



LUCIUS FOGG
DEADLY CREATURES

DAN WICKLINE

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By Dan Wickline

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Cover Designed by: Dan Wickline and includes art by Tone Rodriguez

Published by: Dark Muse Press

Visit the author website: www.danwickline.com

Version 2011.07.10

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Dedicated to Lisa for always being there and for finally liking something I wrote.

Chapter One

I quickened my pace and turned the corner onto Eighty-Second. I could see through the shop windows as my tail sped up to keep me in sight. I stopped to look in the door of a five and dime causing him to awkwardly jump behind a newspaper stand. He was an amateur but determined. I had no idea why he was following me. I wasn't working a case. I just swung by for a hot dog at Louie's. I spotted my shadow a couple blocks back and decided to take him on a trip until I could figure out what he wanted.

I lingered at the corner on Sixth just long enough for the signal to turn yellow then crossed. The car horns told me he dove through traffic to follow. I wanted to get a better look at the man, but didn't want him to know I was on to him.

"Afternoon, Mr. Doyle. Fancy a shine?" the bootblack asked me as I approached.

"Sure thing, Leonard." I hopped up into the first seat and extended my leg so he could get to work. A little chit-chat would help sell the scene. "What's the good word?"

"Looks like they're finally talking peace over in Korea," the shoe-shiner said as he worked the rag back and forth over my wingtips. "I thought the last war was supposed to be the one that ended all wars."

"That's what they told me when I was there."

The guy following me was about two shops down staring in the window at a new canister vacuum. You can tell a lot about a person when they're trying to be inconspicuous. He was in his mid-twenties and took good care of himself. His clothes were well kept but not expensive. The suit was also tailored to fit him. This told me two things -- he was concerned with his appearance and he wasn't packing heat. If you carry a gun regularly you get baggy suits to hide the bulge.

I watched him from the corner of my eye. He kept turning his entire head to check if I was still there. Definitely an amateur. But that didn't mean he wasn't dangerous. I had a few options at this point. I could try and shake him, easy enough but I wouldn't know why he was following me. I could confront him, but odds were he'd run and I'd have to chase him a few blocks. I hated running and the kid looked like he might be fast. I decided to go with the third option: total improvisation.

I tipped the bootblack and headed back down Eighty-Second toward my follower. As I approached him, he started looking around for places to hide. There were none. Three nuns were walking toward us from the other direction. I slowed my pace so we'd cross paths right in front of my pursuer, forcing me to step closer to him. He turned his back to me as I expected. I bumped him with my shoulder hard enough to make him stumble a step or two. I tossed an apology out without stopping and turned left onto Sixth.

As I walked I started looking through the wallet I had just lifted. His driver's license said he was Stephen Ottley and he lived on Bleeker Street. His library card was well used, told me he was a reader or at least liked books. There was a paper napkin with a phone number and the name of a restaurant on it. Four singles and a five were the only other contents. Not much, but now if he ran I'd know where to find him.

A side mirror on a parked car told me Ottley was still behind me. I sped up again and turned south onto Eighty-Third. I quickly ducked inside the lobby of a movie theater and waited until my tail passed by. I stepped back out and whistled. He spun around just in time to catch his wallet.

"Now that I know who you are, you want to tell me why you're following me?"

Ottley looked around like a trapped fox trying to escape the dogs. "I... You... You won't understand!"

He turned and ran. They always run. I gave chase. The kid was fast but he kept looking back at me. Twisting your body like that just slows you down. If he had just put his head down and

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sprinted I'd never have kept up. He dashed through the intersection at Fifth. I tried to follow. A cab screeched to a halt in front of me, making me slide across its hood.

Ottley was pulling away from me again until a woman stepped out from one of the stores. He bounced off the open door and was sent careening into the street. He staggered about three steps and then slammed shoulder first into the asphalt. He didn't have time to look up before the white delivery van hit him head on.

I told the lady to go back into the store and call the cops. I ran over to Ottley and checked for a pulse. It was too late. The van driver was frantic, telling everyone that the kid just dove out into the street and there was nothing he could do. I sat on the fender of an old Packard and waited for the cops. The first to arrive was Officer Jim De Carlo. He took one look at me and put a call into Detective Sebastian "Sea Bass" Lee. Sea Bass barely got his car parked before he started asking me questions.

"What happened, Doyle?" He was prepared for the worst. "This guy one of Fogg's kind?"

By that he meant something supernatural. Lucius Fogg was my boss and together we handled cases involving the occult and the paranormal. I don't remember the last time I spoke with Sea Bass that didn't have some kind of monster or magic involved.

"I really don't know." I shook my head. "I noticed him following me for a few blocks. I confronted him, he ran and ended up getting up close and personal with the truck's bumper."

"Do you have any idea why he'd be following you?"

"Not the slightest. He's no professional." I tilted my head towards the uniformed officer. "Even De Carlo over there would've spotted him."

"And you're leveling with me here." He leaned in so no one else would hear him. "There are no vampires, werewolves, giant gargoyles, evil warlocks or anything else involved in this?"

"Cross my heart." I made an 'X' over my chest. This seemed to appease the Detective a bit.

"All right. I'm going to keep you out of this. If the Captain sees your name on the report he'll have a hundred and one more questions. And I don't want to deal with it." He glanced around again to make sure no one saw him being nice. "You need a ride home?"

