You have children?" she asked the other woman.

The woman looked at her hands. "Yes ma'am. Three."

"Do as I ask and they will eat for a month." Lady Cox placed her fingers under the woman's chin and pulled it close so their eyes were level. "Do we have an understanding?"

"Yes, ma'am," the woman replied.

Lady Cox pulled her in and gave her a tender kiss. She pulled away from the woman with a smile. "Good."



## Chapter 5

The day of the rally was clear and bright, almost in defiance of the usual grey pallor that covered the city. Whether impelled by unconscious intention or sheer coincidence, Jet's wanderings led him to a road parallel to the square. At first he thought nothing more of it than that the roads were becoming unusually crowded, then he heard the drums echoing off the walls of the alleys. "It's the Salvationist rally," he said to no one in particular "Well," he resolved. "Let's go have us a look."

He turned into an alleyway and quickly found himself pushing and dodging through a mass of people, almost entirely people of the lower class - the dregs of society - some were interested in the message but more, it seemed, were there for the spectacle. As he approached the center of the square he saw the crowd had left a small circle around the Salvationists, of which there was only a handful, easily less than twenty. And, at the head of the group, the good book firmly in her hand and loudly proclaiming the merits of the Kingdom of God, was the Sergeant Major.

"She's a fiery one, she is." He smiled, watching her perform from his vantage point.

"The day is not long off before you will stand before He that made you! Already, there are those among you who may not see the light of another day. The time is now to repent and turn from your evil ways for already you are perishing and in need of rescue! But I tell you there is one who is even now ready to save you from your eternal fate; that is the Lord, Jesus Christ! He is not concerned with what earthly man may consider worthy for you are all worthy of His love no matter what your past for it is your future that is of greatest concern to Him. Turn from your sin to the Lord and He shall prepare a place for you with Him forever! The house of the Lord has many rooms; enough for each and every one of you!" she announced.

Two young men approached her, from their clothes Jet guessed if they held any job at all they were simple laborers as they wore faded, dirty overalls and only their shirtsleeves, flat caps crowned their heads. For a moment, looking at these men, Jet could not help but recall himself and Arthur on that day three months back. All at once he felt a knot of unease in the pit of his stomach. The men called out something Jet could not understand as it was obfuscated by their heavy accents and the general roar of the crowd; but from her reply, ringing clear as a bell, he was able to guess at the content.

"I thank you, but better men have tried and failed."

He let a sharp laugh escape his lips. "I suppose she's referring to Artie and I," he mused.

These were not the words the men wished to hear, there could be no doubt such a pronouncement of their fitness (or lack thereof, as it were) had wounded their pride. The events that followed seemed to occur in painfully slow motion to Jet and yet so quickly he scarcely had time to perceive them as they happened. The man on the right appeared to lean far to his right

side, as though he were falling, but only so much that his hand brushed against the ground. That very hand, holding something square and grey, came up again in a great arc that passed across the side of the sergeant major's head. Her bonnet abandoned her crown for the air above, the laces trailing across her face. Her head twisted sharply at an unnatural speed and angle in opposition to the hand. Her body leaned right and then crumpled slowly to the ground.

Jet cried out and ran toward her, roughly shoving people from his path. It seemed to him he was moving preternaturally slow, like he was running through molasses. The two men were laughing over the crumpled form of the woman, joking. The man on the right let the paving stone drop from his hand to return to the road which had supplied it. Finally, after what seemed an eternity but was measurable only in mere seconds, the mass released Jet in front of the men. In that moment time regained its normal pace.

"Oi!" he yelled to the men, who turned. He caught the man on the right with a blow to the face hard enough to send him flying into the drummer who immediately expelled the unconscious form from his drum to the ground. The other man, seeing this display turned to flee but Jet caught him by his overall straps and threw him into the crowd where the man picked himself up and ran as one being chased by the devil himself.

Jet knelt down at the side of the Sergeant Major's still form. "Bertie, Bertie, wake up!" he shook her gently, forgetting all formality. "Bertie are you all right?" She only lay in front of him, not moving.

Jet turned her head to examine where the stone had hit and recoiled in horror. On the left side of her brow was a large, deep gash. It almost looked as if her skull was dented. Her blood matted brown hair was plastered to her scalp. It seemed the sanguine substance kept bubbling up from the wound. Jet stared wild-eyed at his hands and saw the fingers of the left were coated in her warm red blood.

"Oh no, Bertie!" He murmured. "Oh no no no. I need a doctor!" He yelled. He tore at his coat searching for his inside pocket from which he produced a brown bottle. Holding it tightly he gripped the cork in his teeth and yanked it out. "C'mon Bertie, hold on." he pleaded emptying the contents of the bottle on the injury which still bled freely. He stripped off his coat entirely and bunched it up, pressing it against the ruined scalp. "Is anyone a doctor?!"

