The Chronological Man

—Two Complete Novellas—

Andrew Mayne

THE CHRONOLOGICAL MAN

THE MONSTER IN THE MIST & THE MARTIAN EMPEROR

ANDREW MAYNE

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Thank you!

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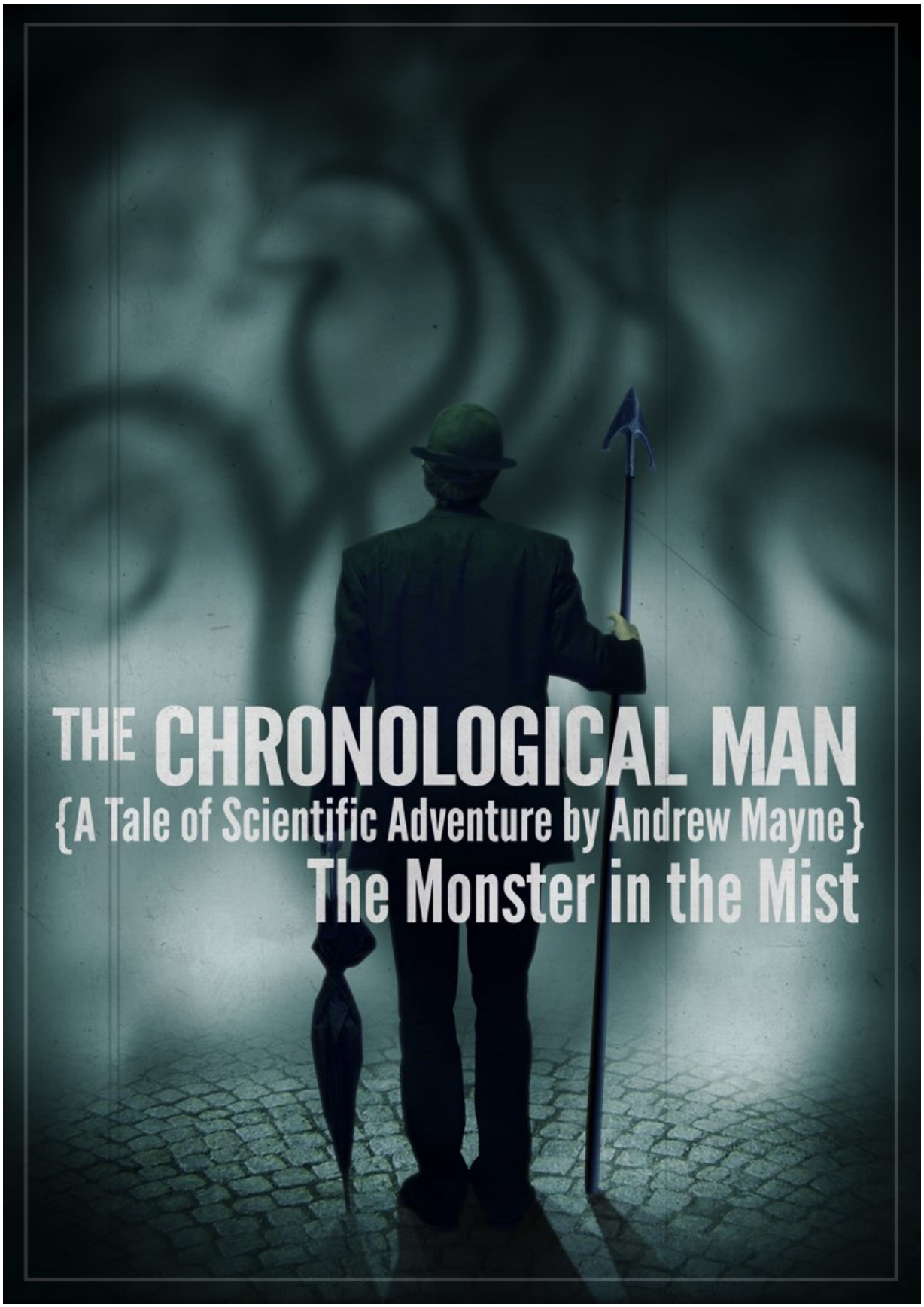
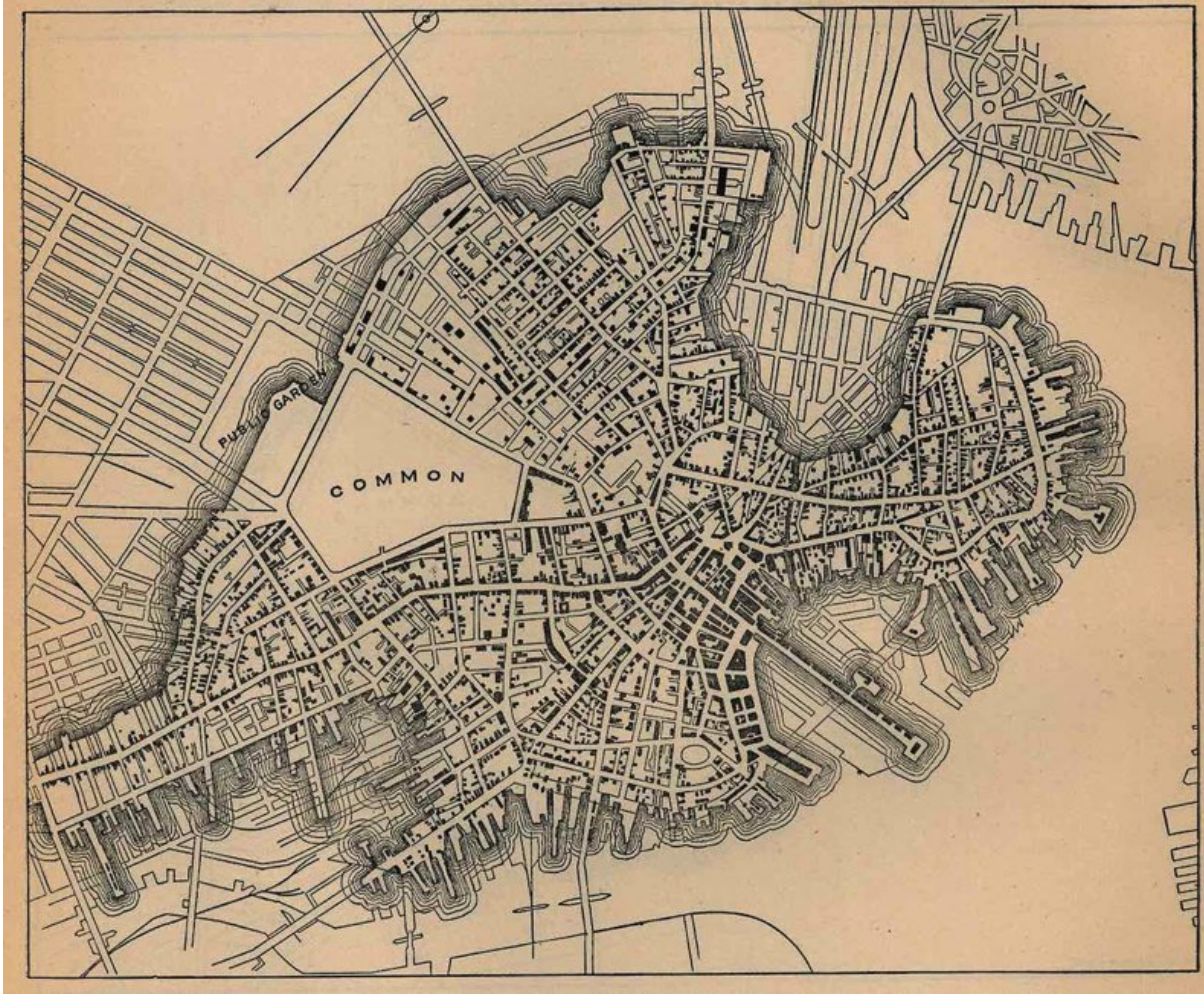

THE CHRONOLOGICAL MAN
{A Tale of Scientific Adventure by Andrew Mayne}
The Monster in the Mist

BOSTON IN 1814.

From a Map of Boston, in the State of Massachusetts, surveyed by I. G. Hales

THE FAINTER LINES SHOW STREETS OF 1880.



Boston 1890

Without a thought about the stories in the newspapers or the whispers in the streets, Mary O'Mallory waved goodbye to her friends and watched as they faded into the night. The mixture of soot, moisture and cold air had blanketed South Boston in a thick fog that made the days feel like twilight and the nights like a damp, dark cellar. The light from gas lamps and the newer electrics struggled to pierce the veil. She could hear horse-drawn carriages just a few yards away but only infer their passing from the sound of the hooves and the dim light their gas lamps made as they passed.

On any other night, she would have taken the streetcar back to Dover House with her friends, but tonight she was waiting for Albert to walk her home. His ship had ported three days prior, and he'd promised to spend his time ashore wining and dining her and reminding her why she liked the lovable rogue.

She straightened the folds on the dress from home that she had changed into in the washroom. Working in Edwin's Abattoir was a dirty job, and she wanted to look her best for Albert. Not that he would have cared if she had specks of cow blood or pig fat in her hair or on her clothes. He'd spent the last three months on a whaling ship that reeked of rendered whale parts, which covered ship and crew alike in a thick black burnt whale oil that never washed off. Try as Albert did to look his best, his clothes and hair were always permeated with the stench. She'd grown to miss that smell in his absence. She'd even taken to using one of his pajama tops she'd promised to wash for him as a pillow case. (Which was as close as they had come to sharing a bed so far.) One more whaling run and he'd have saved enough for the two to marry, he'd promised.

She pulled her coat closer as a light rain began to fall. The damp collar tickled her neck. In the distance she could hear a train pulling out of South

Station. The sound of carriages began to fade into the distance. With the exception of Edwin's, most of the other businesses had closed up for the night. She could hear hurried footsteps on cobblestones across the street as someone ran home to get out of the rain.

"Oh, Albert," she said into the dark. She worried that he might not even see her on the corner in the thick fog. Or worse, that he'd run into one of his friends and lost track of time at some saloon by the wharf.

She'd walked home lots of times that late at night. But never when it was so dark out. It was an hour trip, twenty minutes if she caught the electric streetcar that ran up Arlington. But she'd waited too long and missed the last car. She decided to give Albert a little more time before she walked back home. This late and dark, it didn't make a difference, she thought.

She heard the sound of a mewling cat down an alley and then screeching as two cats got into a fight or got on with their lovemaking. Not a cat person, Mary could never tell the difference. Maybe both. She imagined for a moment that the female cat was chewing out the tomcat for leaving her by herself for so long in the dark. When he tried to make an amorous advance, she nipped him in the ear and let him have a piece of her mind.

Maybe she should nip Albert in the ear. She put the thought out of her mind. She'd spent enough time worrying late at night that he'd never make it back from the sea. She didn't want to push away something she wanted so much.

She heard the sound of a cat behind her, a long mewling sound that grew deeper. It was unsettling. Mary backed away from the street corner and stepped farther back on the sidewalk near the side of the building. She heard the cat again. This time the sound was closer and deeper.

She'd grown up with the usual superstitions about cats, taught by her grandmother who grew up in the hills of Ireland. Nonsense, she knew. But

they still seemed like quasi-mystical animals to her. The cat's meow turned into a growl. It was close by, but she couldn't tell what direction it came from.

The sound came again. This time it changed pitch and was coming straight toward her. She thought she could hear faint footsteps.

"Mmmmmmmary," called out the sound.

Mary's breath came out in stunted gasps. She was about to run when she noticed a familiar smell.

"Marrrrrrry O'Mmmmalllorrrrryyyy, ohhh how I love theeeee."

Mary swung her purse into the fog and felt it connect. There was a thud followed by a cackle.

"You horrible man!" she shouted through laughter.

"Oh don't you know it," said Albert's familiar voice with his impish lilt. "Still see you have no love for cats."

"Or you either!" she said as she gently pushed him away.

Albert stepped into view from the shadows with his broad grin and locks of dark hair poking out from under his cap. He kissed her on the cheek.

"Oh my," said Mary. "You're late."

"A thousand pardons, Miss O'Mallory. One of our mates didn't make it home last night, and we were checking the saloons to see if he'd been waylaid." He took her hand in his and began to walk down the street.

"I bet you did," she said as she placed her other hand on top of their joined pair. "Had a pint or two, I'm sure."

Albert slapped his pocket. "Only drank what I sang for. Saving my money for you."

He had a lovely voice and sang with a cheerfulness that could brighten a dark tavern or make even the most solemn choir song sound like a celebration. She'd met him at St. Anthony's, where he would sing at the occasional Mass. Although the congregation was a little more upscale than

a shanty whaler like Albert was used to, the older ladies had welcomed his charm and voice and seemed not to mind his sooty clothes or slightly off-color sense of humor. He had a good heart, a big smile and sang like a devilish angel, which was most welcome in the predominately Irish church.

He whistled as they walked along the sidewalk. He brought them to a stop on the corner and listened for carriages. There was no way to see one coming in the mist. She held his arm and leaned into his shoulder. She smelled his coat and smiled.

When they reached Flaherty Street, the whistling stopped.

"Well, I'll be," said Albert.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"I could swear ...." His voice trailed off.

"Albert?"

"God damn!" he screamed as he was yanked sideways and fell to the ground.

Mary kept hold of his hand. She looked down and saw his face look up at her from the fog. He'd gone completely pale. Paralyzed with panic, she didn't know what to do.

"Albert?" she screamed.

"Not here! Not here!" he shouted.

Albert's body was dragged away from her and into the fog. Mary tried to keep a tight grip on his hand.

"Albert! Albert! What's going on?" She pulled on his hand, trying to keep him from whatever was tearing him away.

Suddenly he was lifted to the height of Mary's shoulders. His eyes looked into hers, scared and desperate.

"Run Mary! RUN!" he screamed as his body was jerked into the darkness.

Mary's grip wasn't strong enough. His fingers slipped from her grasp, and he vanished into the fog.

From out in the darkness she heard him call out again, "Run away!"

Mary's legs didn't want to budge. She was still holding her hand into the darkness, staring at her white fingertips, trying to understand what had just happened.

"Albert!" she screamed. "Albert!"

Despite his warning, Mary refused to run away. Instead, she ran toward where he'd been pulled. She called out after him again. "Albert!"

All she could hear was the sound of her voice echoing. She reached the sidewalk across the street and tripped on the curb. Mary fell to the ground and stretched her arms out to try to find some sign of him. Her fingers only found moist brick.

"Albert!" she shouted between tear-filled sobs. "Albert!"

1

April Malone pulled the set of brass keys from her coat pocket and unlocked the door to the building with no name. Same as she had done six days a week for the past two years.

The streets were covered in a thick fog and she felt uncomfortable being out there in it with all the strange stories about people missing. When she'd got off the trolley car a few blocks back, a withered old woman dressed in black had tried to offer her a protective amulet. The crone said it was a gift, but April had read enough to know how gypsies operated their scams. She'd politely declined and kept walking. Paperboys approached her with sensational headlines, each one more sinister than the last, about people missing in the fog.

She shut the door behind her, bolted the three locks on the door and placed her coat on the rack. As per the instructions given to her by the previous woman who held the job, she started brewing a pot of coffee that would never get touched, placed next to the pot a paper bakery sack that would get thrown out, too, and made sure that fresh copies of the London Times, the New York Times, the Boston Globe, the San Francisco Chronicle as well as various mail-order catalogs and scientific journals were placed on the desk that sat at the opposite end of the room from hers.

In the pneumatic mail slot that mysteriously delivered things during the night, she found a thick envelope filled with long pieces of cardstock with various notches in them. These cards were blue colored. Interesting. She didn't get as many of them as the red, yellow or greens ones.

She sat at her desk and turned a crank on the side as she fed the blue cards into the card slot. A minute after she entered the last card, she heard a bell ring, telling her she could stop turning the crank.

It was just one more mystery. On her desk sat a mechanical calendar reminding her when to go to the back end of the building and have the coal man pour coal down the shoot or when to have the man with the oil cans refill a tank built into the back wall.

Periodically, a letter written on a typewriter would arrive with new instructions. They would be simply signed Mr. S.

She looked forward to these letters. They were deviations from the normal routine. They might have instruction like, "Pick five of the New York Times fiction best sellers and read them," or they might ask her to attend a public lecture at Boston College or MIT.

Although she didn't have a formal education, April had a quick mind and loved to read. The frustration with the secrecy and mysteries was offset by the unpredictable nature of the job and the opportunities to spend long hours reading or meeting interesting people at lectures. She'd attended lectures on topics as varied as Egyptology and human anatomy. When she asked her predecessor the purpose of the reading and the lectures, she simply shrugged and said you never know when you might get quizzed. Quizzed by whom, she'd wondered?

On more than one occasion she'd been instructed to tell lecturers that she was there as a guest of Mr. S. The lecturers, usually professors or other scholars, sometimes had special manuscripts or in some cases envelopes of punch cards for April to feed into her desk. Some gave her chemical samples to be deposited into a safe.

When family and friends asked her about her job, she just told them that she worked for a private actuary. If they pressed on, she described her job as doing "actuarial things" and left it at that.

Her most recent letter from Mr. S was to learn how to use a velocipede. That had been an interesting experience. It sat in the corner waiting for her next practice session.

The office, as she referred to it, had a front door, several bookcases filled with reference materials she kept updated, a closet, two desks and three doors at the back. One door led to the water closet. Another to a storeroom, and the third, a large metal door with three incandescent lights above it, led to where god only knows. She half suspected it was a vault of some kind. Her predecessor only told her that she'd be told if she needed to worry about it. Told by whom?

Unbeknownst to April, twenty feet below her desk the punch cards worked their way through a machine half the size of the city block the building was built on top of. Gears turned, pins found the holes in the cards, levers clicked and tumblers began to rotate. The cards became mathematical problems. A large brass sphere with a series of notches on it, unlike any difference engine cylinder ever seen, began to spin. A calculation was made.

April flipped through a script to a play. She felt a rumbling as a streetcar passed by. She looked up from her desk when she realized that the electric car didn't go down this street. She walked over to the small window that looked out on the street and peered past the blinds and metal bars securely fashioned to the wall. The street was empty.

That was odd, she thought. Maybe they were working on the subway line or the sewer tunnel? She sat down and went back to her reading. Although she took her job seriously, she'd developed the rather unladylike habit of taking her boots off and sitting with her feet up on the desk. If her mother saw her doing that, she would have cupped her in the ear.

Although she was an attractive woman of twenty, there was still a bit of the tomboy in her. She licked a finger and turned the page. She almost didn't notice when the first light above the metal door turned red.

Somewhere beneath her, valves turned. Pressurized steam powered a turbine that began to pump gas into a large glass chamber.

April set her book down and looked at the light. She'd never seen that before. She unlocked the drawer in the desk where the manual was located. She pulled it free and thumbed through to the section that explained what that meant. Her desk had various incandescent filaments and metal cylinders that had different instructions. The light above the door was one she'd forgotten.

Did that mean she'd forgotten a delivery in the back? She scanned the yellowed page that described the door. It said to make sure that there was a fresh pot of coffee ready and to see to it that all the other things she'd done when she arrived had been done.

The second light turned red. She almost jumped out of her chair when she felt an even louder rumbling from under the floor and heard something hiss. The manual didn't have any further instructions.