"No, the Studebaker is just around the corner."

"Detective! You'll want to see this!"

De Carlo came running over with something in his hand. He gave it to Sea Bass. It was a stack of newspaper clippings stapled together. The Detective just shook his head as he looked over the pages. Finally he tossed them over for me to see. It was a collection of articles written about Fogg and the cases we'd solved. He had even circled my name with a red pen.

"They were in the dead guy's coat pocket." De Carlo was proud of his discovery.

"He was a fan, probably following you in hopes of getting your autograph." The Detective shook his head again. "We see this kind of stuff all the time with ball players and movie stars. The more you and your boss end up in the papers, the more likely this kind of stuff will be."

"That doesn't make any sense. Why would he run?"

"Probably too nervous to actually meet you." He sent De Carlo away. "Listen, Doyle, everything I see here says this was just an accident. You were being followed and like a good PI, you wanted to know why. I'd have done the same thing. The guy just had bad luck. Now go home."

I started walking back towards my car. I'd seen a lot of dead bodies in my day, human and inhuman. So it wasn't his death that was bothering me. It wasn't my involvement in it either. As a detective you're always looking over your shoulder and I would have played it the exact same way even knowing the outcome. You can't second guess your instincts or you'll end up dead yourself.

By the time I had reached the Studebaker I had resolved myself to believing Detective Lee's theory. Ottley was just a poor star-struck fan with rotten luck. It explained his nervousness, his following me, the clippings in his pocket, just about everything. I just had to accept that I'd never

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know what he thought I wouldn't understand. I'd also have to accept that the delivery truck driver really didn't see him and that's why he never even tried to hit his brakes.

Chapter Two

It was half past five and I was just finishing dinner when the doorbell rang. I don't like being interrupted when I eat, so I ignored it. The headline of the paper had captured my attention: 'Coroner misplaces body of Bleeker Street resident.' The corpse of the man who had been following was taken to the coroner. When the family arrived to make a positive identification, his remains couldn't be located. Someone down there was going to catch hell.

The doorbell rang a second time. I still had some carrots and almost an entire chicken leg left, so I didn't move. The bell rang for a third time.

"Knock yourself out," I muttered, not looking up from the page.

The ringing turned into heavy pounding.

I shook my head. "It's obviously not the Girl Scouts." I grudgingly put down my paper, pushed my plate away and headed to the foyer.

The banging continued. I would've let it go on until the guy's arm tired out, but he was hitting with enough force to maybe do some damage. I didn't want Fogg taking the repair cost out of my pay. I glanced through the peephole to see who I was about to turn away.

"Well, if it isn't old Sea Bass." I took a step back and opened the door just far enough to be seen but not enough to let him in. "Why Detective Lee, what brings you here on such a fine evening? Is this about you losing Ottley's body?"

"It has nothing to do with that guy, Doyle. I need to see Fogg." He tried to push past me, but I took a step forward, making him run his shoulder hard into the door jamb. It had to hurt, but he wasn't going to let me see it.

"Now, Detective, you've been around long enough to know that's not how it works. Fogg doesn't see anyone before sundown and the last thing he wants to do is start the evening off by staring at your ugly mug. So spin around, go get back into your car and find yourself a phone. You can call for an appointment like everyone else has to do."

Sea Bass's mouth opened and closed a couple of times.

"You know, when you do that, I can really see where you got your nickname."

Sebastian 'Sea Bass' Lee was, for all intents and purposes, a good cop; probably one of the best in the city. He got his promotions the hard-way, working his tail off and not quitting until the case was closed. He was gruff, heavy-handed at times, and when he yelled, which he did often, he looked like a large-mouthed bass, hence dooming him forever with the unfortunate moniker.

We'd done this dance many times but always when our investigations crossed paths with his. He'd come pounding on the door, demanding to see Fogg and I'd keep him out until my boss actually wanted to see him. It was silly, to tell the truth, but at times it could be amusing. Depending on the urgency of the situation, I could count on Sea Bass to react one of two ways: he'd try to physically run me over, which had never worked for him and resulted in occasional pain, or he'd actually leave and call for an appointment. It was quite shocking to learn that the detective had a third option up his sleeve.

"Jimmy, please..." He had to pull the words out of his mouth like an impacted tooth. "Something strange is going on. Too many weird coincidences and I just can't figure it out. I need Fogg's help."

There were so many things wrong with the words he'd just said that I wasn't sure my brain could properly process them all. Sea Bass never asked for Fogg's help. He had accepted it in the past when it was obvious that he had no other choice, but it came with a lot of grumbling and swearing... most of it directed at me. For him to show up and ask for Fogg's help, that was completely unheard of. And don't get me started on him using my first name or the word 'please'. I would've stood there another ten minutes with my mouth agape if I hadn't heard the telltale sound of the brass cane tip on the top wooden step.

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“What on Earth is all of this commotion?” The voice was commanding and firm. Kind of like God speaking from on high. Fogg has an ability to suck every ounce of attention from a room the moment he enters. He stood at the top of the stairs gazing down at me with eyes of hellfire.

“Who’s at the door, Jimmy?”

“It’s our old friend, Sea Bass—” I only got that far before being interrupted.