He looked up at the crowd. They were staring at him as though he were some strange and possibly dangerous creature. He became vaguely aware of how he must appear to them - a man, clearly a gentleman by dress, running into a crowd and violently assaulting two men as though he were possessed and then personally tending to a badly injured Salvationist woman bloodying his fine clothes in the process. Yet, at the moment, he could not bring himself to be self-conscious.

"You there!" he pointed to a small boy who, in shock, pointed at himself. "I'll give you three pounds if you go fetch a doctor and coach." The child's eyes grew wide as saucers at the promise of such instant wealth. He ran off as fast as his legs could travel ducking around people and crawling between legs. A few of the Salvationists approached the feral gentleman.

"Is there anything we can do?" the bespectacled man from before asked; clearly speaking for the group.

"Are you medically trained?" Jet inquired.

"No." the man answered solemnly.

"Well then," Jet spat sarcastically. "I would recommend you start praying." Then a thought crossed his mind. "Give me your glasses."

The strange request startled the man. "What?"

"Glasses, please." Without looking Jet raised his hand and twice made an opening and closing motion with it. The man placed his glasses into Jet's waiting palm. Jet examined them without a word and then put them in front of the Sergeant Major's lips. A very faint fog appeared on the glass. "Well, she's breathing." More of the Salvationists had gathered around her mouthing solemn prayers. "Move back!" he commanded. "If she's breathing you should let her have some air!" The Salvationists were taken aback by his caustic words, but he really didn't care - if they couldn't be of practical use he'd prefer they not be present at all.

It felt like an hour before the doctor arrived, though it could not have been more than a quarter of one. He was an older man, slim, with wavy grey hair topped by a black bowler hat. He had a grey mustache, and wore small, round pince nez spectacles. In his hand he carried a sizable black bag which held the tools of his trade. The child was not to be seen, no doubt he was fervently securing transport. Jet stood to greet the doctor. "Chester Jenkins Moore." he said, extending his hand.

"Dr. Julian Lang." the doctor replied, taking it. "Where's the patient?" Dr. Lang was clearly not a man to mince words. Jet indicated towards the prone body of the Sergeant Major. Dr. Lang knelt down next to the woman and placed his bag on the ground next to him, snapping it open with one swift motion. "The child told me she was hit by a man-"

"Yes, with a paving stone," Jet interrupted.

"Where is the injury?"

"It's under my coat, the left side of her head. I poured a bottle of laudanum on it -" The Doctor shot him a look. "- You can castigate me later. How serious is it?" Dr. Lang carefully removed the coat from the injury, by now it was heavily bloodied and some of the dried matter had begun to crust and stick to her skin. The wound looked easily as bad as Jet had remembered, if not worse for its temporary removal of blood.

"My, my." the doctor mumbled as he took a pair of tools from the bag and prodded the area. "This is a very grievous injury indeed." He applied a clamp to the spot that was burbling blood. He looked to Jet. "I can clean it and stitch it - but I cannot guarantee that she will live to see the morrow. Even if she does, it may still become infected. What is the patient's name?"

"Sergeant Major Bertha," Jet answered.

"And her family name?" Dr. Lang inquired.

"I- I don't know."

Dr. Lang raised an eyebrow. He turned to the woman and patted her gently on the cheek. "Bertha, Bertha," he gently called to her. There was no response. "I'll need to operate as soon as possible."

"Whatever you can do, sir."

"We will need a place to do the surgery, somewhere stable where she can rest for a few days."

"What of the hospital?" Jet suggested.

"No, the miasma of infection in the air would almost certainly kill her."

"I have an apartment at the Great Western Royal. You can do the procedure there. I'll make all the necessary arrangements." The sharp ring of hoofbeats on the paving stones alerted Jet to the coach's arrival. He looked to the sound to see the beaming boy guiding the coachman's Dalmatian to the square where he stopped. Jet strode up to him, "That's a good lad, here's what I promised plus one for speed." He let four gold sovereigns drop from his hand into the child's eagerly waiting cupped hands. "Now be off with you, this is no place for a child." Jet returned to the doctor.

"The child said there was an emergency?" the coachman called from his roost.

"Yes, a young woman has been injured and we require your assistance to transport her to the Great Western Royal," Dr. Lang replied. Noticing the woman lying prone on the ground the coachman looked unsure.

"I'll pay you a crown plus your usual fare," Jet offered. This seemed to assuage the coachman's unease for he waved them to bring her in.

"We'll have to travel slowly so she isn't badly jostled. I'll need a few men to carry her," Dr. Lang stated.