April sat at her desk, transfixed by the door. What would happen when the last light came on? Beyond the door she could hear what sounded like a large mechanical leviathan coming to life.

Lately she'd taken to reading Shelley, Stevenson and Verne. Her mind raced with sensational possibilities. She'd always assumed the pot of coffee and pastries were for someone who would enter through the front door, not one who came through the metal door.

What could be behind there? An armor-clad dinosaur? A deranged lunatic serving off a prison sentence? A cursed Egyptian mummy? She thought of some of the more bizarre items from the penny dreadfuls on her reading list. Vampyre? Feast of Blood?

April looked toward the doorway. What if it all had been some kind of cruel trick? The money was more than fair; she was paid every other week via a check that came through the post from some law firm in New York. But was she actually being paid to be a victim? She really had no idea who she worked for. Whatever was behind that door had been there for the past two years. What kind of horrible creature had been trapped in there?

The third light came on. April calculated how many steps it would take for her to reach the front door, unlock it and run away. If she stayed at her desk, she would get trapped between there and whatever was behind the metal door.

She took her feet off the desk and decided on a compromise with slightly more composure. She would stand beside her desk and wait to see whomever or whatever came through the door. That probably wouldn't give her enough time to unlock the front door, but it would give her the chance to make a start of it if she could fight off whatever was making the sound from behind the door.

April heard the sound of clicking wheels and sliding bolts. The door slowly swung open by itself. It was pitch black inside. The gas lamps from the office could barely penetrate the opening's interior, revealing nothing to April.

From inside emanated the sound of footsteps running up stairs. April stepped backward and bumped into a row of encyclopedias. She reached back and grabbed one so she could have something to throw. She pulled it free and held it in her right hand, ready to be used as a weapon. By the weight of it, she could tell it was "M." That was a good meaty one to use. Lot's of useful things in "M," she thought.

In her mind, she began to recite the first entries for "M," verbatim.

Something moved in the darkness. April lost track of whether it was the Phrygians or the Cataonians who worshipped the goddess Ma first.

A figure leaped from the last step of the stairs and bolted into the middle of the room. April made a noise that sounded more like a hiccup then a scream. She dropped the encyclopedia.

The fair-haired man in slightly disheveled clothes turned his head toward her.

"Hello! Have we met?" he asked with a helpless smile.

2

April looked at the man. Slightly gaunt with dark blond hair, he looked like he was in his late twenties. There was a white orchid in his hand. Presently, he was smiling at her. He looked down at her bare feet. April began to turn red when she realized she'd forgotten her boots.

"Finally! I hoped we would get rid of those silly artifacts. So much more healthy to not have them, except in the cold or rough terrain." He pointed to his own bare feet. "I avoid wearing them myself as much as possible." He noticed the orchid in his hand and tossed it to April. "Smell this please. My nose hasn't quite caught up yet, although ...." He made a motion with his nose as he turned toward the coffee. "Splendid!" He jogged over to the gas-heated coffeepot and poured himself a mug. He rifled through the bag of pastries and pulled out a jelly doughnut and began to devour it between long sips of coffee. "Pardon me," he said between mouthfuls. "Got to get my energy," he said as he waved the coffee mug toward the bag of pastries, spilling it on the metal serving cart. "Have some? Whoops, sorry. The coordination takes a while. Not as long as the memory, though. Sometimes that never makes it back between trips. Of course, the only reason I know that is because of this." He reached a powdered-sugar-covered hand into his pocket and pulled out a small card.

He waved it at April. "Do you have one?" He shoved it back in before she could look at it. "Not a whole lot to go on. I'm sure it will all make sense in a bit." He looked at her again. This time taking a longer look. "So ... uh ... have we met?"

April was reasonably certain she had never met this peculiar man before. He looked harmless enough, a bit on the thin side. Despite the fact that he looked like he had been sleeping for ages in his rumpled clothes, his manner was very polite and almost elegant, if not a bit too energetic. He was wearing dark slacks and a white collared shirt that was untucked and half unbuttoned. On his left wrist he wore a leather band with three watch faces. He was likable but unfamiliar. "Um, no. I don't believe we have ... Mister ...?" she said.

He stared at her. "Mister? Mister what? Oh me?" He reached into his pocket and pulled out the little card. "It says here Smith."

"Mr. Smith then."

"Um no," he looked at the card again. "Just says Smith here. So let's just leave it at that for now. I'm sure the rest will come to me before we're done. So what do I call you?" He sat down at her desk and fished another doughnut from the sack. He waved it at April. "No? Sure?"

"No, thank you, Mr. .... No, thank you, Smith. My name is Miss Malone." She looked down at the orchid she was absentmindedly holding. She brought it close to her nose. It smelled fresh.

"And ...?" he asked.

"It smells nice. Quite nice, in fact."

"No hint of decay? No acrid odor?" he inquired.

She gave it another whiff. "Not at all. It's quite pleasant." Her eyes drifted to the open door.

"Excellent! I think." He bolted up from her desk. April jumped backward. Oblivious to her reaction, he gallantly took her hand and kissed it.

"A pleasure to meet you, Miss Malone!" He looked at her face. "Oh so sorry. I know I'm a bit archaic."

"No, no. It's quite all right. I'm just surprised. The gesture, that's all." She looked at his unkempt clothes and disheveled hair. "Were you in there all along?" She pointed to the metal door.

"I assume so." Noticing his unkempt appearance for the first time, he self-consciously ran a hand through his hair. "Sorry. I saw a sign that said urgent, so I didn't bother to wash up downstairs."

April eyed the metal door. He grinned then walked over and gave it a push. The door slowly closed shut. He walked over to a bookcase filled with scientific and medical textbooks behind his desk and knocked on it four times. It swung open to reveal a walk-in closet and an ornate washroom. "Don't know why I remembered that of all things. Give me a moment, Miss Malone." He walked into the room and pulled the bookshelf partially closed.

What an odd man, thought April. She stared at the bookshelf and tried to piece together what had just happened. She had a thousand questions. Smith made no room for them as he peppered her with his own questions about world events, the latest music, what books she'd read and if there were any scientific discoveries he should know about.

Finally she interrupted him, "Have you been away on a trip of some kind?" "I don't know," he replied. "I'm sure it'll come to me." He poked his head out from the hidden doorway. There was a spot of shaving lotion on his ear. He held out his razor. "Do they make an electric one yet?"

Yet? wondered April. "I'll look into it."

He ducked his head back in. "I'm sure Edison will figure out a way to fry the hair off or something." He popped back out. "Is he still around?"

"I think so," said April.

"Right bastard. Of course he is," scoffed Smith.

"He built the dynamo stations for the electric streetcar," offered April.

"Have you seen them?"

"Every day, running up and down the street. Like the horses got loose or a caboose without a locomotive," she said.

"The dynamos, Miss Malone. Have you seen them?" he asked as he rummaged through his closet.

"No. I haven't. You can't miss the station though. The chimney must be a hundred feet tall."

"Interesting. Ben would have loved to have seen that," replied Smith.

"Ben, is he a friend of yours?"

Smith stepped out of the closet and adjusted his tie. "I don't know. A mentor, I think." He stepped back and presented himself. Shaven face, hair combed back and wearing a proper jacket and tie, he looked like the young men April saw walking around the financial district or going to the theater. "How's this?"

"You look fine." She noticed he was wearing shoes.

Smith looked down at his feet. "Ah, yes. I realized that it was too good to be true when I noticed that your feet were rather pale." His cheeks turned red. "A very nice color actually, I mean. Er, um, you have nice feet. Uh, so, what's the weather like?"

April laughed. His awkwardness was endearing. She'd grown up with three brothers and was not easily embarrassed by silly matters like ankles or feet. "We've had a most dreadful fog for the past few weeks. It just lingers. You can't see three feet in front of your face at night."

"Yes, of course. At this stage of industrial development, I'd expect the factories are making it worse. Don't worry, it'll get better."

"That's a relief," said April, puzzled by his answer.

"If Mr. Edison is building power plants for streetcars, the electrification of factories will soon follow. I say it'll clear up in about twenty years."

"Oh. I was hoping for something a little more short term"

Smith walked over to his desk. "It's all relative, Miss Malone. The thick stuff is much more temporary, I'm sure." He pulled a black card from a slot on his desk.

April hadn't noticed it before. It must have come out of the slot some time that morning.

Smith held it up and looked at the various punches in the card. "I'll need my decoder to be sure, but I'm fairly sure it's the reason that I'm here." He sat down at his desk and pulled a key from around his neck and unlocked a drawer. He removed a flat piece of brass machinery and laid it on the desk. He placed the card in it and slid various panels over it and turned some dials.

"It's an interpreter. A kind of astrolabe for numbers. The card is just a series of numbers generated from various pieces of information from those punch cards you insert into your desk. This tells me a little bit more."

April vaguely remembered that an astrolabe was a mechanical device used to track the position of stars and planets. As she watched Smith's nimble finger adjust the various parts of his interpreter, she tried to imagine what it was measuring. "If you don't mind me asking, where do the cards come from?"

Smith looked up. "I don't know." He looked back at the interpreter. "I mean, I do know, but the amnesia is blocking it. I imagine another office rather like this one, only there someone sits at a desk and looks for word frequencies in newspapers, examines things like stock prices, peculiarities in the classifieds."

"Peculiarities?" asked April.

"Lots of things. You could spot an unreported epidemic among newborns by the frequency of used cribs being sold compared to live births within the last year. A boarding house with a high turnover could suggest the landlord is murdering guests. You could also find morbid things, too ...." His voice trailed off as something caught his attention.

"Why?" asked April. "Why do you track these things?"

Smith pulled the card free and held it up to the light. "I don't remember. But I know it's important. Not the boarding house stuff or the infant deaths." He paused. "I mean, those are important, of course. But that's not why I'm here. At least I don't think."

He picked up the Boston Globe and started flipping through the pages. "Do you have the last two weeks of the Globe?" he asked.

"Yes." She walked over to a filing cabinet and pulled out a stack of papers. "I keep six months here before I send them to be warehoused."

"Excellent." Smith turned the paper he was holding to a specific page and set it on the floor. He rifled through the other papers until he came to a similar page and laid them on the floor, as well. He had six newspapers in all laid out on the rug in the middle of the wooden floor. "And here we go." He stood up and gestured to the newspapers. He looked at April, expecting her to understand.

April thought the floor looked more suited to wrapping a large fish than explaining anything. "Um, I don't quite see it."

Smith knelt down and tapped several articles. "Missing persons, Miss Malone. This is a highly unusual number of missing persons under strange circumstances."

"People go missing all the time. What makes it significant now?"

"There's a higher than normal number. Not enough that police have realized there's something really going. But mathematically speaking, it's obscene." He leaned over and picked up a paper. He handed it to April. "Some of these people went missing just a few feet away from people they knew."

"It is a thick fog," suggested April. "The papers will sensationalize anything."

"Of course. But people just don't walk into it and vanish. They have to go somewhere. We live in a world of science and rationality. The fog didn't

take them. Well, it probably didn't take them." He crossed his arms and stared at the ceiling. "Yes, I'm reasonably certain the fog itself didn't do it. I mean, I suppose you could have some kind of acid fog that eats people. That would have to leave bones, though. Unless of course the calcium ...." Smith pulled a notepad from his desk and started writing some strange symbols.

April waited for him to finish his thinking.

Smith crossed off a row of calculations. "Nope. Doesn't add up. It's not people-eating fog with calcium-devouring microbes. Pity. I'd like to have seen that. But, someone or something out there has been taking people." He gestured at the papers. "Maybe not all of these people but some of them. And quite likely other people who never made it into the papers."

April stared down at the newspaper he had handed to her.

MISS MARY O'MALLORY OF DOVER STREET claims that her fiance, Mister Albert Carnegie, a merchant seaman, was bodily abducted at 10 PM Thursday night in her presence on Flaherty Street. She is currently being treated at St. Elizabeth's Woman's Hospital for hysteria.

"THAT COULD BE a couple of his shipmates pulling him away to waylay him," said April.

"Perhaps," said Smith. He gestured at the papers. "Other accounts are similar. But the question you need to be asking is this, if it's just a sailor being abducted to work on another ship, why is Miss O'Mallory being treated for hysteria?"

"Maybe she's the hysterical type?"

"I'd like to have a look at the police reports and decide for ourselves." He looked over at the corner. "Ah, the velocipede! Have you tried it?"

"Yes. It hurts a bit in ... never mind. It took me a while to figure out how to use it with my skirt on. To be honest, it seemed like an odd request that I use it."

"All part of the job, Miss Malone. I apologize if it caused you any inconvenience or embarrassment. They make different ones for men and women. When they switched from wood to rubber, I understand they hurt much less," he said.

April couldn't imagine using one that was made from wood. The splinters alone gave her pause.

"I'm looking to have a motorized one made." He looked up. "Or did I already? We'll have to check the warehouse. Maybe it's there already." He looked at April. "Two people could use that one at the same time."

That sounded very frightening to April, although the childlike look on Smith's face made it seem like there might be some charm to it.

"We'll look into that later. For now I think we should start with the case of poor Miss O'Mallory's fiance." He looked back at the device and then to April. "They don't call them velocipedes anymore, do they?"

"No. Most people call them bicycles," she corrected.

"Ah, that's right. We'll get another one later. For now a walk would be good. It's been ages since I stretched my legs. Shall we go?"

"Go?" asked April. She looked at her desk and the office. "I've never left here during work hours."

Smith gestured to the door. "Miss Malone, the books, the lectures, that's not the job. That's to prepare you for the real job. And that's out there." He held the door open for her and then stopped her. He took the orchid from her hand and threaded it through a buttonhole on her coat. "Ah, that's better. Mustn't forget why we're here."

Unsure of why they were there, April looked over her shoulder hesitantly, shrugged and then stepped through the door into the afternoon fog.

ACROSS TOWN in an upscale brownstone apartment, Dr. Lindestrom poured a cup of tea for Mrs. Reardon, wife of the late railroad baron. Her hands trembled when she took the cup.

"Thank you for making an appointment for me at your private practice," said the woman. Her eyes passed over the plush couches and ornate furnishings that made up his office and approved.

"For special clients, I think this is more relaxing than the hospital," said Lindestrom. "Let me look at your hands."

The woman set the cup down, spilling half its contents. Lindestrom placed his palms under hers and felt the quivering.

"I've always had the tremor, ever since I was a little girl. It's just gotten so much worse since I got older."

Lindestrom nodded.

"I've heard that you might know of special remedies," she hesitated, "ones that they won't prescribe in other practices."

Lindestrom placed her hands between his own. "There are some that are ... that are on the cutting edge of science, shall we say. Treatments that are years, some are even decades away, from the mainstream. Unpredictable. Potential side effects for a few, nothing serious. But treatments that have given comfort to a select few who choose to take them. I use a few myself. The trouble, of course, is the cost." Lindestrom let go of her hands. "I'd be happy to prescribe you some traditional remedies as a courtesy."

Mrs. Reardon shook her head. "Cost isn't a problem, Dr. Lindestrom."

"Now, now, Mrs. Reardon. Let's not let two people of our stature discuss something so crass." He got up and walked over to a cabinet. He unlocked it and pulled out a small ampoule filled with black liquid. He sat back down and placed it on the table in front of her. "A gift. Try this. If it works for you, we might be able to develop an alternative course of treatment." He

nodded to her trembling hands. "One more effective than the one you're on."

She picked up the ampoule and placed it into her pocket with some difficulty. "I'd be happy to pay you for this ...."

"Shhh, Mrs. Reardon. Let's just see if it works first. It was obtained under great difficulty and is quite a rare substance to process. I don't want you to worry about cost if it's not going to be right for you." He stood up and helped her to her feet. "Call upon me in three days. We'll have our assistants talk about compensation then if it's necessary and you insist."

Mrs. Reardon smiled as he held open the door for her. "Bless you, Dr. Lindestrom."

He saw her out the door and then waved for the handsome young man waiting in the foyer to enter. The doctor walked back to the cabinet and locked it. Lindestrom had no idea if the substance he gave the woman was going to work. His research had only begun. But Lindestrom was certain that the large dose of cocaine mixed with the liquid would certainly make her think it was doing something and send her back for more. He could continue experimenting with different dilutions and refer to his colleagues on the matter.

The young man sat down. "Looks like your friend is back in town."

"Are you certain?"

The young man nodded.

"His timing is most peculiar," said Lindestrom as he tapped his fingers on the cabinet.

He unlocked a door to his basement. The young man followed him down the steps.

It was cold down there. Large crates were packed with sawdust and ice. Inside were various strange shapes the younger man didn't recognize. A pungent smell permeated the air. He had to cover his nose. Lindestrom seemed oblivious.

"We'll have to ship these to our employers sooner than later, perhaps."

Lindestrom walked over to a shelf lined with various bottles and jars filled with dark murky liquids. "I have enough for my own experiments." He turned back to the crates. "These specimens were interesting, but the one I really want is still out there."

Lindestrom's fingers curled over the edge of one of the ice-filled crates. "Contact our carpenter friend and have one more crate made. This one large enough for a man."

3

"It's about elliptical problems, Miss Malone," Smith explained as they walked down the sidewalk. "This way to the police station?" He pointed his umbrella down the street. "Some of it comes back in bits and pieces. Other parts not so much. The hard part is sorting out things in what order. We've never met?"

"No, Mister ... no, Smith. I'm certain of it." She'd never had any reason to doubt her memory. "Elliptical problems? I'm not sure I've ever heard of those before."

"Look over there. We're about to see one." He gestured his umbrella at a three-story building across the street.

The building read "Varley's Textile Emporium." A horse-drawn wagon was parked in the street in front while three men unloaded crates. At the top floor, two doors were wide open. A pulley and winch were suspended in front of the doors. Below it, the three men on the ground used it to lift a large burlap-wrapped bundle.

"If you saw the rope start to fray, what would you think?" asked Smith.

"I'd think the rope was about to snap and the whole mess would come crashing to the ground," answered April as she watched the men struggle with the awkward load.

"Exactly. That's a kind of linear problem. The consequences are directly related to the evidence at hand. Elliptical problems are those where you have the evidence but don't know the relative consequences. Look at that rope. What do you see?"

April scrutinized the rope. It didn't look like it was coming apart. It had a slight green color to it. That seemed a little odd to her. "The color."

"What's odd about the color?" he asked.

"Well, it looks a little green." Why did that sound familiar?

"What kind of things are green, Miss Malone?"

"Living things, generally." She looked at the rope again. "It's a kind of nautical rope, isn't it? Something they use on sailing vessels? It comes from the tropics, I think." She remembered a book on her reading list about ropes, cords and other abysmally boring topics. "It shouldn't be that green, though. The rope has a fungus in it that's kept in check by saltwater or dryer climates."

Smith waved his umbrella over his head in a circle through the mist. "Does this look like a dry climate?"

"No, it does not." She looked at the large burlap-covered bundle they were lifting to the third-story loft.

"Anything else? Did something catch your eye in the paper today?" Smith darted across the street to the sidewalk near where the men were lifting the bundle. An old woman with two canes was walking toward the front of the store.

"Keeping warm, mum?" said Smith.

"Doing my best, dear," replied the old woman.

Smith looked up at the bundle. "Best to hold up one minute." He looked over at April.