“That’s Detective Lee to you, Doyle.” Sea Bass could speak directly to the man now, so the niceties were gone. “I need to confer with you on a matter of life and death, Fogg. There’s no time to waste.”

“For heaven’s sake, Jimmy, let the man in and show him to my office. It’s obvious he’s agitated and I’m certain it’s not completely from your lack of manners. And offer him a drink. I will be down momentarily.” Fogg turned and headed back for his room. I could hear his brass cane tip striking the floor as he went.

“Please, won’t you come in?” I backed away from the door and made a grand gesture of welcome.

Sea Bass grunted and stepped inside.

“May I take your hat and coat?”

I tossed his stuff on the rack in the hallway and led him to the office. I offered him a seat and a glass of scotch, both of which he took eagerly. This was another sign that something was up. I didn’t know Sea Bass to drink that often--and never on duty. He sat in the same chair he always sat in, the red leather high-back directly across from Fogg’s desk. He once said it was the best seat because it allowed him to keep an eye on Fogg when he was doing one of his tricks. Fogg maintained that the chair had come to him from the sitting room of Edgar Allen Poe. I wasn’t sure how old it was, but damned if it wasn’t comfortable.

The chair, like almost everything else in the room, was a priceless antique. Fogg’s desk, the most ornate thing in the room, was carved for King Henry VIII as a wedding gift from one of his wives. It was given to Fogg as payment for services rendered. The paintings that adorned the walls were basically a who’s who of master artists that would rival the best museums in the world. Many of our clients had inquired about purchasing one piece or another but Fogg always refused.

Now I said almost everything was a valuable antique. The one glaring exception was my own desk. It was straight out of the Sears & Roebuck catalogue. I know because I ordered it myself. Tucked back into the corner, it was the last possible thing you’d see when entering the room. Fogg claimed that having me sit there allowed for a different view of our potential clients, and that I might be able to catch something that he wouldn’t from where he was. I knew the truth--he didn’t want the opulence of his office disturbed by me or my stuff--but I really didn’t care. If I was going to spend a large part of my time sitting at a desk, I didn’t want it to be something worth more than I’d make in my lifetime.

“Is Fogg going to be much longer?” The detective shifted in his seat.

“Let me refill that glass for you.” I poured him another shot of scotch.

Sea Bass had crossed paths with Fogg and me on many occasions, none of which he was happy about. He liked his reports to be neat and tidy, his killers to be average people and his motives to be human nature. But there was nothing neat and tidy about the cases Fogg got involved in. Lee wanted order and logic and we dealt with the occult and the supernatural, two things not known for being orderly or logical. That’s why he hated dealing with us. It meant that whatever case he was working on, it was about to go sideways the moment we showed up.

“Can you hurry him up?” He drained the last bit from his glass.

“Does Fogg strike you as someone who can be rushed?” As I poured more scotch into the glass, I glanced out the window and saw the sun had just set. “I don’t think you’ll have to wait too much longer.”

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Another second or two passed. Then I heard the sound I was expecting--the brass cane tip striking the wooden stairs. He may have appeared compliant to the Detective's wishes, but Fogg had purposely delayed long enough upstairs so as to negate the matter entirely. The law of not seeing clients until after sundown remained intact. Fogg was a stickler for the rules, even if they only mattered to him. He entered the room without a word, crossed over to his desk and sat down. He shifted a bit to get comfortable then turned and looked at Sea Bass.

"Good evening, Detective Lee. My apologies for keeping you waiting." Fogg was in a rare good mood. It probably had to do with seeing Sea Bass coming to him for help, something he obviously wanted to relish. "Now, how can I be of service to the New York Police Department?"

Chapter Three

Sea Bass gulped down the two-fingers of scotch that remained in his glass and took a deep breath. I thought about offering him one more refill, but it looked like he was finally going to speak and I didn't want to stop him.

"Ever since you and Doyle started interfering--er... assisting in some of my cases, I've had to accept that there are things in this world that are beyond what most people know and understand. But I've been able to find a thread of logic in all of it. Something to ground it in the reality I'm comfortable with. There is a different set of rules when the supernatural or occult is involved and I'm just getting my head around that."

He glanced over at the bottle of scotch like he wanted to do one more shot before continuing, but he seemed to decide against it and got up from his chair. He walked over to the window and looked out. The moonlight accented the gray strands that had begun creeping into his jet black hair and mustache. The lines of his forty plus years showed on his face. I would have said something, but not knowing where he was going I really couldn't help him get there. He was on his own.

"Maybe I've seen too much. Maybe I'm starting to see the bizarre and strange where there really is nothing..."

Fogg interjected at this point. "Detective, if this pertains to a specific case, perhaps telling us the details of the case without your speculation will lead us to the same conclusions. Then you will know if coming to us was warranted or not."

It was obvious Sea Bass liked this idea. He turned around and headed back to his chair with a renewed sense of purpose. He pulled out the spiral-bound notebook that he always carried with him. He was a meticulous note taker, jotting down even the smallest detail in case it might be needed later. I glanced at the cramped notes once, practically unreadable to anyone else as he had developed his own personal shorthand over the years.

"That's an excellent idea." He sat and flipped to the appropriate page.

"Hey, does this have anything to do with that missing body?" I was curious.