Jet faced the Salvationists. "I need six strong men to lift her, who volunteers?" A dozen men raised their hands to volunteer. "Alright," Jet looked them over. "You, you, and you four, come with me." He pointed to five men as well as the man who had formerly worn the spectacles which Jet returned as he passed. "What's your name?"

"Jim Reed, sir." the man replied adjusting his spectacles.

"Mr. Reed, I'll need each of you to take a limb and two to lift her body on either side." Jet explained.

"We're going to take the patient to the coach and lay her on the floor, be very careful. I'll hold her head so it doesn't move too much," Dr. Lang ordered. "Positions!" he called out. The men lined up, three to a side with Dr. Lang at the head. "Lift!" he ordered. The men lifted her body and began to slowly walk it to the coach. "Place her in feet first, I need to make sure we don't lose control of the head." The men rotated so that her feet faced the coach and took her to the threshold. "Mr. Moore, hop in the coach - I need you to help guide her in. You will need to bend her legs to fit." Jet jumped up into the coach and did as Dr. Lang instructed.

Between the eight of them they were able to safely guide the Sergeant Major in with no incident. Jet sat lengthwise across the seat, unable to move for the cargo on the floor. Dr. Lang poked his head into the open door space, "I'm going to ride up front with the coachman. Watch her to make certain she doesn't move too much. Here," he said, placing Jet's ruined coat under her head as a pillow. "If she rouses, try to keep her from moving." He carefully shut the coach door, leaving Jet alone with the unconscious woman - *if she rouses* as much as he wished her conscious the idea of being solely responsible for her life left him terror stricken.

Jet had never before realized just how many bumps there were in the streets of London; but now he felt every jostle and jerk as the coach slowly made its way to the hotel. A sudden lurch caused him to brace himself against the wall. He heard the soft moan of a woman from the floor. "Oh no, don't wake up Bertie - we're not home yet," he whispered. But it seemed in slumber she was just as willful as when awake and she moaned again and rolled her head slightly.

"Da?" she murmured.

"Stay still, Bertie, don't move," Jet's voice shook as he gave the order. They went over a large bump that caused Jet to momentarily lose contact with the seat. "Goddammit! Does he have to hit every bump in the road!" he exclaimed.

"Da, what was that? Why can't I move?" Bertha sounded more a helpless child than the formidable woman Jet had known.

"Bertie, you- you hit your head and we're taking you home to get it fixed," Jet attempted to explain.

"Oh." She was quiet for a moment. "Da, my head hurts." *You don't say!* Jet thought to himself.

"It'll be alright Bertie, just go back to sleep," he tried hard to sound calm.

"Da, will it be much longer? I'm tired."

"Just go back to sleep now, we'll be there soon." Jet was grateful when he heard next the sound of soft snoring. It seemed an eternity before the coach stopped and Dr. Lang opened the door - the sound seemed so loud! Yet she did not wake.

"Now we just have to lift her onto the hotel's stretcher, are you ready Mr. Moore?"

"Oh thank God, yes!" Dr. Lang reached for her shoulders, at his touch her eyes flew open. And she screamed. "Woah woah! Calm down Bertie!" Jet exclaimed.

Bertie tried to get up but the doctor held her shoulders down. "You! What are you doing to me?! Let go of me!" She screamed lashing out with her fists.

"Bertie, you were hurt during the rally, you need to stay still!" Jet ordered.

She looked up at the man holding her shoulders down. "And who is this? Another one of your *friends*?" She struggled. "Let me go!"

"This is Dr. Lang. He needs to operate on you. Now be still!" Jet shouted the command.

"Operate!" Her screams became more hysterical.

"Moore, hold her down! She needs to be sedated." the good doctor ordered. Jet fell on top of her, his knees on her waist and his hands pinning her shoulders to the floor. She pummeled him mercilessly with her fists which, thankfully, due to her position and condition, lacked the force necessary to remove him. Dr. Lang returned with a white rag and placed it over her nose and mouth. She fought a few moments longer and finally settled back into slumber. Jet relaxed his hold. "Chloroform," the doctor replied to his unasked question. "I take it you and the lady are not on the best terms."

"No, not especially." Jet winced cradling a sore spot on his gut where she had landed a particularly effective blow.

"Are you certain it's a good idea for her to stay here with you?" Dr. Lang queried.

"I'm beginning to rethink the notion," Jet smiled tersely, "but can you think of a better place?"

Dr. Lang shook his head. "No."

"Then we are in accord. Let's bring her inside before she wakes again." Jet, Dr. Lang, and the footmen helped lift the Sergeant Major from the coach and place her on the stretcher. They quickly carried her into the building where her room was waiting.