April had read an advertisement saying Varley's received a large order of spun wool and was offering it at a steep discount the next day.

She looked across the street as Smith was engaged in small talk with the old woman. He looked over at April and shouted, "Think elliptically, Miss Malone."

The three men on the ground lifted the bundle higher. The rope looked intact, but as they gave it a heave, she could see it stretch slightly. The men seemed oblivious. The wool had soaked up more moisture than they realized.

She was too embarrassed to say anything until she watched the bundle bounce again and the rope stretch more. The men had probably never tried lifting such a heavy load when the rope was in that condition. Smith looked over at her expectantly, waiting for her to say something.

"Watch out!" she shouted to the men.

The men on the ground and the man in the loft guiding the rope with leather gloves looked over at her. April pointed at the rope. "The rope!" she shouted.

The men looked at their perfectly solid rope and then back at the silly girl shouting at them. Shamefaced, she remained quiet. She looked over at Smith. He was ignoring her as he talked to the old woman. Was this all a put-on?

To heck with him. "Your rope!" she shouted. "Doesn't it look a little green?"

The men on the ground laughed. The man in the loft waved her off. "Stick to darning threads, miss," he shouted across the street.

April shot an angry look at Smith. He was turned away from her and had his back to the men and their load. He held up three fingers in April's direction as he asked Mrs. Broadbent about her begonias.

He ticked his fingers off one by one. April heard a snap as he reached one, and the bundle of wool came crashing to the ground, making a loud thump as it hit. The three men jumped back, barely making it clear of the bale.

The man in the loft leaned out to see if anyone was hurt. The men picked themselves up and dusted themselves off. The ripped-apart bundle covered the sidewalk in a downy mess of white. The man looked out at April and shouted. "Sorry, miss. Should have listened. Thank you for the warning."

April nodded back at the man. Smith guided Mrs. Broadbent around the heap of wool to the other side of the sidewalk and then walked back to April.

"Well done, Miss Malone. I doubt anyone would have been seriously hurt, other than maybe the dowager Mrs. Broadbent. But it was an excellent test of your elliptical thinking skills. What have you learned?"

She wanted to tell him that he was a peculiar and infuriating young man. "That people don't listen."

"Precisely. Just because you can see the problems of an elliptical problem doesn't mean that others will listen. And that's what we do."

"How do you mean?" she asked.

"We solve elliptical problems. Problems that others don't recognize."

"Why you?"

"Us. I think you meant to say, 'Why us?' You're not just a random person, Miss Malone. You were hired for very specific reasons. You have an exceptional recall ability. That alone is an asset to my deficit of retention, temporary as it may be. All those books and journals," he pointed to her head, "they're up there in that pretty head of yours. You have an exceptional ability that not one in 50,000 people has. A human computer. And there's the other equally rare asset you have."

"What would that be?" asked April.

"When those men ignored you, why didn't you walk away? It must have been embarrassing."

"I guess I didn't want them to get hurt." April wasn't quite sure why she didn't just storm off. She guessed some part of her told her she had to make

them see.

"It's morality, Miss Malone."

April laughed. "I'm not quite sure about that." Although she wasn't as "free" of a spirit as some of the young women she knew, she hardly thought of herself as a moral, churchy woman.

"I don't mean the uptight Bostonian brand of morality that would ban a play or sheet music because it puts naughty suggestions into their tiny minds. I mean morality in the Enlightenment sense. You care for the well-being of your fellow man." He pointed his umbrella at the men trying to gather up the broken bundle of wool. Mrs. Broadbent was offering them not very helpful suggestions. "You'd sacrifice a moment's worth of embarrassment to see to it that they were unhurt. That's the kind of morality that's important to me."

April had never thought of morality in those terms before. Most of the moral lessons she'd got in church were about what she should and should not do. Little of it was about how she should treat others beyond turning the other cheek, which everyone ignored.

"Your morality and your encyclopedic brain, Miss Malone, are the two most important qualities we require."

"Require for what?"

"A much larger elliptical problem. One that I can't seem to recall at the moment. But I know it's important. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here." He guided her arm around a corner toward the police station.

"How did you know precisely when the rope was going to snap?" she asked.

"I cheated."

"Cheated? How?"

Smith ignored the question and walked up the steps to the Boston police substation. "No time for that now, Miss Malone."

They watched as a blue-uniformed police officer led a man with one hand on the collar of the man's jacket and a billy club in the other.

Smith looked back at April with a grin. "Someone's been naughty."

4

Desk Sgt. Robertson looked at the man and woman standing in front of him. The woman looked to be about nineteen or twenty. Attractive with dark hair, she had intelligent eyes that looked right at him when she spoke. The man had a smile as he looked around the room at the suspects handcuffed to benches and the police officers sitting at desks going over paperwork. He reminded Robertson of his ten-year-old nephew when he took him to visit the station. To him it was all a game.

"So you're not reporters, attorneys or family members?" asked Robertson as he leaned back in his chair. His right hand absentmindedly stirred his teaspoon while his left hand went to the goatee on his chin.

"No, sergeant, we're not." Smith looked over at April and then back at the desk sergeant. "We're concerned citizens. We'd like to look at the following police reports." He reached into his pocket. "Er, I don't seem to have the list with me." He looked over at April.

"May I?" she motioned to a notepad and pencil on the sergeant's desk.

"Certainly, but there's a procedure here. We don't just hand out police reports to anyone who walks in off the street."

"Don't you?" asked Smith. "Isn't it public record?"

"Yes, but there are forms to be filled out."

"What kind of forms?" asked April as she finished writing and set the list of names and dates on the desk in front of the man.

He looked down. "There are over a dozen people here. It'll take a couple days to get the clerk to pull the files. But first you need to fill out request forms."

"Oh bother," said Smith. "I don't think we have days." He motioned toward the notepad. "I think that list will get longer if we don't do anything about it."

Robertson picked up the notepad and read through the names. "These are all unrelated. I can't see why they would be of any interest to you at all."

"Well, um," said Smith. "The connection might not be obvious to you at first. But we have reason to believe that there's an elliptical connection to them all, one that we intend to prove and make quite obvious. It's really all about mathematics ...." Smith's voice trailed off when he noticed Robertson's arched eyebrow.

"What Smith is trying to say is that for the play he's writing he's very interested in the subject of missing persons and their connections to others. It's actually a love story," said April.

Smith shot her a confused glance. "Miss Malone, are you mad?"

April put a hand on his arm. "I know it's supposed to be a secret, but I think we can trust Sgt. Robertson." April looked up at Robertson and gave him a wink. "Can't we?"

Robertson looked at April and then back to Smith. "A play?"

Smith gave a glance to April then smiled at Robertson. "Shhh, it's a secret for now. If my uncle finds out how I plan on spending my inheritance, I'll never hear the end of it."

"I see," said Robertson. "How very interesting." He tore the slip off the pad of paper. "I think I can make an exception. It'll take me just a moment. If you don't mind transcribing them here." He gave them a smile and then walked toward the records room.

Smith turned to April. "A play, Miss Malone? Why on earth would you say that? I was trying to appeal to the man's sense of reason."

"You were talking yourself into a trip to the nut house. I appealed to his sense of vanity," she replied.

Smith crossed his arms and looked at the door Robertson walked through. "Vanity? How so?"

"Did you notice his goatee, the way it was trimmed?"

Smith shook his head.

"It's trimmed just like Sir Arthur Ladd's, the famous actor. He was at the Orpheum three months back," said April. "I got tickets in one of the envelopes that arrived at the office. I took my aunt. She was quite taken by Ladd, as were a number of the ladies. Bit of a buffoon, in my opinion."

"I see," said Smith. "So he's a fan of the theater?"

"Rather his wife or girlfriend is. He shaved his beard to look like Ladd to impress someone."

"Do I have to create a play now and cast him in it?" asked Smith.

April wasn't sure if he was serious. "No. We've done our part. When he goes home and tells her about the playwright he met who was asking for the reports, the first thing she's going to ask is if he helped you."

"And he wants to look like a hero in her eyes. Very clever, Miss Malone." His voice quieted when Robertson returned from the records room with a stack of folders.

Robertson sat back at his desk. He pointed to an empty bench. "I brought all the reports from the last three weeks. You can look at them over there." He pushed the notepad and pencil to April. "You can use this."

"Thank you, Sgt. Robertson," said April as she helped Smith pick up the folders. "Has anyone ever told you that you look like Sir Arthur Ladd?"

Robertson's mouth curled into a sheepish grin. "Once or twice, miss."

Smith and April sat down on the bench and began to look through the folders.

"What are we looking for?" asked April.

"We need three things," said Smith. "Location and time of day, anything unusual, like if there was a witness who saw the person disappear and occupation and home address."

That was technically five things, but April decided not to mention it. "So we can find them?"

Smith lifted his head from a case report. "Er, Miss Malone, I'm afraid these people are most likely dead."

"Dead? Then what are we doing?"

"We need to find out what took them," he said.

"And do what?" she replied.

"Stop him or it."

"Why us?" She looked over at the policemen in the station.

"Because," said Smith, "they're never going to find something if they don't know what they're looking for."

April went through the files, stealing a glance from time to time at Smith. She was beginning to suspect that he hadn't been on a trip but, in fact, had been in the basement all these years. Doing what? Toiling away on the huge machine she could feel under the floor of the office? Locked in a study, pondering some philosophical problem? Sleeping in a coffin?

Her curiosity in the man outweighed her fear. He was a mystery. But at least his intent seemed noble. For the present, at least.

5

It took them an hour to sort through the files and find ones they thought relevant. Many of the missing persons cases were clearly people who decided to leave of their own volition. Renters skipping out on landlords. Deadbeat men who decided to move on. Women who had enough of their loutish husbands.

While they looked through the folders and made notes, Smith made light of the somber mood by making a game of trying to guess the transgressions of the men (and occasional woman) who were brought in front of the desk sergeant.

"Horse thief," April would whisper as a drunken old man on a wooden crutch was hauled up in front of Robertson.

"Embezzler," whispered Smith as a soot-covered nine-year-old boy was brought in by the ear.

"Mass murderer about to confess," said April when an old woman went up to the desk to ask a question.

"Pimp," said Smith. He apologetically covered his mouth when he realized what he'd just said in the presence of a lady.

April looked over her shoulder at a priest standing in front of the desk. She let out a cackle that turned every head in the room. She quickly buried

her nose in a folder to avoid the glare of Sgt. Robertson.

"Miss Malone, I fear that I may be a bad influence upon you," said Smith in a hushed tone. "Prostitute."

April lowered her folder. "Pardon me?"

Smith looked away from the woman in front of the desk. "That woman over there, she seems quite distressed. I can assume from her attire that she's ... well, that's not important. I wasn't making a judgment."

April noticed the woman's sloppy clothes and crude makeup. She certainly looked like some of the women she'd seen by the wharf plying their wares to the men as they got off the boats.

Smith quietly walked over to the desk. He could overhear the woman complaining to Robertson.

"I keep asking that ya find out what happened to O'Bannon. But you lazy micks won't have none of it," said the distressed woman.

She had curly hair and skin that was pale from all of the makeup she had caked on. It was an almost comical effect until Smith noticed it was to cover up severe acne scars and rosacea.

"You're better off without O'Bannon in your life, Miss Shelly. He's trouble," said Robertson. He looked over at Smith. "Something else?"

"I'm sorry to intrude. Is this O'Bannon fellow missing as well?" asked Smith.

"Not officially, Mr. Smith," said Robertson.

"Just Smith. What do you mean by 'not officially'?"

"He means he's too lazy to write up a report," said Miss Shelly. She gave Smith a wary eye.

"I mean that O'Bannon is a no-good pimp and that the world is better off without him. And since Miss Shelly isn't a wife, family member or fellow boarder, there's not much we can do in the way of making a report," answered a terse Robertson.

"I see," said Smith. He gestured to April and the stack of folders. "We have eleven cases that seem a little peculiar to us over there." He gave Miss Shelly a cordial smile. "How many more would we have if we included the 'unofficial' reports, like Miss Shelly's?"

Robertson crossed his arms and squinted. "It's the fog, Mr. Smith."

"Smith. Just Smith. The fog? I don't think it's the belief of the South Boston Police Department that the fog is eating people, is it?" He failed to mention the plausibility of that happening.

"What? Of course not. People don't like the fog." He shot a glance at Miss Shelly. "For some people, let's just say it makes working at night more difficult. Fewer customers, less money to be had. These people aren't exactly long-term planners, so they move on to other places."

"Some of these 'people' would tell their friends before they moved on detective," retorted Miss Shelly. "And maybe if you did some detecting instead of moralizing like a fat chaplain you'd have the time to notice something." She reached into her pocket and pulled something out. "Iffin' O'Bannon was in such a hurry to get his lot outta town, then why'd he leave this?" She opened her hand and slammed five dollar bills and a fistful of quarters on Robertson's desk.

Robertson stared at the money.

"Have you eva' known a pimp to run away when he had money due?" She pulled her frayed shawl around her shoulders, turned on her heels and walked toward the exit.

"Miss Shelly, you forgot your money," shouted Robertson after her.

"Use it to buy a decent cop!" She made a rude gesture with her hand and walked out the front door.

Smith looked over at April and nodded his head toward the door. April got up and hurried out after her.

Smith decided to let the two women talk while he gathered up the folders. He walked back to Robertson's desk and set them down.

"That does sound kind of odd," said Smith.

"Yes, no, maybe so," replied Robertson as he reached into his desk for an envelope to place the money. "O'Bannon's a piece of work. Thug, pimp, anything for a buck. I wouldn't be surprised if he was laying in a ditch with a gunshot or a knife in his belly."

Smith nodded to the door. "Miss Shelly seemed to be concerned."

"Concerned about the whooping she'd get if she didn't pay him what was due."

"I see," said Smith. He put a hand on the folders. "Just between you and me, how many more cases would we have if we accounted for ...," he arched an eyebrow, "people who aren't as quite accountable?"

Robertson looked around the room. A half-dozen police officers were scattered around desks making reports and talking to witnesses and suspects. He leaned into Smith. "Lots more."

"Why isn't it a bigger deal? I'd think the papers would be filled with stories."

Robertson pursed his lips. "Let's just say that some people around here would rather not look what they see as a 'gift horse' in the mouth. Despite the fog, crime is down."

Smith slid the stack of folders in front of Robertson. "Is it, sergeant?" He pointed a finger at the pile. "I guess if we can conveniently ignore certain crimes, we can say the crime rate is as low as we want, can't we? You're a good man, Robertson. Doesn't that bother you?"

"We're not just sitting still Mr. Smith."

Smith cocked an eye at his chair.

"Er, metaphorically, I mean," said Robertson. "We are looking into it. Some of us are more concerned than others. I've volunteered to do night patrols after desk duty myself." He reached under the desk and slapped his hand against his leg. It made a hollow metal sound. "Even with the leg, or without it, I should say."

"I apologize, Sgt. Robertson. I meant no offense to your dedication."

"It's no matter." Robertson pointed to the back of the station. An elegantly dressed older man was talking to the captain and two other men. "See that man? That's Dr. Lindestrom from the psychiatric hospital," he whispered. "He's an alienist, an expert on maniacs and the like. He says that's what we might be dealing with. But we don't want to alarm anyone until we have better proof. He's actually advising a special task force."

Smith tried to look at Lindestrom's face but his back was turned. "How exciting. I think." There was something about the name that nagged at him.

April slipped back into the station and stood next to Smith. The two men looked toward her.

"Did Miss Shelly have anything else to say?" asked Smith.

"She gave me the time and location of the last time she saw O'Bannon, or rather heard him."

"Heard him?" asked Smith.

"She said four days ago she went to meet him at 4th and Lark and heard him call out in the fog briefly. Then that was the end of it. She walked to where he had been standing and there was no one there."

Smith looked to Robertson. "Does that sound like some of the 'unofficial' accounts?"

Robertson nodded.

"There was one more thing," said April. "She said there was a very foul stench in the air. More pungent then the fog. She said it smelled like death."

"You mean like something decaying?" asked Smith.

"No. She said literally like death. I asked her to be more specific. She said like a funeral parlor." April's deep blue eyes looked up for a moment. "You don't suppose she meant like a chemical they use to embalm people?"

Smith turned to Robertson. "Any of that sound familiar?"

Robertson thought for a moment. "We may have one or two people who mentioned a smell. Nothing quite so specific though."

Smith put a finger to his lip. "Well, this is good news."

"How so?" asked Robertson.

"I can get my chemistry set and maybe get some of the witnesses to help identify the smell. That could help us connect everything, could be a clue." He looked through the window at the thickening fog. "Or not. Could just be a peculiar smell, that's all."

"Sounds like a very complicated play, Smith."

Smith's face looked confused. "Right, the play."

"He's more of a naturalistic dramatist," interjected April. "Modernism, science instead of the fates. Secular."

Smith's face lit up. "Indeed. Very much so. But you know my aunt. She'd have none of that."

"Your uncle," corrected Robertson.

"Very eccentric family," said April as she gave Robertson a wink.

"I look forward to it," he replied. Robertson leaned over the desk and stole a glance over his shoulder. "Say, you have any idea when you might begin casting for the play?"

"Sgt. Robertson," whispered Smith. "Are you an aspiring actor?"

Robertson blushed. "Me? No, no. I'm just asking for a friend."

Smith rapped his knuckles on the desk. "We'll let you know first." He nodded to the door. "I have to write the fool thing first. And I have no idea how it ends. Miss Malone?"

April smiled to Robertson as Smith guided her out the door.

"I'm one, too, you know," she said as they walked down the steps.

"I'd suspected as much. Lots of people are. Nothing to be ashamed of. I'd thought as much about Robertson, too, after you pointed out the goatee. That and that he didn't have a wedding band. Made sense who the other person was. I suspect it's a secret he'd have to keep to maintain his job. I don't think they'd fancy a man who fancied, well, never mind."

April stopped walking. "Are we talking about the same thing?"

Smith looked back at the station. "Um, I think so. Maybe? What are we talking about?"

"I'm a thespian, Smith. At least I've been taking classes after work."

"Right. Same thing. No bother. Pretty girl like you. Lots of choices. Very natural, I'm quite sure. Classes? Intriguing. Could be useful." He started back down the street and then stopped. "Wait, did you say 'thespian'?"

"Yes," she answered. "An actor. Aspiring one that is." She looked at her feet. "Just a hobby, really."

Smith let out a huge laugh. A man feeding a horse from a feedbag turned to look. "A female actor?" bellowed Smith. "Now that's unnatural."

April gave him a stern look. "What cave have you been hiding in? Lots of the greatest actors are women today."

Smith crossed his arms. "Yes, I guess that's so. I can't see any reason why a woman couldn't portray another woman, theoretically." He looked up. "Come to think of it, I'm sure I've seen a play or two with actual women in them." He tapped his temple. "Things get a bit foggy up here." He stood back and assessed April. "I think you'd make a fine actor, Miss Malone."

"Thank you, Smith."

He looked at a piece of notepaper in his hand. "This way to the last disappearance."

"So what were you implying about Sgt. Robertson?" asked April.

"Right, that. I guess it was impolite of me to say that. I sometimes prattle on about things that are none of my business. Quite rude, I know. This way, Miss Malone."