"What missing body?"

"The one from the car crash I was reading about in the paper when you so rudely began pounding on our door," I shot back.

"No, this doesn't have anything to do with a missing body." He seemed flustered. "Nor does it have to do with any car crash."

"I just figured if you guys lost a body..."

"We didn't lose a body! The coroner lost a body." He corrected me.

"That's just the kind of blame shifting I would expect from the NYPD." I feigned disgust.

"Will you stop aggravating the Detective, Jimmy?" Fogg turned back towards Sea Bass.

"Please continue."

The detective cleared his throat then began to go over his notes. "It's not one thing that has me here; it's a collection of things. It started two days ago when I got called to the scene of a murder. A man had gunned down a woman in the middle of the street in broad daylight. He didn't know the woman, had no criminal record and had never even fired a gun before buying the pistol he used that morning. The first time he pulled the trigger, the bullet pierced the woman's heart from over forty yards away."

"That's a hell of a shot for beginner's luck," I said.

"That was just the first odd thing. The man didn't run, he stood there and waited for the police to arrive. When I asked him why he had done it, he claimed he didn't know. He just decided to skip work, go buy a gun then drive to that exact location and shoot that woman." Sea Bass flipped the page on his notebook. "I brought in a psychiatrist to see if the guy was nuts."

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“You mean the random shooting wasn’t enough for you to think he was few cards short of a deck?” I threw in.

Lee ignored me and kept going. “The psychiatrist believes the man is not only telling the truth about not knowing why he did it, but he believed the man to be completely sane outside of this one event.”

Fogg sat forward and drummed his fingers on his desk. He did this when he felt like his time was being wasted. “That is curious, but I fail to see how that would be something for my expertise. Sometimes humans do things that we just can’t explain.”

“I understand that,” Sea Bass interrupted. “And I wouldn’t be here if that was the only thing I had. Yesterday afternoon I was called to another murder scene... an almost identical murder scene. The only difference being it was in a parking lot instead of a main street. A woman was dead, the shooter stood waiting for the police with his newly bought pistol on the ground at his feet.” The detective glanced down at his notebook and looked back at Fogg. “It happened a third time today.”

“And all of the assailants confessed to the crime?” Fogg sat back again, his curiosity was now piqued.

“Without a moment’s hesitation or any request for a lawyer even. By themselves these are completely open and shut cases. Dead body, confessed killer and the murder weapon... a D.A.’s dream case in triplicate.” Detective Lee shook his head. “But I can’t accept the coincidences.”

“Nor should you,” Fogg added. “Have you found anything that ties the victims together?”

“Not a damn thing.” He shook his head. “Nothing connects the victims to the killers, the victims to each other or even the killers to each other. I’ve checked everything I can... but now I’m getting heat from my bosses to move on. When you have a confession they don’t like you to keep digging.”

“What can you tell us about the guns?” That was more my area of expertise than Fogg’s. “And were the other two shots as impressive as the first?”

“Similar guns, Smith and Wesson .38s, brand new bought the day of the shooting and none of them had experience with weapons.” He flipped another page. “All three shootings were from more than 30 yards and all were direct hits to the heart. Even odder, each gun had only the one fired casing in it. The other five chambers were empty.”

I started scribbling some notes of my own. Fogg sat quietly for a moment running his fingers through his silver hair. His brow crinkled up just a bit above the bridge of his nose. This told me that the answer wasn’t obvious to him. You’d be surprised how often he had solved a case with fewer details than we had just received. This also told me that he wanted to know what the answer was. Fogg was rich, obscenely rich, so he only picked the cases that interested him. If there was nothing mentally stimulating about a case, he would merely give the client a piece of advice or a clue and then send them on their way. For every case we take we turn down another dozen.

“The NYPD doesn’t officially recognize these cases as being connected?” Fogg asked.

“No. To the best of my knowledge I’m the only one who even thinks there is something wrong,” the detective admitted.

“And you’re asking me to look into this unofficially?”

“Yes. My hands are tied at this point.” Sea Bass looked as if removing his own spleen would be easier than saying the next words. “I would regard it as a personal favor.”

“Of course, Detective, consider us on the case.” Fogg nodded to me and I held up my book to show him I was already taking notes. “We will need copies of the police reports, the confessions and Jimmy will need to see the bodies.”

“I can arrange all of that,” Sea Bass assured him.

“Assuming the coroner hasn’t misplaced them.” I got a dirty look for that little jab.

“I’m curious, Detective,” Fogg asked. “When did you first get the feeling there was something more to these cases than what was on the surface?”

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“They didn’t feel right from the very beginning.” He closed his notebook and put it away. “When I talked to the first suspect and he confessed, I could just see the confusion in his eyes. That wasn’t something you could fake.”

“Jimmy will show you to the door.” Fogg was done. “We will let you know the moment we find anything.”

I got up to show Sea Bass out. He hung there for a second, like he had something else to say. Maybe he wanted to demand updates at certain intervals or some such nonsense, but he had dealt with Fogg enough to know it wouldn’t work. Instead he just said, “Thank you” and turned to follow me out.

“And Sebastian...” Fogg didn’t look up, but using his first name grabbed the Detective’s attention. “Don’t ever knock on my door before sundown again.”