Jet watched the doctor attentively as he prodded about the wound with his forceps and probe. The doctor removed a small grey speck, almost invisible to the naked eye, and placed it on a silver plate. He had been at this for the better part of an hour. Without looking up from his

work he stated, "I need more water." Jet answered the order by taking a bowl to the sink and filling it as he had done dozens of times since the start of the surgery. He set it on the end table beside Dr. Lang who poured a small amount of Phenol into it and began rinsing the wound again. Jet looked at him questioningly.

"The wound is very deep and there is a good deal of dirt from the stone in there. If I don't remove as much as I can before I suture it then it is very probable that she will develop a deadly infection." He set back to his labor. It was some time before he spoke again. "Out of question, where did you learn to pour laudanum on an open wound?"

"Our family doctor used alcohol to clean the break in my skin when my arm was broken in a riding accident when I was ten; he said alcohol could prevent infection. Laudanum is mostly alcohol so I figured it couldn't hurt the situation any, I suppose. I can't say I was really thinking at the time."

"He was correct and so were you. Using an antiseptic, like alcohol, immediately, likely prevented a good deal of infection from setting in before I could arrive. I imagine the opium helped keep the inflammation down. You may have saved her life."

Jet smirked. "I doubt she'll thank me for it."

The doctor smiled at his remark; though remained focused on his task picking out piece after piece and putting them on the plate. "Judging from her reaction to you in the coach, I would not wait on it. But you never can tell." He took a good final look into the wound. "That should about do it. I'm going to stitch her up now. You may want to go down for supper; I won't need you for this part." Dr. Lang took the curved needle and began to thread it.

Jet, who had until now managed to keep his composure, felt his stomach lurch at the sight of the threaded needle. He quickly retrieved a tailcoat from his closet and put it on. "I believe I will. Send for me if you need anything."

"Very good," the doctor replied examining the needle just as the door closed.

Jet sat in the dining area stirring his soup, lost in thought. In the events of the last few hours he had seemed so unlike himself - the self he had known himself to be that he had so long cultivated - that he could not recognize it. And yet the germs of his actions felt familiar, as though they had been his constant companions from youth. But such strange fruit they bore!

Barking orders wild-eyed and mad in a crowded public square? Rushing to the aid of a woman whom he had every right to, if not scorn, at the very least ignore? A woman whom association with not only failed to benefit him but would injure his reputation? Who had never so much as given him a kind word or a friendly smile? He placed his head on the palm of his hand. "And to what end!" he mumbled to himself.

"Is there something wrong with the soup, sir?" the kindly voice of the waiter inquired.

Jet looked up, startled, from his reverie. He pushed the soup away. "Oh no. No, it's quite fine. I just don't seem to have much of an appetite, I'm afraid." He tried to smile reassuringly at the man. "You can take it away."

"Very good, sir." The waiter removed the bowl from the table and walked away. Jet watched him out of the corner of his eye. The waiter was met by his compatriot who whispered to him and pointed at Jet. The waiter whispered back indicating to the full bowl of soup. Jet let out a deep, silent sigh - he must be the talk of the staff bringing in a strange woman (a Salvationist; they would know the uniform without doubt) who was gravely injured. The surgery, the bloodied sheets and towels, there could be no doubt every member of staff was trying to solve the mystery this presented them with. It screamed of something: scandal or heroism - the nature of it had yet to be determined. Even Jet felt at a loss to determine what had led to his present circumstance.

He sighed once more and stood up, straightening his coat. He sat down again and summoned the waiter for a glass of wine. With the laudanum gone; wine would have to suffice. He was nursing his second glass when a maid came down and met the host at the entryway. She whispered something and pointed to Jet. The host nodded his head and dismissed the woman. The host walked over to Jet and addressed him. "Pardon the interruption, sir, but Dr. Lang requests your presence."

Jet was almost thankful for the reprieve from his own company. He stood and, in one swallow, downed the remainder of the glass and put it on the table. He straightened his coat. "Thank you," he replied and strode quickly from the room.

He knocked before he entered the Sergeant Major's quarters. "Come in." Dr. Lang replied. Jet opened the door and was startled to see Bertha propped up on a small mountain of pillows, her eyes open, and looking not much worse for the wear aside from a large gauzy, white bandage wrapped about her head. On her forehead and on the edge of her left eye a large bruise was blooming.

She allowed a weak smile upon seeing Jet. He could not even begin to describe the warming effect that small gesture immediately produced. He flushed. Dr. Lang approached him carrying his medical bag. "I have been called away to attend to another patient, she made it out of the surgery well but I will need you to keep her awake until I return." He continued, lowering his voice to a whisper, "I told her what you did for her; she is grateful - even though she may not show it."