Smith's mouth seemed to race to catch up with his brain, a habit April's mother had pointed out in her, as well. She couldn't decided if he was a bit mad or if the world moved too slowly for him. Perhaps a little of both. Those were feelings April had often felt herself. She followed him down the street eager to see what was going to happen next. It was like one of those

penny mysteries, where every street corner had a clue. Smith, like the lead characters, always seemed to know more than he was letting on.

6

"According to Miss Mary O'Mallory, she last saw her beau right about here." Smith pointed his umbrella toward the middle of the street.

It was late afternoon and the fog was beginning to thicken. Horse-drawn carriages and wagons rolled back and forth through the street carrying goods from the various factories and warehouses that lined both sides of the avenue. Most of them already had lanterns lit to help guide the way. People bustled along in soot-covered leather aprons or cotton and wool that were a dull gray. The few women were dressed in work linens in the same bland colors as the men. Almost none of the women wore hats. Most had their hair tied up in buns. No one seemed to notice Smith, although a few men turned to appraise April.

"What stands out to you?" asked Smith as he balanced on the edge of the sidewalk, twirling his umbrella.

April looked at the street and buildings. There were a few alleyways. Besides the industrial look of the area and the miasmic fog that covered the entire city, nothing stood out as "sinister" to her. She looked at the different buildings that lined the street. There was an abattoir, a machine tool manufacturer and a few warehouses with no markings.

"He's either here or not here," said Smith.

"Yes, I'd say so," replied April, agreeing to nothing.

"Then that leaves four possibilities. Probabilities, I should say."

"Four?" asked April.

"One -- all of these assume the account is accurate of course -- he left here of his own free will and is hiding elsewhere. Two, he's hiding somewhere here of his own choice. Three, he was taken from here against his will by some other agency. Or four, he's been hidden away here somewhere against his will," said Smith. "What would you say to that, Miss Malone?"

"If he left here or is hiding here, then it doesn't seem like he'd be connected to all the other disappearances. If that's the case, then we should move on. If he was taken, then it would seem he was moved on to somewhere else," replied April, her blue eyes scanning the street and buildings.

"Why do you say that?" Smith had an approving grin.

"The missing persons vanished from different parts of the city. Assuming this location is just as random, I'd assume that whomever is doing this is taking them somewhere else instead of finding 17 different locations nearby each disappearance to hide the bodies." April bit her lip and looked up and down the street. An ice wagon rolled by pulled by a team of horses. She brushed a lock of hair.

"What are you thinking?" asked Smith as he nodded to the ice wagon.

"They had to be taken away somehow. Maybe bodily for a few yards, but then I'd think they had to be carried away in a carriage or wagon." She shook her head. "No one reported seeing or hearing a carriage, but I suppose they might not have noticed one half a block away. You could miss a dark-colored wagon a few feet in front of your face in this fog."

Smith began to walk along the gutter and poked his umbrella into puddles that lined one side of the street. "A black carriage, like a hearse?"

"That'd be how I'd do it."

"Well, Miss Malone, I think your method is sound for your own nefarious purposes." He pulled his umbrella out of a puddle and then looked to the opposite side of the street. "What's this?"

Smith walked to the gutter and stabbed his umbrella into a dark shape. He lifted it up to eye level. "It looks like a woolen cap. A bit soggy but definitely a cap." He brought it over to April. "Miss Malone, my olfactory senses are still a bit diminished. Would you do me a kindness and have a smell of this cap?"

April looked at the cap and then back at Smith. He smiled.

"Oh dear," she leaned in and opened her nostrils. "Ugh, a little foul, I'd say."

"Foul? Please describe, Miss Malone."

"You know, foul," she said, wrinkling her small nose.

"I can think of a thousand different kinds of foul smells. I can describe twelve different kinds of decaying flesh smells alone. Did you know decomposing carnivores smell totally different than herbivores? And reptiles are different altogether. I once had to spend several days in the presence of the scent of a decomposing dragon corpse in the Komodo Islands. Nasty creature in life and in death. For the life of me, I can't recall the occasion for such bad company. I digress. Could you be a little more specific?"

"I don't know. It has an oily smell like burned grease," she replied.

"Ah," Smith tucked the soggy hat into a pocket. "That would be the smell from a whaling vessel, I'd assume. I believe the absent Mr. Carnegie worked on such a ship."

Smith looked at the unmarked warehouses. "I think your assessment is correct. We can find out who owns these buildings if we come up dry. For now I think that Mr. Carnegie is nowhere to be found on any of these premises."

"So you think a black carriage hauled him off in the night?" asked April.

Smith pursed his lips. "Or some other alternative means of transportation." He looked down at his three watches on his wrist. "I think we can check one more location before we need to procure some lanterns."

Lanterns? thought April. She followed Smith as he walked down the street tapping the metal tip of his umbrella on paving stones and the sides of buildings.

"It'd be fun to find a trap door or a hidden panel, wouldn't it?"

April nodded, unsure if he was serious. "If they're not being kidnapped for ransom, then why take them away at all?"

"Lots of reasons, I suppose. Maybe to sell their body parts to the medical schools."

"That's rather gruesome," said April as she wrinkled her nose. "Is there much call for that?"

"Not now, that I know of. I'd have to go back to the office and check the going price. Thinking about a different occupation, Miss Malone?"

"I've got a few relatives I would consider offers on."

7

The shadows of the buildings had reached the other side of the street by the time they heard the sound of a woman screaming. Smith turned to April. "Beg your pardon." He broke out into a run toward the sound. April lifted the hem of her skirts and chased after him.

Three blocks later, she came around the corner and saw Smith talking to an older man in a leather apron. Both of them were out of breath and looked up as April approached them.

"You heard it, too?" said the man, turning to April.

She pointed at Smith. "Yes, I came running after him." April looked at the street. It was completely empty. "Who shouted?"

"Devil if I know," said the man. He gestured toward the open door of a carpentry shop. "I was over there planing when I heard the screaming. I come running out here and I run into you." He nodded to Smith.

"Well, this is disturbing." Smith folded his arms and considered the street. "A missing person and not even a name to report."

"Did you by chance hear a carriage go by?" April asked the carpenter.

"No, miss. Not that I would have noticed." He jerked a thumb toward his shop. Music was coming through the doors. "I have my gramophone playing while I work. I don't pay attention to much else."

Smith scrutinized the sidewalk and the buildings. He poked his umbrella into a puddle on one side of the street like he'd done at the last location. He looked up at the fading sun. "This one in daylight. This is most disconcerting." He turned to the carpenter. "Do you know the constable who patrols this neighborhood? Could you tell him what you saw, or rather what you didn't see, when he comes by?"

The carpenter nodded. "I will, for what it's worth."

Smith walked to the center of the street and took turns facing in every direction. He spent a considerable amount of time staring at the sky, which seemed odd to April. The carpenter returned to his shop. April went to stand beside Smith.

"See anything?" she asked.

"Not presently. It's like the person who screamed just vanished. Could have just been a child or someone having a prank."

"It sounded like bloody murder," said April.

"Yes, it did. Can you smell anything?"

April was beginning to realize that her nose was going to play as big of a part as her brain. She noticed a large chimney puffing out coal smoke. The wind was carrying it away swiftly. "There's a bit of a breeze." She pointed to the chimney. "I can definitely smell that. Nothing else stands out."

"Nothing?"

April shook her head.

"Too bad. I think we should head back to the office. I want to take a closer look at a map. Then maybe we go speak with Miss O'Mallory."

"Miss O'Mallory?" asked April. "But she's in the sanitarium."

"And?" asked Smith.

"Nothing." April's mind went back to the scream they had heard. To Smith, it just seemed like one more piece of information to add to the problem he was trying to solve. To her, it was the last sound someone had made. What if it had been her? She looked at the darkening streets and

pulled her coat closer. Smith acted as if he was an observer to the events, not an actual participant. April thought of the number of times she'd walked home alone in the fading light. The last person had gone missing only a few blocks from where she stood. Strangely, she found Smith's obliviousness comforting. She'd rather be standing near him trying to figure things out than home with her mother and sisters wondering what was going on in the night.

They began walking down the street when Smith grabbed April's elbow and pulled her closer to him.

"Mr. Smith?"

"Not now, Miss Malone," he said in a whispered tone. "I want you to yell at me then storm off in front of us as fast as we can. Then go left at that corner."

"Well, I never!" shouted April as she slapped him in the face and ran away from him down the street.

Smith stood there, stunned, his face still stinging from her slap. He caught movement in the corner of his eye and then chased after April.

He reached the corner and then ducked around it. April was standing there with a mischievous grin on her face.

He put a finger to his lips and rubbed his cheek. He kneeled down by the edge of the brick wall. Running footsteps grew louder. Smith stuck his umbrella hook side out at ankle height. A man ran past the edge as his foot tripped on the umbrella. He came crashing to the ground.

Smith ran over to him and put a shoe on his back. He shoved the pointed end of the umbrella into his side. "Most sorry. But why are you following me?" His voice was polite but stern.

"I'm not following you, you git. I was following Miss Malone."

"David?" shouted April, recognizing the voice.

Smith turned to her. "You know this man?"

April nodded. "He's in my drama class." She walked over to help him up.

David gave Smith a glare as he brushed the dirt off his trousers and adjusted his coat and vest. He looked to be in his mid-twenties and had handsome, yet stern, features.

"My apologies. I'm a bit concerned about my own security. I often have people making inquiries into my affairs," said Smith in a tone that was less than convincing.

"And why would that be?" asked David.

"Um, well that would be my affair, wouldn't it? Care to tell us why you were following Miss Malone?" asked Smith with a sharp look.

"We were worried, that's all. Some of us in the acting class, with the fog and all."

"This is your first acting class?" asked Smith, his eyebrow arched.

"Yes. Why do you ask?" he replied.

"Oh no reason," said Smith. "So you saw us walking and you decided to follow? Follow to make sure that she made it to class safely?"

"Yes, that's right. So who exactly are you?"

April interrupted. "He's a friend of the family, David."

David gave Smith a wary look. "I see. Will I be seeing you in class tonight?"

April looked over at Smith. "I don't think so. We have some family business to attend to."

"Family business? Well, give your mother my best. I hope to be able to stop by again soon."

"Yes, that would be lovely." April gave him a polite nod and put her hand through Smith's elbow. "Have a lovely evening."

She waited until they'd put two blocks between them before she spoke. "That was peculiar."

"I'm going to guess that he's a very poor acting student," said Smith.

"Dreadful. Some of us assumed he was there just to meet the ladies."

"I'm sure he was there to meet one in particular," replied Smith.

"Now Smith ...."

"I don't mean it like that. But let me ask, did he ask to call on you?"

"I'm not sure if that's any of your business," said April.

"Perhaps it is. Did he ask you questions about your job and who you worked for?"

"Yes. But I think he was just making polite conversation in his own boorish way."

"We'll see," replied Smith.

April had thought David's behavior a bit unusual but so was Smith's. She still wasn't sure if she understood either of their intentions, let alone her own.

8

They returned to the office as dusk fell. April went around the corner to pick up some sandwiches, while Smith vanished behind his metal door to retrieve some things. When she returned, he'd pinned a large map of Boston to the wall.

"Before we get into that matter," he said as he pointed to the map, "I need to ask you something. When did you first meet that man, David?"

"Smith, I think you're a pleasant fellow and I'm obliged to follow you on all sorts of strange misadventures as far as it falls within the somewhat nebulous job description, but my personal affairs are my own." She'd known the man only a few hours and he'd already taken on a form of familiarity with which she was unaccustomed. Deep down, she liked it but knew it wasn't proper to encourage it, at least not in an obvious manner.

"No offense is meant. I'm asking in a strictly professional capacity, Miss Malone. There's a great deal of secrets here, many of which it's very important they don't fall into the wrong hands."

"I hardly think David is the wrong hands. A taxidermist from Rhode Island has very little use of whatever mysteries you think you possess," she said, recalling in her mind the most boring conversation about the difference between badger toes and raccoon feet.

"It's not the fool David I'm concerned about. It's who he's working for. There are very dangerous people trying to inquire about me and what it is I do. Just give me the date of the first time you met him. That's all, and I'll leave the matter alone."

"Fine," said April. "Six weeks ago. I met him at the drama class." She was more frustrated with the idea that David was some kind of spy than actually upset with Smith.

"He signed up after you?"

"Yes. Why?"

Smith reached into his pocket and pulled out a photograph. "I have a number of security measures built into this building. I own the whole block, actually, and some of the nearby buildings. There's an automatic camera that takes photographs whenever the sidewalk in front of here is walked upon. In the corner, you'll see a clock with a time and date superimposed on the image." He handed the photograph to April.

The photograph showed David peering into the window. The time stamp showed it was six months prior. April was confused. She felt her stomach roil.

"I have hundreds more of him. Some are more clear than others. It wasn't a chance occurrence. He seems unreasonably interested in my affairs. I apologize for the inconvenience."

April sat down at her desk and looked at the photograph again. "He was a horrible actor. Handsome, yet that was about it."

Smith sat on the edge of her desk. "Miss Malone, I'm sure your qualities weren't lost on him. Certainly not on me."

April waved a hand at the office. "For two years I've been coming in here and staring at an empty room. I finally decide to do something a little adventurous and take a drama class." She tossed the photograph onto the desk. "And the first man I meet who seems to fancy girls ends up being paid to spy on me."

"I'm sorry for any harm this job has caused to your personal life."

April looked up at Smith. "Who are you? All day long while we've been chasing after whatever happened to those people, I keep wondering about you."

Smith tapped the photograph. "You can understand why I'm hesitant to offer up much about myself. The less you know, the less reason anyone will have to seek you out."

"Lot good that's done."

"True. I guess I can tell you a little. My amnesia is a little less severe. I have a better picture in my head of who I am and what this all means." Smith walked over to a row of books and pulled one out. "How old would you say I was?" He laid it open to a photograph.

"Late twenties, early thirties, I'd guess."

Smith pointed at the image. "That's Abraham Lincoln almost 30 years ago. Notice the man off to his left? How old would you say he is?"

April leaned in to look at the photograph. It was Smith. "That's you." She looked up. "You look the same." She squinted her eyes to look more closely at Smith's face for any wrinkles. "Very similar."

Smith checked the watches on his wrist. "According to my chronograph, it's only been a few weeks for me since that photograph was taken."

She examined the binding to see if it had been pasted in as a joke. "Like the Wells story, 'The Chronic Argonauts,' a time traveler," she said with a grin, not sure what to believe. She made light because she didn't know what else to say.

"Of course not. Don't be absurd. Time travel is impossible. At least backwards is impossible." Smith rolled his eyes as if this were a question he was asked all the time. "I have other means."

"You're not a vampire, are you?" She looked over at the metal door he'd emerged from that morning. A day ago she would have thought that was a crazy idea. Now she wasn't sure of anything.

"No. I don't believe so. You'd tell right away by the smell," Smith said seriously.

April arched an eyebrow. "Pardon me?" She'd meant the question as a jest.

"What I am, who I am, isn't as important as what I'm trying to do. And that's stopping more people from going missing. And to do that we need to be vigilant. I fear it's part of something far more sinister." He picked up the photograph of David and tossed it into the wastebasket. "I'll deal with the Rhode Island taxidermist in due time." He walked over to the map on the wall and started pushing pins into locations. "In the meantime, let's focus our attention on the current matter. I fear the attack we almost witnessed is evidence that things are about to get worse." He paused. "Miss Malone, if you'd prefer, maybe it would be better if I had someone escort you home? I seem to have gotten caught up in things." He checked his chronograph. "I've already asked too much of you."

April got up from her chair and walked over to Smith. She took a handful of pushpins from him and began putting them into the missing persons locations from memory. "I think you're going to need my help." She removed one of Smith's pins and put it in the correct position.

"Why thank you, Miss Malone." He examined the pushpins. He stole a glance at her and smiled. "Do you see a pattern forming?"

April took a step back. The pins appeared to be clustering in one area. "Hold on." She pulled them all back out. "Let's color code them by date."

April pushed the pins back in using her own schema. A pattern began to form.

Smith walked over and sat down on his desk to take in the whole map. "I say, Miss Malone, you are a clever girl."

Her cheeks blushed. She'd been told a thousand times how pretty she was. She couldn't remember since she was a little girl when a man called her clever as a compliment. The colored pushpins were arranged with one

color representing a three-day period. They began at the eastern side of South Boston and radiated to the west.

April looked at the map more closely. She pointed to a street near the wharfs. "It seems odd that there's none on the other side."

Smith shook his head. "Not at all. On the ocean side of that street they'd be reported to the harbor authority. I'm sure they have their own collection of missing persons reports. Only they care even less than the South Boston department does because a missing sailor is an hourly event there. It's what I feared."

"How so?"

Smith waved a hand over the radiating pattern. "That's not a random arrangement." He looked at April. "That's a hunting pattern."

"A hunting pattern? Like an animal?"

"Indeed. I don't think we're looking for a black carriage being driven by ghost horses. We're looking for some kind of creature."

"A creature? What kind of creature?"

"I'd rather not guess right now," said Smith.

"We need to tell the police."

Smith shook his head. "Tell them what? That their phantom maniac is an indescribable animal? We need more proof."

"So now what?" asked April.

"Now we need to talk to Miss O'Mallory." He reached into his pocket and pulled out two small vials. "We need to find out which of these two smells is the most familiar to her."

"Why not ask Miss Shelly?"

"I think Miss O'Mallory got the bigger whiff. We can ask Miss Shelly, too, if O'Mallory can't help us."

April nodded her head. "I'm fairly sure they won't let us in to see her at the woman's hospital, especially at this hour."

"That's why I have a plan, Miss Malone. One that uses your extensive knowledge of theatrical techniques."

He explained his plan to her.

April was dumbfounded. "I think that's the amnesia talking Smith. That's the daftest thing I've ever heard."

"You don't think I could pull it off?" he asked.

"Trust me. I'd like to see you dressed up like a tart and marched into the woman's hospital. But it's a silly notion. Once they see you have the wrong tackle, they'll send you to the men's prison. I'm sure they'd love your fancy face paint getup there."

"Do you have a better idea?" asked a dejected Smith.

"When you mentioned my theater skills, I thought you meant my acting."

He touched his hand to his cheek where she had struck him. "Yes, there's that. But I couldn't send you in there. It's too much to ask."

"No, it's not. I live in this town. It could have been me screaming for help today. Besides, you have an escape plan, right? One that doesn't involve me spending the entire night in the sanitarium?"

Smith nodded. "Yes. Of course. Maybe?"

9

The orderly and the night nurse guided the catatonic woman to a room on the fourth floor. Her dark hair was in a mess and pretty face was stricken with shock. Her companion had explained that she had arrived late afternoon to console her cousin who just suffered the loss of her fiance under mysterious circumstance. He said that shortly after exiting the carriage and into the thickening fog, she'd seen something that made her scream.

"She's quite inconsolable. A rather delicate composition," Smith had told them. "We were on our way to visit her cousin in this very hospital, during proper hours in the morning, of course."

The stern-faced night nurse sitting at the desk at the entrance to the woman's hospital looked down at the ledger before her. "What was the cousin's name?"

"Miss Mary O'Mallory. Mary, to us."

The nurse tapped a withered finger on a name and then read the note next to it. "I'm sorry dear, but it would be of no use. Miss O'Mallory isn't allowed any visitors. She's under clinical observation."