Chapter Four

With Sea Bass on his way, I headed back to the office to find out what Fogg had in mind. When he asked for access to the bodies it meant that I would be making a trip to the morgue shortly and I needed to know specifically what I was going to be looking for. It wasn't the first time I'd been tasked with checking out a corpse, but each time there seemed to be something different Fogg wanted to know. I hoped it wasn't another instance of checking the mouth. Once you've see one swollen black tongue with the skin bursting into fissures; it leaves you hoping to never see a second.

Fogg was working the dial on the large safe. There were two safes in the office. The smaller safe, which was hidden behind a picture painted by Renoir, was where we kept the cash, the accounting books and anything of monetary value. The larger safe was in the corner of the office behind an ornate Indian woven tapestry. This one was a little trickier to open than the smaller one. You had to chant a series of words perfectly timed with matching the numbers on the dial to get the handle to unlock. Fogg had placed an additional enchantment on it since it contained all of his arcane artifacts, occult oddities and other items one might use to take over or destroy the world. I knew what the words were. I had them written down. But I was only supposed to open that safe in extreme emergencies, like in the case of Fogg's demise. Then I also had a second set of words I was to chant that would destroy everything inside.

To the world at large, Lucius Fogg was a private investigator who specialized in the odd and bizarre cases that other detectives declined. He had become somewhat famous even, having appeared in the local papers more times than Eisenhower. But in truth, Fogg was the foremost authority of all things supernatural, paranormal or occult related. He dealt with things too scary for a normal man to try and comprehend. If Fogg got involved in a case, it meant that there were some serious otherworldly activities going on.

My role in this little set up was much simpler. I was the leg man, the investigator. I went out and checked the crime scenes, rounded up the suspects, collected all the information and brought it back to the boss. I'm not saying that Fogg was lazy, nothing of the sort; he just had a very good reason for staying home all the time. If he stepped outside for even a second, he'd die. So Fogg hired me to do all the things he couldn't.

Actually, he hired me twice. The first time, I had just gotten my private investigator's license from the great state of New York and realized that getting started on my own would be difficult. So I answered a few ads with the larger firms in hopes of building up some experience. Fogg was the third interview I had and to be completely honest, he creeped me out. After three weeks of interviews I received two pieces of mail on the same day. The first was a letter from Fogg offering me the job as his assistant. The second was from the draft board inviting me to go die for my country. The army won out and I got packed up and shipped out to fight the Nazis.

I did two tours in Europe before a bullet to the head landed me in a three-month long coma. When I awoke I found myself in a London hospital with a Celtic pendant around my neck. It had arrived for me from the United States and my nurse felt inexplicably compelled to open the package and put the necklace on me. A few days later I was awake and making remarkable progress. The nurse showed me the box and the little note that had come with it: "Come see me – Fogg".

I returned to New York a few weeks later with a scar on my temple, a metal plate in my head and a purple heart on my chest. The war was just about over and Uncle Sam felt I had given enough. Ariel stood waiting for me at the baggage carousel holding a sign with my name on it. She didn't say a word. She didn't have to, I would have followed her even if it was into Satan's personal coach. Long straight black hair, alabaster skin and ice blue eyes... I was certain that 'no' was not a word she was accustomed to hearing.

She drove me back to Fogg's brownstone and led me into his office where the man himself awaited me. Fogg explained that he had held my job for me while I was gone. He believed that no

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man who went off to fight for his country should lose his job because of it. I thanked him for his consideration but I had not planned on taking the job.

“Nonsense.” Fogg looked at me as if I was saying the sky was green. “The job is for you and you are for the job. Are you refusing it now, as well?”

I thought about it for a few minutes. I had no money, no prospects and no family to count on. I didn't even have a place to sleep that night. My big plan had been looking up an Army buddy who had opened up a bar and hoping he'd let me crash with him. So there was no real way I could pass up immediate employment, especially since it came with room and board.

“I'll take it.” Funny how three little words could completely change a life.

Even after five years, I still felt like I understood very little of the things Fogg dealt with, like I had just started to scratch the surface. Usually we'd get a case and Fogg would give me a list of instructions to follow. Now I'm never going to be confused for a genius and Nobel's prize won't be hanging from my mantle any time soon, but I've got a decent brain even with the metal shielding and it used to be rare that I would have to write down instructions. Then I started working for Fogg. He'd give me objects to use with very specific instructions including words to say and actions to do, all of which had to be done precisely. One wrong syllable or an object turned clockwise instead of counter-clockwise and a building might burst into flames. Thankfully, that had happened only once. I quickly became very good at taking notes.

Fogg got the safe door opened and pulled out a box about the size of a cigarette carton. He opened it and retrieved three small red stones and a velvet pouch. He put the box back, closed the door of the safe and returned to his desk.

“These are memory stones.” He held one up for me to see before dropping the three into the bag. “I want you to take these to the morgue and place one on the forehead of each of the girls.”

“I hate to break it to you, boss, but I've never been good at getting answers out of a corpse. I mean, I can slap them around a bit if you really want me to.”

“This isn't the time for your wit, Jimmy. These stones are specifically created to retrieve the memories from the brain post-mortem.” Fogg handed me the pouch. “I will give you instructions for you to follow exactly. Once you have successfully retrieved all three sets of memories, you are to return the stones to me.”