"I see," said Smith. He looked over at April as she sat on a bench quietly singing to herself as she stared off into space. "I don't think a

visitation is what we require now. I'd like to return her home to Annapolis as soon as possible, but there's no way we can depart until the morning." He leaned in to the nurse and whispered. "And there's another matter. I can only arrange lodgings for one. Being that Miss Patrick is an unmarried woman, I'd hate to create a sense of impropriety. She comes from a proper family."

"We're not a hotel, Mr. Smith."

"Of course not. However, I think Miss Patrick has more in common with your patients than a hotel guest." He patted his vest pocket. "I'd be happy to make a donation to the hospital to make any recompense for her stay."

The nurse looked over at April as she pulled at a strand of her hair while singing a lullaby. She did look rather pathetic. An attractive girl, for sure. She looked back at Mr. Smith. "Well ...."

Smith pulled out his billfold and laid a ten dollar bill on the desk. "I assure you she comes from a family of means and this isn't an attempt to abandon her. I'd have some serious explaining to do if I returned home and had to explain to her father, the senator, why his daughter was missing."

"Senator?" said the nurse as she looked back toward April.

Smith put a finger to his lips. "I didn't say that." He placed another ten dollar bill on the desk. "Our secret."

"I think we can spare some room for the night," said the nurse as she gathered up the bills and dropped them into her drawer. She rang a bell on her desk and an orderly emerged from behind a door. She walked over and gently picked up April by the elbow. "This way, dear."

Smith looked at the orderly and then back at the nurse. "It would make sense if you placed her with her cousin, wouldn't it?"

"As I said, Miss O'Mallory's not allowed visitors."

"Of course not." He touched April on the cheek. She stared off into space. "But Miss Patrick isn't a visitor, is she?"

"I'll see what I can arrange," said the nurse as she helped escort April through the doorway.

Smith watched them retreat down the hallway, feeling like he'd made a terrible mistake.

BUTTERFLIES FLEW AROUND HER STOMACH. Back in the office, it had sounded like a prank. Inside the depressing mental hospital, April began to feel claustrophobic. She let the nurse and the orderly guide her. As the reality of the situation she'd talked herself into began to settle in, it became easier to play the part of a frightened woman with a nervous condition.

The look in Smith's eyes as they carried her away had done more to unsettle her than any of the moans or screams she heard from behind the locked doors of the hospital. For the first time that day, she saw something that looked like fear -- fear for what he'd just put her into.

The orderly unlocked the door, and the nurse escorted April into the darkened room.

"Over here, dear," said the nurse as she guided April to an empty cot. "Miss O'Mallory has been by herself in here on doctor's orders. I think some company might be nice."

April heard the door lock behind her. For the first time, she looked at the other side of the room. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust. There was a simple cot and someone under a blanket. The room was otherwise unfurnished. The only light came through a hole in the door she'd just entered through -- the locked door.

"Miss O'Mallory?" she whispered.

April heard something that sounded like a whimper. "Mary? Mary O'Mallory? Is that you?"

A soft voice answered. "Yes."

April could hear crying. She walked over to the edge of the cot and sat down. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry to hear about Albert." Hearing the sad voice gave April a reason to be more confident. She needed to be strong for the other woman.

"Why won't anyone believe me?"

"Believe you? How do you mean?" asked April.

Mary sat up in bed. She looked at the outline of April's face in the dim light. "Who are you?"

"I'm a friend. I want to help you. What did you see that people won't believe you?" asked April.

"I don't want another ice bath. The doctor says I can't leave until I convince him that I imagined it."

"Imagined what? I promise you I won't tell the doctor."

"Promise me you'll find Albert?"

"I'll do my best." April thought it best not to mention the cap Smith had found in the gutter.

"Poor Albert. First the trouble on the John Jackson, now this."

"What did you see?" asked April gently.

She felt Mary's lips close to her ear. "Promise you won't say that I said this to the doctor? I can't take another ice bath."

"Promise," said April.

Mary whispered into her ear.

"Are you certain?" April wasn't quite sure she actually understood what the woman had told her. She pushed it to the back of her mind.

"Quite. Will you keep your promise?" asked Mary.

April nodded. She reached into a pocket and pulled out the vials Smith had given her. "I need you to do me a favor. Do you remember the smell when you saw it?"

"A horrible smell. I'll never forget it."

"I want you to smell these and tell me if either one reminds you of the scent." April opened the first vial and handed it to the woman.

Mary pulled the vial near her nose. "That's nasty." She handed the vial back.

"Was that it?"

"No. A little but not it. What is that?"

April shook her head. The vial only had a number marking on it. "I don't know. Try this one." She handed the other vial to her.

"Oh good lord! That's it! That horrible smell! That's what it smelled like!"

"Are you certain?" asked April.

"Yes. Like I said, I'd never forget. That's what the serpent smelled like."

Serpent? April didn't know what to make of that. She'd still been holding on to the idea that it was a madman out in the fog preying upon people. Perhaps a mortician or a man driven mad by the chemicals from one of the scores of tanners and processing plants throughout the city. But some kind of animal? Smith's notion of a hunting pattern started to make sense.

April put the vials away in her pocket. Mary leaned in closer to her and started sobbing into her shoulder.

"There, there. My friend and I will get to the bottom of this, and we'll see to it that the doctor lets you go free."

"Put him right, will you?" begged Mary.

"Yes. First I need to get out of here. We'll send someone to collect you." April got up and checked the door. It was securely locked. She pressed her head up against the glass and tried to look down the hallway. She could make out a desk at the far end with a nurse reading under a gas lamp.

"How's you friend going to get you out of here?" asked Mary.

April reached into her pocket and pulled out a small glass cylinder. "He told me to give this a shake and then place it in the window so he could see where I was." April shook the cylinder and it began to glow bright green.

Mary looked at it from the edge of her covers. "That's a clever thing." The cylinder illuminated her features in green light. "But I don't have a window."

April looked up at the bare wall for the first time. "Oh dear." Good thing she'd told her aunt not to wait up.

10

An hour later, April was trying to figure out a way to get out when she heard a key in the lock. April threw the cylinder under her pillow and jumped into her cot. A man's silhouette appeared in the doorway. She pretended to be asleep as he entered. She could hear the sound of a chair being pulled into the room and the door shutting behind him.

"Well, well, Miss Malone. It looks like you've gone adventuring where you shouldn't have," said an unfamiliar voice. "I'm going to enjoy asking you questions about the man you call Smith."

April remained perfectly still.

"What is that odd light coming from your pillow?"

She could hear his footsteps as he walked over to the head of her cot. A hand reached under the pillow and pulled out the glowing cylinder. She opened her eyes and looked up as the man appraised the bright green chemical inside. The man was Dr. Lindestrom, the doctor from the police station.

"A chemical firefly of some kind? Very curious. His talents could be put to such better use." He tucked the cylinder into his pocket and sat back down. "Before we begin a more clinical form of questioning, I'll start off in a more cordial manner."

THREE BLOCKS AWAY, Smith walked out the side door of a warehouse and stepped into the dark street. His lantern could barely pierce more than a few dozen feet. As he turned to lock the door behind him, he heard the sound of a carriage come to a stop.

A deep voice called out to him. "Mr. Smith, we're placing you under arrest."

Smith turned around and saw the outline of two police officers in the fog. He could see two more on the paddy wagon behind them. "Arrest? For what?"

"For the assault of Mr. David Evans. We also have a warrant to search these premises," said a gray-bearded police sergeant to Smith's left.

Smith looked over his shoulder at the building. "You won't find much anything interesting in there." Smith looked to his right as another carriage pulled up. A man in a tattered suit was at the reins of two very emaciated horses. The carriage looked equally old and worn. He could hear flies buzzing around the back. It smelled rotten. "What's that all about?"

The sergeant turned to the other police officer, a brutish-looking man with a sneer. "I don't see nothing. Do you see anything, Dobbins?"

The other man shook his head. "I dunno, Flintwick. I think Mr. Whatever-His-Name is a bit delusional. Seeing things. Hearing voices."

"Plain crackers," said the sergeant. "Just like the doctor said he'd be."

Smith grinned. "Oh, this is brilliant. I get it. I'm supposed to be the maniac. And you clowns are the task force? Very clever. How much are you being paid?"

The sergeant hit his nightstick into his palm. "We can do this the gentle way or the rough way." He pointed to the back of the paddy wagon. "Hand us your keys and step inside."

The brute to Smith's right pulled a gun from his holster. "Lindestrom said we could wound you if we had to but nothing fatal."

"Well that's a relief. I have a low tolerance for pain." He took his umbrella from his elbow and pointed to the fly-ridden carriage. "And who are they? Those can't be the missing people, are they?"

"Witnesses, you might say," said the sergeant.

"I'm guessing there's an empty pauper's graveyard somewhere?"

"You'll know soon enough," the brute said with a chuckle.

"We have very different senses of humor, you and I. Fine, I'll go with you and explain everything to the judge. I'm sure a man of reason like him will understand what's going on here." He set down his lantern. "Let me give you my keys," he said as he passed the umbrella to his other hand.

AN ORDERLY STRAPPED April into a gurney in the middle of an operating room covered with either rust or blood stains on the wall. Leather straps were cinched around her wrists and ankles. She felt her skin chafe. Dr. Lindestrom sat on a stool in the corner just out of the light from the hooded gas lamp on the ceiling.

"Your employer is a very interesting man. I'm sure you must have a thousand questions yourself," said Lindestrom as he gestured for the orderly to leave.

"I mind my own business," said April.

"Do you know how old he is?"

April stared at the ceiling.

"Seventy, maybe eighty. Could be much more. Doesn't look a day over thirty. And how do you suppose that's possible?"

"Why don't you ask him yourself?" April stole a glance at the door. She wanted to know more about Smith but was unwilling to betray what little she knew.

"Oh, plan on it." Lindestrom waved a hand toward the door. "He'll be arriving here soon on a stretcher like yours. I've been waiting for this opportunity for quite a long time. It's very fortuitous how the recent unfortunate events have played out this way. Indeed." He walked over to April and brushed a lock of hair out of her eyes. "Such an attractive thing, youth. What would you give to hold on to it?"

April turned her head away.

"It's a silly question to ask a young person at the height of their beauty. You can't value what you don't appreciate." Lindestrom massaged a knuckle. "It's the little things you notice at first as they stop cooperating. A creaky bone here, a persistent ache there." He sat back down in the shadows.

"People pay a lot to hold on to what you take for granted. Kings and queens have thrown away entire empires in search of something that will help them linger just a little longer." He swept a hand around the operating room. "To be certain, science marches forward. But too slowly for most of us. I may be an unethical man to you, but a hundred years from now I would seem a saint. That's how these things work.

"I used to deliver children once. I loved it. The smell of newborns. Watching life climb into this world. Not like creating a life, like you can in your womb, but it was wonderful to be a part of it. But then .... But then the stillborns and the mothers who couldn't make it that passed away. It got to me. Life became something else. The threads were too thin. I looked for ways to make them stronger. I believe your acquaintance knows. What kind of man keeps a secret like that from the rest of us?"

"I know less than you," said April. "The missing people, is that because of you?"

"An unintended side effect," said Lindestrom. "One we had no reason to expect. It'll pass soon enough and things will go back to boring."

Lindestrom massaged another knuckle. "I understand your aunt isn't feeling well. There are remedies for her condition."

April looked at the man skeptically. She was about to ask how he knew this and then she remembered that David had met her aunt. David was clearly Lindestrom's spy.

"There are other remedies, Miss Malone, the kind doctors aren't aware of. That's my specialty. Unusual treatments. Something might be done for your aunt if you were a bit more cooperative."

"I don't know what you want," said April. "I've only known this man less than a day. I don't know anything about him."

"What do you call a man who doesn't age? What's the name for someone who spends his days deep in a basement?"

"Lucky? Eccentric?" replied April.

"There's another word. One that comes from central Europe," said Lindestrom.

"Oh please. You're madder than anyone else here."

Lindestrom bolted upright and slammed his hand on the metal gurney. "THEN WHAT WOULD YOU CALL HIM!"

April froze. Lindestrom's eyes were filled with anger. His breathing was heavy and his hands gripped the edge of the gurney like talons. He leaned his face in close to hers. She could smell the makeup he had plastered over his skin. His breath was hot and smelled acidic. "Miss Malone, there are a hundred words for it in a hundred different cultures. None of them tell the whole story, I'm sure. There's probably a more scientific, rational explanation than what we would think. But the problem with science is that there are so many questions so much bigger and mysterious than what we understand. And not enough time!"

Lindestrom threw up his hands. "Maybe you don't know anything. Soon enough I'll have the opportunity to go through his precious building and, if need be, take apart his precious body to find out what I need."

"On whose authority?" demanded April.

Lindestrom shot a finger at the ceiling. "On god's authority! On man's authority! On my own!" He grinned at April. "Do you know what happens to the criminally insane in this town? They come under my responsibility." He reached a cold hand under her dress and grabbed her ankle. "The insane and their accomplices." April recoiled as she felt his bony fingers massage the back of her leg.

They both looked at the door when they heard the explosion.

11

The first mistake the police officers had made was not throwing Smith into the back of their police wagon as soon as they saw him. The wiry-looking man didn't seem like a threat, other than the chance that he might talk them to death.

The second mistake was not taking his umbrella from him as soon as they could.

The third mistake was not stopping him when he pretended to pass it from one hand to the other.

While he looked trapped as he stood between the policemen and the wall of the warehouse, his confidence should have told them otherwise.

"Oops," said Smith as the umbrella opened. "Let me fix this." He reached to the thick shaft and gave it a click.

What a clumsy man, thought Flintwick, Dobbins and the two men behind them. The driver of the wagon filled with corpses just picked at his teeth with a rusty nail he'd found on the ground.

"There we go," said Smith as he looked at the men. "What's this?" He looked down at the lantern he'd set by his feet. He nudged it forward. His body receded into the shadows. "Whoops!" said Smith as he kicked the lantern at Dobbins.

Flintwick ran toward Smith and got a face full of smoke and fire. "Damn it!" he screamed as he ran away, trying to put out the fire on his mustache.

Dobbins fired his gun into the smoke and shadows. After he stopped firing, the other policemen ran to encircle the front of the warehouse. They waved their billy clubs in front of their lanterns as they searched through the smoke and fog trying to find any trace of Smith.

Dobbins reached the door. It was still firmly closed. Flintwick, mustache singed but no longer ablaze, walked back.

"I don't think he went in there," said Dobbins.

"Kick it in!" screamed Flintwick.

Dobbins fired at the lock and then shoved open the door with his foot. The four men entered with their lanterns. Although it was pitch black in the shadows, it was hard to ignore the fact that in the lantern light the warehouse appeared to be completely empty.

"Look for another exit!" commanded Flintwick as he rubbed his face.

"I don't think ...."

"Now," he screamed as he smacked Dobbins on the ear.

THE ORDERLY OUTSIDE the operating room looked up from staring at the floor when he heard the explosion. In his mind, he was fantasizing about having the chance to pay special attention to the attractive young woman Dr. Lindestrom was with.

He turned his head and saw a cloud of black smoke rolling through the hallway. A strange amplified voice called out from the other end of the floor. "Where is she?"

Thompson stood there for a moment, unsure what to do. He was too frightened to move. Behind him he heard the door open as Lindestrom peeked out.

"What's going on?" he shouted.

Thompson walked to the corner and peered around. Two red eyes were visible in the smoke. He could hear footsteps in the smoke and the sound of doors crashing open. The strange voice called out again. There were shouts and screams from the rooms on the secured floor as the voice grew closer.

"Go find out, you fool," screamed Lindestrom from the other end of the ward.

Thompson grabbed a lantern and ran into the black smoke. He saw the red eyes emerge from a room. He could vaguely see the shape of a large man.

Thompson set the lantern down and unlocked a cabinet to his left where the fire ax was kept. He pulled it free and ran toward the shape. The red eyes turned on him. He brought the ax down on the figure. Its left hand punched the handle and it splintered apart. The ax head made a clang as it hit the figure's shoulder and fell to the floor. Thompson reached out to grab the shape. There was a bright flash of light and then Thompson found himself on the ground. His muscles couldn't move. The two red eyes were inches away from him.

"Where is she?" shouted the figure.

Thompson was speechless from fright.

The figure placed a hand on his chest. Thompson felt an intense pain.

"WHERE IS SHE?" demanded the voice.

"Down the hall! Operating room!" said Thompson as he wet himself.

The figure pushed him flat to the ground and walked toward the operating room.

April looked at the door as Lindestrom ran out of the room. He turned toward her before he left, the blood gone from his face. "This isn't the end of it!" He locked the door behind him.

April pulled at the restraints on her wrists. She tried to get a hand free, but it was too tight. She could hear footsteps approach as black smoke

seeped in under the crack between the door and the floor.

The steps reached the door. She could see two red glowing eyes through the small window. Suddenly, the door flew away from the frame and there was a large silhouette of a man in the doorway. His large eyes glowed bright red. They turned toward her.

April let out a scream.

The figure walked into the room, the black cloud of smoke following him inside. He reached the edge of the gurney. Gloved hands reached out and ripped open the straps holding her down.

"Are you OK?" he asked.

The voice was familiar.

"Smith?" said April as she tried to see the figure in the smoke.

"Who else?" He helped her off the gurney.

"What are you?" The glowing red eyes, the dark cloud of smoke, the door ripping off its hinges, something Lindestrom said was beginning to nag at the back of her mind. For the first time she was afraid of Smith.

"I'm very upset right now. We need to get out of here." He pulled her into the hallway.

There was smoke everywhere. April couldn't see past her nose. She could hear shouting and footsteps and orderlies and nurses trying to get patients back into rooms.

"Take my hand," said Smith. "Um, no, better take the other one. It's the safe one."

Smith walked down the hallway with April holding his left hand. She couldn't see anything other than the red glow his eyes made in the smoke. Heavy footsteps ran toward them, most likely an orderly. There was a flash of light and she saw the outline of Smith touching his hand to the man's chest before she heard a thud on the floor.

Smith guided her around the body. Patients and nurses walked past as they clung to the walls to avoid the smoke and frightening red eyes. Finally,

they reached the stairwell at the end of the ward. April heard the sound of the door crashing as Smith reached out toward it.

He pulled her up the stairs.

"Up?" She couldn't tell what he was or how he was doing the things he was doing. She just followed along closely.

"Yes," said Smith. "It's the fastest way. I'd call that 'Bedlam' back in there, but that'd be rather redundant."

He helped her up the stairs in the darkness. They reached the landing that led out to the roof. Smith touched the door and it flew off its hinges like the others.

They stepped onto the roof, and Smith pulled an umbrella from his side. "Hold on to me, Miss Malone."

She stood there, confused. She still couldn't get a clear view of his face or body. "I don't understand."

His left arm pulled her into his chest as his right hand opened the umbrella and held it over their heads. "I'll explain everything. Just please, hold on to me."

April wrapped an arm over his shoulder. She could feel some kind of leather and metal armor plating. There was a loud pop as flames shot out of the open umbrella from five points. Sparks and smoke cascaded around them as they were lifted off the ground.

She looked down and saw the roof grow smaller. They were flying. April thought for a moment that she was dreaming.

"Just another few seconds! Want to get some distance!" hollered Smith.

Too terrified to say anything, April clung to Smith and looked at the buildings below. The fog made the streets look like canals. She could see gaslights and carriages move about beneath them. In the distance she heard the sound of the fire wagon bell as its horse team pulled it toward the hospital. Police whistles and klaxons sounded in the distance.

The umbrella began to sputter black smoke.

"Don't worry. Almost there, Miss Malone," shouted Smith.

They began to descend to a rooftop. April noticed that there were four tall sides to it forming a large facade that hid the actual roof from view.

"Bend your knees," said Smith.

They landed a little fast. Smith held on to April to keep her from falling over. He used both hands to turn a knob on the umbrella. He set it aside.

April pulled away from Smith. He was adjusting various switches on his suit. The black smoke faded away. He pressed another button and the red eyes went dark. He undid the neck strap and pulled the helmet free. He gave her a broad grin. "Well, that was exciting!"

April resisted the urge to slap him. "What is this all about?" she demanded. "For a moment I thought you were ... you were ...."

"What, Miss Malone?"

"Never mind," she said as she looked at the leather and plate-metal armor he was wearing. He looked like a combination of a deep-sea diver and a medieval knight. There were brass metal loops on the shoulders that led to some sort of battery pack on his back. The umbrella by his side was still smoking.

She was still taking in his gadgets when Smith pulled her to the exit on the roof.

12

Smith led April down a flight of stairs to a large attic. He turned a switch on the wall and an electric filament lit up the room.

"What is this?" said April as she looked around in the shadows. Crates and trunks were everywhere filled with clothing, machines and various gadgets. Some of them looked weather beaten and faded.

"A safe house of sorts." Smith walked over to a brass-lined trunk and opened the latches. He pulled out a large black coat and threw it over the armor. "You can stay here until tomorrow. I'll get word to your aunt that you're all right."

"Where are you going?" asked April, her eyes still probing the dark recesses of the attic. It seemed to go and on, filled with trunks and strange metal objects.

"Down to the seaside." He pointed to her pocket. "She picked the one marked '2,' didn't she?"

April looked down. "The vial. Yes. What is it?"

"No. 1 was embalmer's fluid. I thought perhaps we had some ghouls roaming the streets picking up people for nefarious purposes."

"What convinced you otherwise?" asked April.

"The map you made, for one, and the fact that the resident ghoul has a surplus of dead bodies. So many that they were willing to spare a few to shove into my basement to make me out to be the maniac."

April put her hand to her mouth. "My word. Dr. Lindestrom?"

"He's part of it, but he's certainly not all of it."

"Miss O'Mallory said she saw a serpent. How could that be?" she asked.

Smith leaned against a trunk. His armor suit made a clanging sound as it hit the metal edge. "I think she may have seen part of something. Maybe serpent, but I think there's more to it. That vial contains a substance not exclusive to a particular animal but definitely of the sea." Smith looked down at a light on his suit. "The charge is running a bit low."

Wanting to take her mind off sea serpents, April walked over to take a closer look. "How does it work?"

Smith held up his right glove. There was a large wedge-shaped piece of metal that stuck out an inch past the top of his hand. "That's a spring-loaded piston with about 2,000 pounds of pressure. An electric motor pulls it back into position and rewinds the spring. A pneumatic would be faster but would take up more space." He turned over his hand and showed the palm of the glove. There were several copper studs. "This is what delivers the current. It's set at 10,000 volts -- enough to knock a man down."

"I saw," said April, thinking of the orderly she saw illuminated by the flash.

Smith picked up the umbrella at his side and handed it to her. "There's enough rocket powder in there for another launch for one person, maybe."

It felt heavier than it looked to April. She noticed a brass cylinder just above the handle.

"You turn that to start it and to give it more fuel."

April reached to touch it.

"Not in here, Miss Malone." He hung the umbrella on a clip at his side and then rummaged through another trunk until he found a bag for the

helmet.

"Who is he? Dr. Lindestrom?" asked April.

Smith looked up from the trunk where he was sorting through different gadgets. "He's an apothecary. Actually, a member of a group of them who call themselves the 'White Apothecarians'. I assure you there's nothing 'white' about their deeds. They sell fake remedies and cure-alls in search of the real thing for their own purposes and their wealthy clients. They'll do some unspeakable things to get what they want."

April sat down on the edge of a trunk. "What kind of unspeakable things?"

Smith threw the bag with the helmet over his shoulder. He put two hands on either of her shoulders. "Ghoulish things, Miss Malone. Ghoulish things to a young woman like you. Or a man like me." He let go of her shoulders and walked over to a window.

"Lindestrom said he'd like to dissect you," she said.

"I'll bet he would. He thinks I'm some kind of supernatural creature. He's in for a disappointment."

Questions boiled in April's mind. "What are you? What are you really?"

"I'm just a man with too little time, Miss Malone. Sometimes a clever man but not clever enough. There are a few of us who try to set things right in whatever small way we can. Each of us in our own way." He looked through the window into the street outside and then checked his watches.

"What's out there?"

"A creature that doesn't belong here. Something the fool Lindestrom and his cohorts brought back from god knows where. I'm going down to the wharf to ask. I think one of the men on the John Jackson, the late Mr. Carnegie's whaling ship, might know."

April got off the trunk she was sitting on and started looking through it for something to wear. "I'm going with you."

"You most certainly are not, Miss Malone. You're staying here. I'd take you home now, but I'm afraid Lindestrom might send one of his goons by for you. This doesn't involve you."

"It most certainly does," she said, parodying his tone. "When they sent that fool David to my drama class, they crossed a line. Now help me find some trousers and give me some privacy for a moment."

Smith looked at her piercing blue eyes. They didn't waver. Her small full lips were pursed in determination.

"All right. If I've learned one thing, there's nothing to be gained in the long run from arguing with a woman." Smith opened up a trunk at the far end of the attic. "There are some mountaineering trousers and a jacket in there." He looked at her for a moment. "I don't think they'll hide your curves very well, though. No matter, we'll throw a jacket and hat on you."

Smith walked toward a flight of stairs that led to the building below.

"Where are you going? You're not running off, are you?" she called out, eyeing the dark attic.

He poked his head up from the stairwell. "And miss your company, Miss Malone, not a chance. I have a modified velocipede below we can use. My alternate means of egress from here may not be safe."

"I think you mean 'bicycle', Smith."

Smith placed a hand on the floorboards and thought for a moment. "No. I think it's a modified velocipede. Or a moto-cycle as my machinist called it. Either way, it's faster than walking and should keep us out of reach of the creature."

13

April held tightly to Smith as he raced the moto-cycle through the streets of Boston. A red light on the front of the contraption penetrated the fog several yards, giving them some warning when they were about to run into people, horses, carriages and, in one instance, a very lost-looking cow. Fortunately for the residents of Boston, the streets were mostly deserted by that hour. The fog and the rumors of the monster or maniac in the mist had compelled people to stay indoors, saving them from one more untimely fate.

"It's rather fast," shouted April over the sputtering of the motor as Smith barely dodged a street lamp.

"Yes! Wonderful isn't it!"

Frightening was the word April was thinking as Smith drove up onto a curb and on the sidewalk to avoid a parked carriage.

"One day we'll all ride these!"

"Good lord, I hope not!" said April.

"What was that?" asked Smith, trying to keep his eyes on the foggy road in front of them.

"I said, good lord, I hope so!" April lied. She didn't want to make him regret taking her.

In the attic, he'd shown her how to use a few of the gadgets and gave her the umbrella to hold on to. He explained that it would lower her to the ground before it ran out of fuel. Probably. Most likely. He then insisted she not actually use it.

They neared the South Boston wharf. Smith slowed the moto-cycle down and steered into an alley. He helped April off and then covered it with a tarp he removed from under the seat. April thought the fog in the alley so thick, the tarp seemed hardly necessary.

"Let's find the first saloon and ask the barkeep if he can steer us in the right direction." He swiveled April so she was facing him.

He bit his lip as he examined her. The thick peacoat helped hide her feminine curves. While the hat concealed her long hair, wiping off her makeup did little to hide her striking looks. "You're a bit tall to be called 'boy' but I doubt anyone here will care, Miss Malone."

"April."

"Pardon me?" said Smith.

"April can be a last name. I was named for an uncle on my mother's side who was a Capt. April. You can call me April if you like."

"Fair enough, Miss Malone. I'll call you April. This way, if you please."

The wharf was one of several piers in South Boston harbor. The masts of ships poked out from the fog, backlit by the moon. Deck bells rang in the distance and the sound of creaking boards and ropes being stretched taut could be heard from everywhere. April looked out toward the water. The glow of lanterns could be seen on dozens of ships. Along the pier, gas lamps formed the outline of buildings.

Voices of men could be heard from all over. Dogs barked and horses pulled cargo along the wooden boards of the pier, their hoofs making knocking sounds as they trotted along. Even at this hour she could see the pier was still active as ships were being loaded and unloaded.

She wrinkled her nose. Besides the smell of the ocean, there was the rot of dead fish, coal smoke and the stench of whaling vessels rendering whale fat nonstop. She smelled a black smoker or two in the distance.

The first saloon they entered was called the Blue Turtle. A piano could be heard playing from outside. April noticed Smith resisted the urge to hold the door open for her and just walked in first.

Inside were six tables and a bar. Only two of the tables were occupied. Both had men who looked half asleep as they stared into their glasses. The bartender was pouring a shot for a man who looked like a clerk. This close to the town, April assumed some of the clients wouldn't be sailors.

Smith walked over to the bar while April waited at the door.

"What have you?" asked the leather-faced man.

"I'm looking for some crewmates of ours. From the John Jackson. You know where I might find them?"

The bartender looked over at a spot near the piano and then back at Smith. "Lots of people been asking about them lately." He scrutinized Smith. "You a whaler?"

"I am what pays me. When you say people have been asking, what do you mean?"

"I mean people is all. Been rather slow and all with the fog. What'll you have?"

Smith fished a fifty-cent piece from his pocket and set it on the counter. "Would two of those people have been a man with a gray mustache and a real brutish fellow? Maybe call themselves Flintwick and Dobbins?"

The bartender slipped the coin into his apron. He looked over at April trying to blend into the corner. "Friends of you two?"

April did her best to act mannish, which consisted of remaining stoically still and avoiding putting a hand to her hip.

Smith shook his head. "Most certainly not. I'd rather not make their acquaintance again."

The bartender leaned over the counter and whispered. "They're coppers, you know."

"I'd heard."

"Then if you want to avoid them, I'd avoid the Seawitch down the pier. That's where they're heading. Looking for some of the other folks from the John Jackson."

"Oh really? What for?"

"I think they're trying to recruit them for some nasty work. One of them said something about cleaning up a mess."

Smith thought about that for a moment. Literally or metaphorically, that could mean bad news for the men from the John Jackson. "Thank you. We'll catch up with our friends another time." He nodded to April and they left.

"What was that about?" asked April outside. She'd only gotten bits and pieces of the conversation.

"Lindestrom's men are trying to round up the remaining crew members of the John Jackson."

"What for?"

"Either to get rid of witnesses or to send them on a fool's errand that'll have the same effect."

They walked farther up the pier until they saw the sign for the Seawitch. The outside of the bar was covered in netting, crates and other ship junk. Men were walking in and out of it. To April, it sounded like a full house. As the door opened, Smith caught a glimpse of Flintwick standing in front of the bar.

"This way," he said as he pulled April into an alley behind the bar.

"Where are we going?" she asked, her eyes nervously looking around the dark corridor. She could smell unpleasant things back there.

"Looking for rats leaving the ship," said Smith as he threaded them between several crates. They came to the back of the bar where several barrels were stacked next to boxes filled with empty bottles.

April jumped when she heard a bottle clink in the shadows.

"We'd like to talk to you for a moment," said Smith in a hushed tone. "We're not with the two apes inside there."

There was silence from the direction of the clink. April tried to make out a shape in the shadow. She could smell a strong odor of alcohol and sweat.

"I'll pay you for information," said Smith.

Nothing stirred.

April had an idea. She reached into her pocket and handed Smith a glass cylinder.

"Good idea." Smith shook it and tossed it into the shadows.

The green light illuminated the puffy weathered face of a man cowering in the corner between the wall and crate. He looked down at the light, frightened. He held up his hands.

"Please don't take me. For the love of god, not me."

"We're not going to take you anywhere," said Smith.

The man looked at the back door of the saloon.

"Don't worry, if those two goons come through that door, my mate, Mad Dog Capt. April will pop them where they stand."

"Yargh," muttered April, still trying to stand in a manly manner.

Smith turned to look at her. "Revenge on the account of what they did to his tongue." He looked back at the man. "We need to know what happened on the John Jackson."

The man lowered his hands. "Why are you asking?"

"Because we have to stop it before it takes anyone else. That's why."

The man stood up and sat on a crate. "That's what those fools are telling us we have to do. But I don't trust them. I think they'd sooner put us face down in a ditch than pay us. We know it's their bosses' fault for that abomination. It's a curse. No money is worth it."

Smith sat down on a crate opposite the man. April took a seat next to him.

"Tell us what happened," said Smith.

The man looked from Smith to April and then over his shoulder. He knew they weren't going to leave until they'd heard his story.

14

"They said it was an oceanographic mission. Like the kind that the university does," said the man named Broderick. The light from the green vial cast sinister shadows on his face. He shot a glance over his shoulder. "Only this wasn't a scientific mission. When Mr. Reece stepped foot on the ship, we knew he was up to no good."

"Mr. Reece? I don't believe I know him," said Smith.

"Tall fellow, blond hair. Looks like he might be Norwegian or Dutch. He works for a doctor in town. He was the one that charted the expedition. We were to sail far north of the usual fishery and find a sperm whale. Not as much call for them nowadays. But it wasn't for the whale. They wanted to use it to catch something else.

"Two weeks in we found a young sperm bull. Maybe forty feet. Took us two days to harpoon it, kill it and get it behind the boat. That's when Mr. Reece tells our captain to head dead north. Close to the Arctic as we can. Way out of range from the sperms that time of year.

"Dragging that whale, we head full speed north. Sharks, some whites when it got too cold for the bulls, would come along and pick at it. We'd take turns in the crow's nest shooting at them with the rifle.

"You'd see a fin poke out of the water and a white get close as it saddled up to the sperm to have a nibble. Pop, we'd go with the rifle. Shot one square in the eye and watched it hang loose like a black grape. It thrashed its tail and swam off like an angry pirate.

"It was fun sport until it got real cold. Fewer whites came along to pick at it. The sperm was still mostly there. Its fins had been chewed when we couldn't snipe at night.

"We'd ask Mr. Reece what all the bother was about. Not much sport after a while in shooting at whites. He said that wasn't the point. He and his society, as he called it, were interested in what would come after the whites, when we got real far north.

"He had us sail in a wide circle for a week. Chumming the whole ocean with the body of the sperm. It seemed like nonsense to us, but it was easier work then actual whaling if you didn't mind the cold.

"On the eighth night of going in circles, it comes. We sees what Mr. Reece has sent us out for. I was below deck when I heard Jameson call out. I run up there and see what he's looking at in the moonlight.

"It had two glowing eyes like your little bottle there. Only these are orange. Orange like a flame. Its beak was nibbling on the sperm. Taking big chunks. Mr. Reece comes to the deck and orders us to harpoon it with the powered gun. He says that's what we're after."

"Architeuthis teuthoidea," said Smith. "A giant squid."

Broderick shook his head. "No. That's the thing. Some of us have seen those in the nets trying to take our catches in the middle of the night. This was different."

"Different how?" asked Smith.

"Like a man to a monkey. This monster sat out there, its tentacles pulling away pieces of the sperm, feeding it into its mouth. Those eyes, they watched us as we ran on deck. It knew what we were up to. Jameson ran over to the harpoon and swiveled it over to the thing. He leveled it at it,

pulled back the bolt. We all looked out at the beast waiting to see the harpoon go through it, snaring it. We waited and nothing. We shouted at Jameson to fire. Nothing. I turned to look at him to yell at the bastard and he's not there.

"We ran over to the railing. Nothing. No Jameson. Never to be seen again. Another man, Kennedy, he goes over to the harpoon. Only some of us keep an eye on him as he checks the bolt and brings it to bear on the thing.

"He's ready to fire when we hear a shout behind us. We turn around and there's no one there. Later on we realized it was Saunders that time. We hear a splash. No more Kennedy.

"That's when we realize it. While we're watching the beast out there feed on the sperm, it's mate is under the John Jackson. It's under our keel feeding on us."

Smith felt April's hand grab his arm through the leather armor.

"Two of them?" said Smith. "Hunting together?"

"Like a pair. Only these two aren't just hunting together, they're smart. Real smart. They know what a harpoon gun does. That's why they'd take the man off it whenever he got close. As soon as one of us would get near, a tentacle as thick as a man's body would rise out of the water and pull away whatever fool got close.

"The captain shouted at Reece to let us cut off the sperm and sail out. He'd have none of it. He told us to lash ourselves to the deck and finish what we were paid to do. He had a nasty temper. He yelled at us for taking the money when all we had to do was take pot shots at the whites. Told us if we didn't get the beast, we weren't going to get paid.

"Then he got wise and took the smart approach. He offered a hundred dollars to the man who harpooned the one on the sperm. We all have a price. I tied a thick anchor rope and say I'll give it a shot. It was so cold I

could barely tie the knot. Cold rain was splashing in my eyes. But a hundred dollars was a hundred dollars.

"I get two of my mates, Carnegie and Matheson, to tie off the rope to the mast and to hold to it themselves. I walk over the sloshy deck and grab hold of the handle on the harpoon. Matheson lets go and goes to the bow so he can peer over and tell me when it's coming. I aim the harpoon at the beast out there on the sperm. Matheson lets out a scream. I don't bother to look. I throw myself to the deck and hear a whip go past my ear.

"Carnegie starts pulling on the rope. I slide across the deck on my belly. I feel something strike my leg and I let out a howl. Carnegie tries to pull me but I can't move. I look down expecting to see the tentacle wrapped around my leg but it's gone. Two other men help Carnegie pull. I scream as I feel my skin rip. That's when I notice I'm pinned to the deck with this."

Broderick pulled a large curved amber claw from his pocket and held it up in the green light. It was nearly the size of his hand. "Some men say you can tell the size of them things by the size of the claw they have. Maybe so. These things may not be the biggest creature swimming in the ocean, but they're the meanest and the cleverest.

"But it was Mr. Reece who figured out how to get the one on the sperm. Cruel man. He talks us into lashing a 'volunteer' to the harpoon. He goes below deck and gets Old Webb. He's so soused half the time he can't piss straight let alone fire a harpoon. Reece gets the man good and drunk and convinces him to get behind the harpoon. Webb thinks it's a joke. Like a child he was. He's cackling that stupid laugh of his. Mop of hair hanging down in his eyes. Toothless grin. Reece is just carrying on laughing with him, pouring brandy into him as two other fools tie ropes around his wrists. Like executioners.

"They carry him over to the harpoon and tie his wrists to it. Webb looks over at us with his dumb face and laughs his hoarse laugh. We smile at him. Tell him he can do it, too ashamed to tell him what his real job is.

"I was sitting middeck holding my loosed skin, tying a rag around the leg, but I knew. I was no better. I was part of it.