“You really think this is more than just three random killings?” I asked. “Sea Bass isn't exactly an occult expert, you know.”

“I'm not sure. For now we are going to go on his instincts, which have proven reliable in the past and the belief we share that there are no coincidences.” Fogg leaned back in his chair. “If the detective is wrong and the three cases are unrelated, then he will be in our debt for having looked into the matter for him.”

“And if he's right, then it's a case for Lucius Fogg, anyways,” I added.

Fogg gave me my instructions and I jotted them down in my notebook, and then handed it over to him just to double check. Once he was certain of the accuracy, Fogg handed it back to me. I tucked the book away in my pocket along with the velvet bag.

“You want anything else? Pictures of the bodies, a lock of hair, maybe an article of clothing?”

“Nothing so mundane would prove useful here, Jimmy. Just the memories will suffice.” Fogg paused for a moment then added. “And check their eye color.”

“What am I looking for?”

“You'll know it if you see it.” And with that Fogg started reading a letter that had arrived in the morning post.

I swung by the dining room on my way out in hopes of stealing one last bite off the chicken leg I had left, but Ariel had already come along and cleared my plate. I headed out to the foyer and grabbed my hat and coat off the rack. I found a lump in the breast pocket that I didn't remember

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being there before. I pulled out the object to discover it was a chicken with mayo on white all wrapped up for later. Ariel had struck again. I would have married that girl if it were only possible.

Chapter Five

There was only one problem with me going to the county morgue that night. I'd been there before. A lot. Seems like every other case we got had me running over to check on a stiff. So I was quite familiar with the layout. I had conned, snuck, smuggled and bribed my way in on many occasions. This was the first time I was showing up with permission. I approached the officer at the front desk and tried to keep my hat tipped down over my face.

"Jimmy Doyle. I should be expected." I spoke in a slightly lower tone than normal.

"Doyle?" The guard looked confused. "You look just like that reporter guy, Baker, from the Globe."

"Do I?" I tried to sink into my coat. "I've never met the man. Detective Lee was supposed to have called over about me."

"He did." The guard slid a visitor pass over to me. "I'll ring for the god."

The 'god' as he called it meant the ghoulish-on-duty or rather the nightshift medical examiner. In this case, it was a young guy with wavy blond hair and a perfect smile named Blaine Michaels. He insisted I call him Blaine. He must have mistaken me for someone that could help his career because he treated me like visiting royalty. He gave me the nickel tour before taking me into the exam room.

"I was told you wanted to see three different bodies." Blaine was looking at his clipboard to verify. "Do you have a preference which one you want first?"

"Surprise me."

I wasn't sure just how high and deep they had the corpses piled up in the back, but it took Blaine almost ten minutes to fish out the first girl. He looked like he had moved a lot of stuff around in a short amount of time, yet his hair was still perfect.

"I figured we'd start with the first one killed," he offered.

"Seems like a good idea," I agreed. "What can you tell me about her?"

"Her name was Amy Wilson. She recently turned twenty-one." Blaine pulled back the sheet to reveal the bullet wound through the chest. "The bullet entered here, perforated her aorta and then buried itself in her spine."

I looked at this pretty young woman who would never take another breath. The paper listed 'actress' as her occupation and I could see her doing small roles. She had long brown hair that I'm sure her agent would have had her bleach to blonde. Her face was round and friendly and her body matched. She was the type that her best assets were the first thing to enter and the last thing to exit a room.

It was time for the fun part.

"Blaine, I'm going to do something a bit unconventional... and I can't really explain why..." I tried to prepare him for whatever the little red gems were about to do.

"You work for Lucius Fogg, right? I recognized your name from the papers," Blaine explained. "I didn't think you were just here to check the wounds. I'd like to stay and see whatever it is you are going to do."

So Blaine wasn't trying to ass-kiss his way up the ladder. But was he curious about the cases Fogg and I handled or was he the type that needed to believe in magic because his own life was mundane and pitiful? Either way, it wouldn't be bad to have a friend who worked in the morgue... especially one on the nightshift. I figured it couldn't hurt to let him stay.

I pulled one of the red gems from the velvet bag. The gem was oval shaped and about as big as a fifty-cent piece. It looked more like a garnet than a ruby or sapphire... you tend to learn all about precious stones in this line of work. It would be quite a fetching piece hanging around a woman's neck. But this one wasn't intended for a neck.

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I placed the gem in the center of Amy's forehead, just above the eyebrow ridge. I then pulled out my notebook and found the page with the incantation on it. Blaine was standing far enough back as to not get in my way, but still close enough to see what was going on. I read the words exactly as written, stressing all of the important syllables. Then I took a step back.

Nothing happened.

"I was expecting something a little flashier," Blaine said.

"So was I."

I was about to try the incantation again when I noticed the gem just beginning to glow. It was like a flashlight with a nearly dead battery. But the glow began to increase with each passing second, quickly becoming as bright as a car headlight. In another ten seconds it was too bright to look at, making Blaine and me shield our eyes with our hands. The room was completely filled with a brilliant red light... and then suddenly it was gone.