"We all look over at Webb as he smiles at us. We see it behind him. Reece gives us a stern look, telling us to shut up. He looks over at Webb and cheers him on. The poor fool had been below deck and didn't know what we'd already seen. Dumb when he was sober, stupid when he was drunk. He'd always been the butt of our jokes. Always eager to please. We once tripped him down a ladder. We laughed and laughed. His leg broke funny and he almost died of infection. We kept him drunk. All he did was laugh when we got him soused. Then cry to himself at night when the pain got too much to bear. No family, we were all he had in the world. And this'n how we treat him."

Reece pushed the edge of his sleeve into the corner of his eye. "I watched and saw. Webb swung the tip of the harpoon around. His hands bound to it. The thing comes up behind him and Webb sees our faces. He doesn't know what's going on. But he knows something is wrong. He stops his damn cackle and the tentacle lashes onto his back. Webb let out a scream.

"He doesn't turn to look at the tentacle. He just looks at us. Waiting for us to explain the joke like when he laid there crumpled at the bottom of the ladder after we'd pushed him. Leg twisted, white pain so strong he couldn't understand. He just looks at us like a dumb pup trying to understand.

"Out there strapped to the harpoon, the tentacle pulls on him trying to take him away. He let's out another scream. Still staring at us, not at the thing that has him. The tentacle pulls again and he starts crying. Not understanding. He shouts out names asking for help. None of us do.

"Finally he turns his head and looks behind him. He sees the devil's tentacle arched from his back going into the sea. He probably sees the glowing eyes under the boat. He lets out a shrill scream as the tentacle rips

free. Bits of skin and muscle are stripped from his back. The tentacle slips out of sight.

"A man grabs a knife and heads over to cut him free. Reece strikes him down with his bare fist and yells at him to stand still. Webb keeps crying out. Blood is seeping out of his back as he hangs from the harpoon gun by his wrists. His knees on the deck like he's saying a prayer.

"He cries like that for a minute that felt like an hour. Then we see the tentacle snap back on the deck and grab him around the waist. It starts yanking him in the air like a dog on a bone. The creature is angry, frustrated. Trying to get him free of the harpoon before it fires. Only it doesn't realize that Webb was never meant to fire it.

"The beast pulls and yanks. We can hear bones popping out of joints. The knots, good seamen knots, they ain't going to give. The harpoon gun itself starts pulling at its plating. It'd dragged hundred-ton beasts, and it's straining under the force.

"Webb is pulled sideways. His white face toward us, he lets out another scream, only it's silenced by his own sick coming out of his mouth. All that brandy we'd fed him comes pouring onto the deck and pooling with his blood, splashing toward us. The beast keeps pulling. Webb can't even scream anymore. There's no more air in his lungs. He just looks at us with white eyes. He drowns on his own sick as the tentacle squeezes.

"That's when we hear the sound of the backup harpoon gun pop. The one we'd kept below deck and used poor Webb to stall while we'd set it up. The harpoon shot right through the other beast as it kept carving up the sperm. It was Johnson who'd fired it. Right through the creature's beak as it scooped in handfuls of flesh into its maw. The harpoon went through its gullet and probably through whatever it had for a brain. Its tentacles flailed around for a minute and then it went limp.

"We heard a snap and saw as the other beast ripped Webb apart. His guts and blood flew across the deck as the tentacle shot beneath the waves

with the lower half of his body. The upper half hung from the harpoon gun, intestines unspooling onto the deck. We'd thought he'd drowned on his sick when the thing had him in a vise. But he'd been too drunk or stupid to know to die then.

"We looked away from the thing on the sperm and saw as Webb looked down at his body then back at us. His face was as white as the sperm. The blood and life draining from him. He looked right at me and the others and grinned. He let out a loud cackle. He got the joke. The joke was on us. The nightmare had only just begun."

Broderick looked at the back door of the saloon. "It followed us. We lost five more men on the decks as we raced back here. We kept thinking it would turn around and leave us. After we pulled the beast on deck, we cut loose the sperm. We thought it'd go after that instead.

"We didn't know at first that it had been following us. We laid the beast we harpooned on the deck and Reece took it apart like a butcher. Eyes, beak, tentacles, all packed away on ice below.

"It wasn't the largest one we'd ever heard of, but it was the broadest and maybe heaviest specimen any man could recall. Like I said, it was to other squid what man was to a monkey. Either a better version made by god, or the devil. The way it thought was what unnerved us.

"Three days after we'd cleaned the last of Webb off the deck, Malloy went missing in the night. An accident we thought, then Kendricks went missing next. We figured out what was up.

"Johnson, the man who shot the mate, was too scared to go on decks, but captain ordered him to. He got taken as well. But not before Reece. The bastard got his. He thought he was more clever than the beast. But he wasn't. He didn't realize what the difference was. He only got the one creature because he was willing to let a man die to do it. There's no genius in making another man die in your place. It's what animals do. Only these creatures thought smarter than animals.

"Reece had called the captain and a few others down into the hull where he'd kept the parts. He wanted to show us something special. There was a foul mood on the ship and he wanted us to understand. He reaches into a barrel of ice and pulls out something with his hands. He proudly tells us no other man had ever seen these before. We were the first and we should feel privileged. The captain just turned on his heels and walked away disgusted with the man and himself. The other men crane in to look. I catch a glance.

"At first I think it's one of them glowing eyes. Reece reaches in and pulls out several more. Size of grapefruits, they look like giant squishy marbles. Inside something is floating. The stench is horrible but we lean in to get a closer look. Some of the other men run away and climb up the ladder to get away. They see what's inside, tiny little glowing orange eyes. These are pups, or eggs or whatever, floating around inside. Tiny versions of their parents and they're still alive.

"Soon Reece is all alone admiring what cost almost ten lives at that point. He looks over me and grins. I don't know what to say. All I can think about as I see one of them twitch in his hands from the warmth is that I think I hear something. For sure it's the ice settling. But what it reminds me of is just the same. Goddamn Webb's cackle.

"Reece went missing that night. We were too afraid to touch the cargo. We just headed back to port and go our ways. To some like Carnegie, it's another story to tell at the bar. For me and some others, it's a nightmare that ain't going to let go."

Smith looked at the masts of the ships that poked out through the fog. "Why are you still here, if it's out there hunting you down and anything else it finds?"

"Men been taken on dry land, fool. It's not the beast out there that's after us. It's Webb. He's what's out there in the fog. I'd sooner set foot in the deep ocean than the middle of the street. Little difference."

Smith shook his head. "It's not Webb. I assure you."

April squeezed his arm again. Smith looked over at her. "It should have been obvious to us. Especially me. What did all the locations have in common?"

April nodded to Broderick.

"It's OK lass. I know you have a tongue," he replied.

"Oh my. The sewers. At least on one side of every street," said April. "Good god, it's in the sewers pulling people down in there."

"And that's where it'll have to be killed unless we can drive it out," replied Smith.

15

Smith tried to talk Broderick into helping them, but the drunken sailor wanted none of it. April could tell the old sailor was afraid, but she sensed he wanted to do something, he just didn't know what.

"Can you at least help me find a harpoon gun?" asked Smith.

Broderick looked at him cockeyed. "Are you mad? What good will that do you?"

Smith shook his head. "It worked on the other one."

"It was a one-in-a-million shot, straight through its beak. And that was one that was distracted. This one's a clever one. It ain't going to fall for that trick twice." He kicked the planks beneath his feet. "And down there? Madness."

Smith stood up and poked a finger at his chest. "Then what would you suggest we do? You helped start all this!"

Broderick jerked back and rattled a crate of empty beer bottles behind him. "Don't be blaming me. My score is with Webb."

"Webb is dead. There is no ghost. Just a creature. It's not possessed. It's not haunted. It's not the devil," said Smith.

"What do you know about the devil?" reprimanded Broderick.

Smith reached out a gloved hand and pulled Broderick's face inches away from his own. "More than you'll ever know in your pathetic short life, Mr. Broderick." He pushed him away and turned to April. "Miss Malone."

April followed after Smith as he stormed out of the alley. She glanced back at Broderick. The man shrugged.

Broderick watched them retreat into the fog. He reached down to scratch the itching wound on his leg and then shouted out, "There's a harpoon gun on the John Jackson. Help yourself, there's no one left there to stop you."

SMITH WALKED down the gangplank to the stern of the John Jackson. April waited nervously at the top. She scanned the black water. Every wave and ripple looked like a tentacle rolling across the surface.

Smith shouted back to her. "If you smell ammonium, then you know it's near."

"Are you sure?" She smelled lots of things on the breeze.

"No. I told you to wait in the harbor master's office anyway."

April shook her head and wrapped her hands around a wooden piling. She watched as Smith went below deck. She could see the deck-mounted harpoon gun on a riser near the broad flat stern. There was a small piece of cord still tied around one of the handles. It was hard to see through the mist, but the rope had an almost black sheen to it like dried blood. That was where Webb died, she thought.

The planks of the deck had gouges and stains where whales had been slit open and desiccated. The whole vessel had a dark color from the boilers that rendered the whale fat. They sat silent now. The smokestacks looked like black pillars, in her mind.

She tried to imagine what this vessel must have looked like to a sea creature as it plowed its way through the waves, rumbling with its boilers

and sending up trails of black smoke that ran for miles. The shouting men, the bells, the sharp harpoons, it must have looked like a fearsome creature itself. A wave splashed against the side of the boat and it rocked gently, startling her for a moment.

What kind of animal would go against this beast of a machine? She'd heard the stories of angry whales taking them on and sending them to the sea. To her mind, that was more like an angry bull smashing something apart that was in its way. But a creature that would follow and hunt the men on this vessel for hundreds of miles? She turned to look at the pale yellow lights of South Boston behind her. To find its way there? Under the city itself?

April's supernatural inclinations didn't extend very far beyond the church steps, but she had rational fears of the unknown. As she waited for the mysterious Smith to return, she wasn't sure what was rational or irrational anymore. If a man could live as long as he has and look like he does, along with all his other secrets, maybe the devil could send a creature to do its bidding, to seek out revenge and to terrorize those around it.

Another wave splashed on the side of the John Jackson. April smelled the air. The only scent that stood out was the smell of salt and dead fish. She let go of the piling and tucked a lock of hair back under her cap. The disguise didn't have much purpose now, but she was always mindful of her appearance, even when she was dressed like a boy in a secondhand pair of trousers and peacoat.

"What are you doing out here, Miss Malone?" she said to herself, while listening to Smith's sounds below deck. She knew the answer. She was too smart and too curious for a woman in her time. She'd fantasized about going to Paris or perhaps being a missionary in some far-off land. Neither one had much interest in themselves. It was just the idea of adventure that intrigued her.

She placed the umbrella under her arm and shoved a hand into a pocket and felt a coin. She pulled it out and looked at it. Napoleon's face stared back at her. So many questions. The boat rocked again and pulled at the ropes tethering it to the pier.

April noticed as something splashed in the water. She was certain it was a fish, but her mind kept playing tricks on her. She tried to take a nose full of air but the cold wind was making her sinuses shut.

She gazed down the pier to the harbor master's office. There was a dull light from the gas lamp in the window. It was 300 hundred yards away. So far away. There was another splash. April looked at the waterline on the boat. The vessel was so dark, it was hard to tell where it ended and the sea began.

She heard a loud sound and had to stifle a scream. At the stern of the boat, Smith had just dropped the harpoon gun as he climbed up the ladder from below deck.

"You OK, Miss Malone?" he said as he heaved the heavy gun over his shoulder.

"Yes. Fine. Just admiring the night air," she replied. She shot a glance back to the waterline. Nothing stirred.

Smith walked up the gangway with the gun over his shoulder. With the pointed shaft in its barrel, it was as tall as he was. To April, it looked like a rifle made for a giant.

"Nice gun," she said.

Smith reached the pier and set the butt end of it down. He looked it over. "I guess so. Not too much corrosion. I hope the charge fires." He looked at April. "Looks like I get one shot."

She reached a hand up to touch the sharp tip of the harpoon. "What happens if you miss?"

Smith bit his lip. "That would be bad." He reached down to pick up the gun.

April grasped the barrel and held it in place. Smith looked up at her, confused. "What happens if you miss?" she repeated, worried.

Smith shook his head. "I run. I swim." He tapped the metal plate of his armor with his chest. It made a clang. "I've got this on, too. Don't forget."

April let go of the gun. Smith threw it over his shoulder.

"What do these things normally eat?" asked April.

"Whales, sharks, other squid, I suppose," said Smith as they walked back down the pier.

"Are they like an octopus?"

"Superficially, maybe. We don't know much about them, let alone this one," replied Smith. "I trust your memory on this better than mine."

"Could they eat things like an octopus would? Lobsters and clams, shellfish?"

Smith thought for a moment. "Sure. Its tentacles are probably strong enough to pry them apart."

April tapped the metal armor on his back. "Big shellfish, Smith?"

Smith stopped and turned. "Miss Malone, what are we supposed to do?"

"Not get killed, for a start."

"As you are aware, I'm very keen, you could say an expert, on not getting killed. We can't go to the police or anybody else until we have some sort of proof of what's going on. Right now you and I are fugitives because Dr. Lindestrom has convinced them I'm some kind of killer maniac. We don't have many options."

April shook her head. "More than you want to see right now. The lawyer, the lawyer that hired me, Mr. Coen, he could get the warrant straightened out tonight if you wanted."

"Barring them finding any bodies in my basement," said Smith.

"Are there any bodies in your basement?" April took a step back.

"None that aren't supposed to be there," he snapped.

April decided not to push that issue any further.

"Mr. Coen is an excellent attorney, but I don't think filing a lawsuit against a kraken is going to help. I doubt he'll show in court," continued Smith. "That's the real problem."

"My brother knows people over at MIT. We could get an expert tonight. Someone who could verify what we know," said April.

"Verify what? That drunk sea dog's guilt-ridden story? We have nothing other than stories and innuendos."

"You're impossible, Mr. Smith!" shouted April.

"Smith. Just Smith."

"Whatever. Use your elliptical problem solving to come up with a better solution then your one-shot harpoon," said April. She admired the man's bravery but was frustrated by his stubbornness.

Smith shrugged. "You're the computer."

"Fine." April thought for a moment. "If it's living down there, that means it's feeding down there, too. It has to take the people somewhere, unless it's dumping the bodies out at sea." April looked out at the fog-covered harbor. "But the bodies would be washing up on shore. And they haven't. So that means it's leaving the bodies in the sewers, either sporadically around or in a nest." She remembered something. "They're pelagic creatures most likely, not living on the floor, so that means that they're not likely to nest. So that means it probably leaves its prey near its hunting ground after it feeds."

"The bodies could be anywhere," said Smith.

April turned off to the side as she recalled the map of the missing persons in her mind. "Accepting the distribution on the map, there should be a body within a four- or five-block area of each vanishing point. Far enough away that if anyone poked their head in the sewers to look, they probably wouldn't have seen anything. Close enough that you shouldn't have to spend too much time down there to find one."

"So now you're sending me down there?" asked Smith.

"If we can get a body ...." April shuddered and put the thought out of her mind. "Whatever is left after the squid is done, then I'd imagine a marine biologist could tell the difference between what a squid would do and what a man would."

"Fine. But I'm still bringing the harpoon gun," said Smith.

"But you're only going down there to get a body."

"Sure," agreed Smith.

"Meanwhile, I'm going to contact Mr. Coen and find someone at MIT to meet us at the police station. That's if you won't reconsider your stupid expedition."

"You can use the telephone in the office. Coen has one at his home as well. He and his firm are paid well enough to be bothered at this hour."

"There's been a telephone in there all this time?" asked April.

Smith looked down at his watches. "Yes, but there are still too few people around to talk to on the device that they're not much use."

"Maybe in a hundred years," said April.

16

Smith and April rode the moto-cycle through the fog to a small warehouse two blocks away from the office.

"What are we doing here?" asked April, eyeing the decrepit-looking buildings.

"I don't think it's safe for us to go through the front of the office. I'm sure Lindestrom has more people waiting, maybe even the four police officers I ran into." He opened the door and wheeled the contraption inside.

April followed him, closing the door behind them.

"There's a tunnel here that leads to the basement of the office."

Smith struck a match and lit a lantern. April looked around the interior of the warehouse. The floor was littered with large crates filled with machine parts. Smith walked over to a small wooden closet and opened the door. He reached inside and pulled a lever. The back wall of the cabinet slid backward, revealing a set of stairs.

"This way, Miss Malone." He guided her down the steps, holding the lantern aloft. "Don't worry, I'm fairly certain my tunnels are free of sea creatures."

Tunnels? April hesitantly stepped down the stairs and walked into a narrow corridor. The walls were lined with large rocks. It had an almost

natural look to them. Almost as if they'd always been there.

"Ahead about a hundred yards," said Smith.

April let Smith take the lead. They passed several junctions that led off into dark places. She counted at least a half-dozen metal doors that looked like weather-beaten versions of the one in the office.

Pipes and conduits ran through the corridor, suggesting that the entire block was actually one structure. Behind some of the doors the low rumble of machinery could be heard. She reached out to touch one of the doors. It felt cold.

"What's behind these doors?" she asked.

"Other buildings. Other offices. Other Miss Malones." Smith let out a laugh. "Just kidding. There's only one April Malone, bless her brave spirit." He paused and regarded the doors. "Part of the machinery. A giant clock."

"What kind of clock?" she asked. Her fingers touched rivets on one of the larger doors.

"A clock that tells when it is time for just men to take action."

"Like now?" she asked, not quite understanding what he meant.

"The shape of things is always hard to know, Miss Malone. My elliptical geometry can only tell us small parts. But what we're doing will play some difference. Set things right for now."

They reached a metal door and Smith pulled out another key. He unlocked the door and held it open for April. She looked at the flight of stairs leading up and then back at him.

"This will take you up to the office. I have to go get a few things. Don't worry. I'll be only a few minutes."

"I could help," said April as she looked down another dark corridor.

"I know. Lots of mysteries. The truth is much more boring. In time, maybe I can show you some of the more interesting things."

"Sorry. I don't mean to pry," said April.

"Don't ever apologize for your curiosity, Miss Malone. Never. I'll be up in a bit. You'll find the telephone in the drawer to the left of my desk. I believe you already know where the directory can be found."

April nodded and walked up the steps. Ahead of her, a large metal door began to open. When she stepped through it she realized this was not the same door he'd stepped through that morning. This was the storage room. Curious, she thought.

April called Mr. Coen first. It didn't take her too long to explain the situation. He seemed to be expecting something like that. He made a comment about rousting a senile judge and said he'd be at the police station in an hour.

She next called the operator at MIT and spent twenty minutes trying to get her to find someone in the marine biology department who was still awake and could take the call.

Smith entered from behind the door, holding a large duffle bag. He overheard her talking to the operator. He placed a hand over the mouthpiece of the phone. "Tell her you're Mr. Eddington's assistant and that you're calling on his behalf."

April looked at him, confused.

"He's a very big donor," whispered Smith.

April nodded and then spoke into the telephone. Ten minutes later she managed to reach someone in the aquarium and explained the matter to him. She hung up and looked over at Smith. She'd been too busy talking on the phone to notice what he was up to.

"Oh my," she exclaimed, noticing some kind of weapon strapped to the armor. "What is that on your chest?"