Once I could focus again, I discovered the once red gem had now turned to green. My garnet suddenly became an emerald. That solved one of my concerns--how to tell the gems I had already used from the non-used ones. I grabbed the gem off her forehead and dropped it back into the velvet bag.

"What was that supposed to do?" Blaine was still rubbing his eyes.

"Besides blind us, it was supposed to collect her memories." No sense lying to the kid.

"How does that work? And how do you retrieve the information from the gem?" He was a ball of questions. I hate questions.

"I'm the hired help here, how the actual magic works is above my pay grade." I wanted to move on. "You want to grab the next one?"

Blaine threw the sheet back over Amy Wilson and was about to wheel her away when the other thing Fogg wanted popped into my head.

"Wait!" I crossed over to him. "I need to see her eyes."

I opened her eyes and saw nothing special. Well, they were a lovely shade of blue but nothing out of the ordinary. Luckily my boy Blaine was there and he quickly grabbed her chart, then looked back at her eyes and then looked back at her chart. I had never seen anyone do a literal double take before, but there it was.

"What's wrong?"

"Her eyes are blue." Blaine seemed dumbfounded.

"I can see that." I wasn't sure what had him so stunned.

"But they're supposed to be brown. Her records show she had brown eyes." He continued looking at the chart.

"And you are just now noticing the difference?" Now I was stunned.

"She was positively identified and in here for a gunshot to the chest... so we focused on her chest. We had no reason to look at her eyes?"

"I have a feeling she got that most of her life." I motioned for him to take her away.

I had no idea what the different eye color meant, but since Fogg had asked me to check it then he had a hunch. And his hunches were usually worth betting on.

Blaine rolled in victim number two, a woman named Susan Poirot. At twenty-nine, she was quite a bit older than Amy and had her career well underway as a loan officer at a downtown bank. She also had long brown hair, but that was where the similarity to the first victim ended. Susan was tall and bone skinny. Her face was long but she had a button nose that looked out of place. Blaine had pulled the sheet back far enough to show her chest, which was also far from Amy's, but the wound was exactly the same; a single shot to the heart.

I lifted her lids and noticed her eyes were blue. Blaine checked the chart and told me she actually had blue eyes. One right and one wrong, the incorrect shade on the first girl could've just been a clerical error.

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“Okay, cover your eyes...” I was about to put a gem onto Susan’s head.

“Wait a second!” Blaine dashed out of the room.

I wasn’t sure what the kid was up to. Maybe he needed a bathroom break and didn’t want to miss the light show. I figured I’d give him a minute or so but he didn’t need that long. He came running back in with two pairs of welding goggles.

“They’re doing some construction down the hall, thought these might cut down the glare from the gems.” He tossed me a pair.

I went through the spiel once more and sure enough, the goggles kept us from having to look away. What I was able to see this time was very interesting. Susan’s eyes were moving like crazy under her lids. I had closed them again after checking the color because having a dead woman staring at me was kind of creepy. It looked like she had dropped into REM sleep and was having one hell of a nightmare.

When the gem finally turned green, I dropped it back into the bag and fished out the last red one. Blaine covered Susan back up and rolled her back to the cooler. While he was away, I was thinking about the actual wounds. I knew the odds of something as pedestrian as the cause of death being of interest to Fogg was slim, but it was of interest to me.

Blaine returned with the last girl, and girl was the right term for her. Lisa Kelly may have been eighteen but she still looked like a little kid. Her short red hair and freckles probably helped with the illusion. She was cute, maybe in a few years she would have been beautiful... but she died being cute.

“Eye color?” I decided to ask before I looked.

“Green, like any good Irish lass would have,” Blaine replied.

I opened her lids to discover two beautiful blue eyes. Except it was the exact same shade of blue as the other two victims. This had to be what Fogg was looking for. I checked her wound. It was another single shot to the heart. Uncle Sam taught me how to shoot and I got fairly good at it over the length of boot camp. The idea that someone could pick up a gun for the first time and make this shot was hard to believe. For it to happen three times in a row was just not possible.

After one more light show, I picked up the final green gem and dropped it into the velvet bag. As I was grabbing my hat and coat, Blaine handed me a card with his direct number on it.

“If I can be of assistance to you or Mr. Fogg in the future, please let me know.”

I slipped the kid a sawbuck which he took eagerly. I was glad. Had he turned it down, I would’ve wondered what his true purpose for helping was. Curiosity and greed on the other hand were things you could depend on. He rolled Lisa Kelly back to the cooler while I made my way out into the night once again.

Chapter Six

I got back to the brownstone around midnight and Fogg was not in the office. Waiting for me was a pot of hot tea, Earl Grey, and a plate full of biscuits. I don't mean buttermilk biscuits you'd eat at breakfast, but rather cookies. When I first woke up in London I couldn't handle solid foods for a while, so the nurse who had been taking care of me started bringing me hot tea and cookies and I would soak the cookies in the tea until they were ready to fall apart and then devour them. As with the rest of England, she called them biscuits... hot tea and biscuits quickly became comfort food for me.

After my first case working with Fogg, a particularly nasty situation involving what he referred to as an "Elder God", I was having a hard time dealing with all the new things being thrown at me. Ariel walked into the office and put a pot of hot Earl Grey and a plate full of biscuits in front of me. I dipped the first biscuit in the tea and put it in my mouth. As it melted on my tongue, I felt myself relax. Tea-soaked, one by one, they took on the familiar, molten texture. I realized that I could deal with all of the unknown as long as I kept myself grounded in the things I knew. From that point forward, the tea and biscuits would appear whenever I needed them.

Having just seen the results of three innocent young women murdered for no apparent reason, I needed the tea and biscuits.

Fogg walked into the office a few minutes later. He was carrying a book under his arm which meant he had been in the library. Fogg had an extensive collection of books that covered a myriad of topics ranging from alchemy and science to history and the occult. The downside of having that many books is that when you are looking for something specific but are not sure which book it's in, you could be there for quite some time trying to find it. Fogg had obviously found what he was looking for this time as he placed the book on his desk next to the velvet bag I had left there for him.

"Did everything go all right?" he asked as he took his seat.

Fogg could have simply opened the bag and seen the color of the gems and known the answer, but that wasn't how he worked. He wanted me to give him a report without actually asking me to report. I think the idea here was if he asked for a report I would feel compelled to give him every detail no matter how boring. If he asked me a simple 'yes' or 'no' question, if I did want to add anything I would make sure it was of absolute importance and nothing else trivial. You'd think after five years we'd have worked together enough that he would feel he could just ask for what he wanted, but he continued this type of stuff so I played along.

"Swell, fine... great even." Okay, maybe I embellished it a little. "We seem to have made a new friend at the morgue, one who is willing to help us in the future. And you owe me a sawbuck."

"That's good to know." He started digging in his desk drawer as we spoke. "Was there anything else of note?"

"Yeah, two things... All three girls had blue eyes, the exact same shade of blue, even though two of them didn't have blue eyes before they were killed. Second, Sea Bass was understating just how difficult these shots were to make. I could do it maybe one out of three times. We're talking marksmen level skill here out of three complete beginners. I just don't buy it."

"Good observations." Fogg switched to a different desk drawer.

It took him a few more minutes but he finally found what he was looking for. The object looked like a deformed wire coat hanger. It was bent, unevenly, into the shape of a "C" and had hooks at both ends that matched. In the center was another piece of wire that went up the opposite way of the hooks and then out about two inches. Dangling from the two inches was a tiny little net. With all the amazing things in the brownstone, this looked like it was created by a five-year-old on arts and crafts day at school. No wonder Fogg had buried it in the drawer.

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Fogg placed the object on his head so the hooks went over his ears. He then placed the first of the green gems into the dangling net and let it hang there just over the bridge of his nose. He placed a stack of blank paper and a pen directly on his desk in easy reach. I tried very hard not to giggle as I watched this process take place.

"I'm not sure how long this is going to take, but please don't interrupt me until I'm finished." He waited for me to agree before continuing. "Also, I have written a note that I'd like you to deliver to Conrad Black before dawn. It's very important."

He took an envelope out of his pocket and placed it in the outer most corner of his desk for me. I crossed over and grabbed it and then returned to finish the last of my tea. Fogg knew how much Conrad creeped me out and just how much I hated going to Old Town.

"You want me to have Sea Bass bring the suspects by for you to interview?" I asked

"Why on Earth would I want to waste my time doing that? It's quite obvious they have nothing to do with this." He almost seemed offended.

"You mean besides purchasing and firing the guns... and that whole confessing to the crime thing." It seemed like a good idea to me.

"If you feel so inclined to meet with those gentlemen, you may do so at the station; after you have delivered my note to Conrad." He leaned back in his chair slightly. "Now if you'll excuse me."

Only Fogg would consider the three confessed killers to have nothing to do with a series of murder cases. But then again if they were involved, Fogg wouldn't be. Kind of funny how these things work. I still believed in turning over every rock though. You never knew what you were going to find. I would call Sea Bass in the morning and see about talking to the suspects.

Fogg said a few words. One or two were similar to what I had said earlier, then suddenly the room was filled with an extremely bright green light and I was once again temporarily blinded. Would a warning have been too much to ask for? It took a few minutes for my eyes to adjust and for the light to start dimming, not nearly as fast as it had increased at the morgue. I could see Fogg's eyes moving rapidly under his lids. Every once in a while he'd pick up the pen and write something down without opening his eyes. He never looked at what he wrote, just kept his head back and his eyes closed.

As fascinated as I was by his new sleep writing act, I decided it was better to just do what he asked me to and head over to Old Town. I opened my drawer, pulled out my revolver and checked the chamber to see I had the correct bullets loaded. I put on my shoulder holster and grabbed the usual bag of tricks. As much as I hated this part of the job, Fogg needed Conrad Black and it wasn't like I could just pick up the phone and call him. Damn it.

I got the Studebaker out of the garage and warmed the engine. I hated taking it down to that part of town, but no cabbie would get me within two miles of the place at this time of night, so I really didn't have a choice. With the streets being empty, it only took me about fifteen minutes to get across town. I parked on Fifth Avenue knowing no one from Old Town came up any further than Fourth so the car would be safe. I didn't dare drive all the way to Conrad's. I would be a sitting duck in a vehicle. The sound of the engine, the glare of the lights would just tell everyone where I was, make me an easier target. I'd be much safer going the rest of the way on foot. I would need the freedom to move about if things got ugly.

And in Old Town things always got ugly.