Smith looked down and smiled at his creation. "It's basically a modified Gatling gun with much shorter barrels." He reached up and gave it a spin.

Ten pistol-sized barrels arranged in a circle the size of a tea saucer spun around with a click. "It seemed like a clever idea at the time, when I mounted it to the armor." Smith looked up. "Hurts a lot."

"I'd bet it does. I can't imagine what it'd be like to be on the receiving end of that," said April.

"Actually I meant ... oh, never mind. I think you're right and that I shouldn't go in there with just that." He motioned to the harpoon gun leaning against the door. "To be on the safe side, I was thinking we could flush it to one end of the sewer."

Smith walked over to a drawer and pulled out a rolled-up map. He unfurled it on his desk. "You can see the new sewer works and the older ones on this."

April traced a finger along a line that ran down South Boston.

"I need to know where to put my tunnels and where not to," said Smith. He picked up a pencil and set it on the middle of the map. "Could you mark out all the places people went missing?"

April drew an "X" over the location for every missing person they had an address for. All of them were over major sewer lines.

Smith traced a line with his finger across the middle of the map. "I want to create a distraction to drive it away from here, long enough for me to find some kind of evidence. A body or ...." His voice trailed off.

"A signed confession." April smiled.

"He can use his own ink, at least," said Smith. "Or is that octopuses that have ink?"

"Octopi, Smith. And squid have ink, as well." She looked up. "And nasty parrot beaks and razor tongues they use to devour adventurers." She reached out and gave the Gatling gun a spin. "Please be careful. I'd hate to lose my employer the same day I met him."

"I will be," he said, trying not to make eye contact with her electric blue eyes.

"It would look dreadful on my resume." She saw where he'd drawn the line. "So how do you plan on creating the distraction?"

"With those," said Smith as he pointed to a dozen bottles poking out of the open duffle bag. "They're incendiary devices with a fuse of my own design."

"Of course." The man was endlessly clever, she thought. Perhaps too clever.

"I plan to drop them along here." He pointed to a sewer line that ran north and south. "I'll place them into drains here through here, and they'll all go off at the same time, give or take two seconds. That should create a wall of fire."

"Trapping the creature?" asked April.

"Not so much trapping as giving him a reason to stay clear of the area while I look for the signed confession."

Smith drew a map for her of how to leave the office and make it to the warehouse exit. "I'll leave the door open here. If you run down the corridors in either direction, you'll find an exit. All of them open from the inside."

Smith walked toward the door they'd entered through. April followed him to the doorway. They stood there for a moment in silence.

Smith stared at his boots. "Miss Malone, if something should happen, Mr. Coen will ...."

April put a finger to his lips and shook her head. "You're an odd man, Smith. A little brave and stupid. But most definitely odd." She leaned in and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "For luck."

"For luck," said Smith as his face broke out in a blush. He grabbed the harpoon gun and duffle bag and walked down the stairs.

April watched him step into the darkness. She thought she heard him stumble as he reached the bottom.

"I'm OK!" he shouted.

He reminded her of her brothers and his friends when they got all bundled up to go on one of their hiking expeditions. Only Smith was going to be facing creatures worse than bears and an angry moose. From his confidence, she assumed this was the kind of thing he was used to doing.

17

Smith was still thinking about Miss Malone when he missed his turn on the moto-cycle. He drove around the block to return to the route. A carriage driver did a double-take when he saw the man in metal armor with red eyes stop the two-wheeled contraption and get off.

Smith pulled a bottle from his pack and rolled it into the gutter. He waited to hear the echo as the bottle clinked in the sewer. He looked up at the man on the carriage and nodded. "Evening."

Smith got back on the contraption and raced down the block, fading into the fog. He reached the next sewer junction, pulled another bottle out and threw it down the sewer.

He did this four more times and then checked the watches on his wrist through a window on the glove. It was taking longer than he expected, so he decided to gun the engine to the other end of town and start there so he wouldn't have to double back again. He set all of the remaining timers at once, to speed the placement up.

Smith dropped seven more bottles and was two blocks away from completing his wall of fire. He had two more minutes before all of the bottles, including the ones in his pack, ignited. He revved the engine and raced the moto-cycle down the street.

From the side of the street he heard several large pops and then felt something punch into his side. The force threw him from the moto-cycle. He slid across the damp cobblestone and came to rest at the curb. His first thought was that the bottles had prematurely exploded. He reached down to the bag to check the remaining two. They were still intact.

Smith took inventory of his body. Other than the fall, everything seemed all right. The armor had softened the blow. He reached his hand to his chest piece and felt a dent.

Footsteps ran up behind him.

This was not good, he remarked to himself.

"Look what we found, Mr. Flintwick. Some kind of knight in piss-colored armor."

Smith rolled over on his back and looked up at Dobbins and Flintwick staring down at him. The red light from his helmet made them appear like two devils. They both had shotguns aimed at him.

"My, what large eyes you have there," said Dobbins. "Should we shoot him where he lay?"

Flintwick ran a hand by his singed mustache. "If it were up to me. But the doctor would like him intact." He pushed the barrel of the gun into Smith's crotch. "Here's how we're going to do it. Everything is going to be very slow-like. Mr. Dobbins is going to remove your armor. If you try anything or if there are any tricks up your sleeves, then I pull the trigger. I don't move. You don't move."

Dobbins slung his shotgun over his shoulder. He pulled a pair of thick leather gloves from his pocket and slid them on. "We heard about your electricity trick from the orderlies. A goddamn Tom Edison, you are. If I so much feel a tickle, Mr. Flintwick is going to blow your balls clean off." He reached for the helmet. "How do I unstrap it?"

Smith began to raise his hand. Flintwick jabbed the barrel of the shotgun into the space between his armor plating and his groin. "No hands,

Smith. Just tell us, will Mr. Dobbins get a surprise if he reaches under there?"

Smith looked to either side of the two men. It appeared to just be them. He suspected the other goons were waiting somewhere else with a pair of shotguns for him to come by. If they heard the shots, they were most likely already on their way here.

"Shouldn't you be out hunting for the creature?" asked Smith.

"The doctor said it'll run its course. He says you're the more dangerous one. We'll see how dangerous you are without your toys," replied Flintwick. "Now tell us how to remove your helmet."

"Gladly," said Smith. "You two need it more then me. Particularly you." He nodded at the burn on Flintwick's face.

Flintwick shoved the barrel further into his groin. "Not all of you is covered in armor, Smith. Soon none of you will be. Won't we have some fun then. Fancy that? You all naked."

"There is an uncomfortable undertone to your comment," said Smith. He glanced over at the pack to his left. "Let me get the key out of there."

"Shite you will," said Dobbins. He pulled the pack away and stood up. He looked over at Flintwick.

"Anything we should know about?" said Flintwick. He pushed the gun into his groin again.

"You're not a gentle man, Mr. Flintwick. There are two bottles inside of there filled with a flammable liquid of my own creation."

Dobbins held the pack away from his body. "An arsonist?" He looked over at Flintwick. "What do you think?"

Flintwick stared down at Smith. "I think you shouldn't light any matches."

Dobbins reached inside and pulled out a bottle. It was made from green glass and had a cylinder inside running from the top to the bottom. "Looks like batteries to me."

"Flammable batteries, Mr. Dobbins. Please be careful."

Flintwick looked at the bottle. His gun didn't waver an inch from Smith's groin. He looked back at Smith. "I don't see any bottles like that on you."

"Cause he's unplugged," shouted Dobbins. He held the bottle up to his own face and looked inside.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Smith.

Dobbins held the bottle in his outstretched arm between himself and Flintwick. "Afraid I'll drop your battery, Mr. Smith?"

"It's just Smith, please. Smith," he craned his neck slightly to look at the watches on his arm. "I'm afraid we've run out of time, gentlemen."

"We've got all the time in the world, Mr. Smith," said Flintwick.

"Well, that's a relief because I was certain that the bottle was about to ...."

The cylinder in the middle of the bottle began to fizz and glow. Flintwick and Dobbins turned to look. Smith felt the barrel of the gun slacken slightly. He turned his head and rolled the instant the bottle erupted into a green fireball, engulfing the two men.

Shards of glass sprayed all over Smith's armored body as the explosion ripped into the air. He rolled onto his stomach but couldn't lie flat because of the Gatling gun. He scrambled to his knees and ran away from the flames as they spread across the street. He could feel the suit grow hot as fire licked at him.

A young boy who had been watching the encounter from his window watched as Smith ran across the street like a bright green comet. He saw Smith slide open a sewer grate and jump inside.

The green flame in the street reached the curbs on either end and then stopped expanding. Flintwick and Dobbins tried to run but were covered from head to toe in emerald fire. Their agonizing screams brought more people to their windows to investigate the sounds and the eerie green glow

in the fog. The entire neighborhood watched in horror as the two men burned to death in the middle of the street.

The little boy decided it was just a bad dream and went back to bed. Most people watching were too afraid to process what they'd seen. For some, they thought they'd watched the monster in the mist. Others just closed their windows and hid under their sheets. One man ran downstairs to try to throw a bucket of water on the men, but it was too late. He couldn't reach them and the men were already clearly dead. He looked down the street and saw more green light glowing in the distance as the other bottles erupted and sent flickers of flames through the sewer grates.

18

Smith tumbled down the sewer hole, falling ten feet, splashing into the water below. His suit made a sizzling sound as the flames were extinguished. He'd designed the green flames to burn low enough to not catch nearby buildings on fire and just burn themselves out. But for clothes and human flesh, the fire was more than enough to kill.

He stood up in the water. It came to his waist. Enough to arrest his fall. More than enough for a leviathan to be lurking, he thought as he looked into the dark cavern.

In the distance he could see the dots of the green glow of his fire on either side, stretching 500 feet in either direction. He'd managed to block all of the junctions, except one -- the one he was in. There was only one route of escape for the beast and that was right where Smith was standing.

"Well, that was poor planning," he muttered.

He looked up at the sewer opening. He could see fingers of green flame trickling over. He heard Flintwick and Dobbin's screams come to a stop.

Evil men that they were, Smith didn't want to see them die, especially like that. He could rationalize all he wanted that he'd told them the truth, but the reality was that he'd wanted them to pick up the pack, and thus the lie about the key.

He looked around the sewer in the red light cast by his helmet. There was a ladder that led to the surface. Should he go back and retrieve the harpoon? He heard the bell of the fire brigade and decided to abandon it for now. It'd probably been burnt up beyond use in the green fire.

He spun the Gatling gun barrels on his chest and decided that was enough weaponry for just retrieving a body. Despite his assurances to Miss Malone, up until then he'd planned on trying to kill the beast if he could corner it. Without the harpoon, he wasn't sure that was possible.

He heard a scratching sound and jerked his body around to see where it was coming from. The green fire seemed to be moving toward him. That was odd, he thought. It wasn't supposed to do that.

Something was bringing it toward him. Something was on fire.

He flipped out the handles to the Gatling and prepared to shoot. Shoot at what? All he could see was a wave of green flames coming toward him. He heard the sound of clawing and screeching.

Was this the beast coming for him? The wave of fire grew closer. Green light reflected off the moist curved ceiling of the tunnel. Smith brought his body to the center and spread his legs apart defiantly. He aimed the Gatling straight down the middle and waited for it to get closer.

Ripples of water began to lap at his waist. He could sense there was a large mass moving through the water in his direction. His mind raced back to everything he knew about squids. They had a spearheaded body that ended in tentacles. If this was swimming toward him, then he was going to get the tip end first.

But this was a different creature than any squid ever seen by a man. It had different rules. Smith focused on the fact that it was mortal. All mortal creatures have the same rules. They could live and they could die. Smith included.

The flames were a few yards away. Smith realized that they were almost flat against the water.

The flames were coming at him in small patches. It wasn't one creature. It was thousands. This was no kraken.

Rats. Thousands of sewer rats that had been set ablaze by his green fire.

They swam toward his body. Some kept going past, screeching in pain as the fire burned their flesh. Smith threw the pathetic creatures off as they tried to climb on him.

Just as bad as their tiny screams was the smell of their flesh as they burned alive. He flung tiny balls of fire away from him, trying to keep his body clear. Behind him, some kept going toward the next engulfed junction. Others went right or left.

Eventually, the wave subsided and he was left alone in the junction. The sound of the terrified creatures faded away as they tried to find some kind of release for their pain.

Their burning stench lingered. Smith worried that he wouldn't notice the ammonium smell of the creature over the foul odor. He aimed his head down the west side of the junction. If the creature was on that side, it would be trapped between there and where the sewers dead ended. To the east was the rest of the city and eventually the piers and the sea.

Which way? Thinking back to April's logic, the freshest, most recent kills would be to the west. Smith decided that was where he should head.

As a precaution, he undid the strap from his helmet and smelled a whiff of the air. It was foul. He quickly put the helmet back on and fixed the strap. He didn't know what protection it would offer, but he felt safer with it over his head.

Besides burning rat, he could smell faint ammonium. More strong was the sick, sweet smell of death. There was no doubt this thing was down here and this was where it hunted.

Smith walked down the tunnel into the west end. He scanned the surface of the water to the left and the right for anything that looked like a body. The problem was that the sewer was so cluttered with trash and debris, it

was hard to tell what anything was. All the things that got washed down the gutter were all around him, including things people wanted to hide.

He saw tire wheels, newspapers, bottles bobbing up and down in the ripples, planks, a dead cat and even a child's doll within just twenty feet of where he was standing. He wished he had a stick or a shaft to probe around. Instead he had his suit and all his momentarily useless gadgets.

Smith kept moving forward, keeping an eye out for anything that looked like human flesh or bone. Miss Malone's optimistic assessment that there would be a body within a few blocks omitted the fact that finding the body in all that debris would be a feat unto itself.

He walked a few steps and then let his red glowing eyes rove across the surface of the water for anything that remotely looked like it was part of a human. He took another few steps and repeated the process.

At the back of his mind, he knew with certainty that the creature was aware he was down here. The nagging question was whether it was trying to avoid him or to seek him out.

19

Smith reached another junction. He tried to remember from the map where he was. He vaguely remembered that it might be near where Albert Carnegie had gone missing.

He looked to his right and saw scattered debris floating in the water. To his left he saw the water had a sheen to it as liquid trickled down from a pipe in the wall farther up. He could smell the scent of decaying flesh the strongest from that direction.

Smith stepped forward and immediately dropped a foot. For a moment he thought he was going to go all the way under until his feet touched the muck that covered the surface of the floor. The water lapped at his chest.

He hadn't expected the sewer to get that deep. Otherwise, he would have worn some kind of floatation apparatus. He was also hoping there would be more walkways that would take him out of the water, but they were too far and few between, and he didn't want to waste time climbing up and back down off them in his heavy armor.

Below the dripping pipe in the wall, he could make out a large mound of something poking out of the water like a volcanic eruption. As he got closer, he could see parts of it were moving. His hand tensed up on the Gatling gun grip.

Smith took in a deep breath and got wind of a foul stench. He stood motionless, staring at the mass. Parts of it moved but the whole of it stood as still as he did. He looked at the small pond ripples his body made. The waves traveled across the water before fading into the darkness.

He couldn't see any returning waves. Of course, the creature would be much more streamlined after thousands (or millions?) of years of evolution. Its body would move through the water in a more efficient manner, leaving behind as little of a wake as possible.

This quivering mass before him had to be of something else. He slowly inched his body closer. He focused on the dripping sound of the water above it, trying to see if it masked something else.

The drops splattered against the mass and made tiny echoes in the chamber. Smith moved forward and could begin to see some definition to the form. His eyes traced what looked like pulsating movement. His fingers itched on the steel trigger of the Gatling.

He resisted every impulse to fire. He had no idea what he was looking at. Smith breathed in slowly, ignoring the stench. His eyes were beginning to adjust to the dark.

In the red glow of his light he could make out the moving forms that ran across the heap. Rats. More rats.

But what was the mass? It was nearly as tall as he was. Smith edged closer and could see what looked like white bone in his red glow. As his foot took a closer step, he could feel something crack and slip below him. He began to lose his balance.

Smith fell forward and landed face first on the heap. Even through the helmet, his nose told him before his eyes what he was looking at: It was a rotting pile of tissue and bones. He struggled to gain his balance as his fingers clawed into the mountain of decayed body parts. He could feel bloody masses squish between the fingers of his gloves.

As he pushed himself back up, pieces of flesh stuck to his Gatling and his armor. Fragments of bone fell from the crevices. He wiped rotten organs from his goggles.

Smith resisted the impulse to vomit. He tried not to breathe. He looked the pile over. Something wasn't right. He shoved a hand into the filth and reached around for something solid. He pulled out a large bone, as big as his below the elbow.

He held it aloft in the light and examined it. There were bits of sinew and cartilage still attached. He could tell by the joints that it was a tibia. He looked closer at the ends and the ligature. At first glance it may have looked human, but it clearly belonged to a pig.

Smith looked around the pile. He saw another bone sticking out. He pulled free a jawbone. It was a jawbone from a pig.

All sorts of animals walked the streets of Boston, like any other modern city. And a missing pig or two wasn't as likely to get a missing persons report. Smith looked up at the pipe dripping water down on the pile.

He could see the tip of another bone poking out over the edge. Of course. The abattoir on the street above. While they probably didn't make it a habit of flushing bones and parts down the drain, they hauled most of that away to be rendered, bits of pieces probably found their way past the grates and into the sewer below.

He looked at the film on the water around him and realized he was looking at blood pooling below the drainpipe. The falling water was partly blood and bile with the occasional bone thrown in. Enough over time to create the foul stalagmite in front of him.

What a strange place this sewer must be to the creature, he thought. Parts of dead sea creatures washing off the decks at the port where it found the entrance to the sewer. Inside the tunnels, rot and filth that must have been like nothing it could imagine and then piles of strange animals it had never seen before. Then up above, through gutters and grates, thousands of

unaware bags of meat walking back and across the streets like a massive school of tuna. Oblivious to the creature below them.

Smith turned away from the pile and looked farther down the tunnel. He kept walking down his original path.

Somewhere in his memory he recalled being down in the depths of dark places like this, sometimes the hunter, other times the hunted.

Did the thing go down here to track down the men of the John Jackson? Wasn't it just an opportunistic hunter? Its olfactory senses had to be a thousand times better than his from finding prey across hundreds of miles of ocean.

Smith and April could smell the John Jackson from the end of the pier. Mr. Carnegie's hat also had that odor.

While the creature seemed to consume anything it could find, it did seem unnaturally lucky at finding the members of that ship. If Smith could smell that cap a foot away, what was stopping the creature from smelling it a hundred feet away?

Smith heard the sound of a horse trotting on the street above. He looked up and saw the stains beneath a rain gutter where the sound was coming from. Smith wondered, when the creature stalked the men those several weeks back, lurking under their ship, did it hear them, too? Did it learn their voices?

His mind raced with a thousand questions he'd never get the opportunity to have answered. As he looked up at the gutter and pondered the sounds from the street above, he was oblivious to the ripple in the water that moved past his body.

20

Smith found more parts to animals from the charnel house but nothing that looked human. He began to wonder if he ever would. Most of what men knew about the creatures was myth. The one he was after had no scientific name. It came from parts where men rarely went. Although Broderick said its mate had the form of a squid, it could be a different animal altogether.

They knew so little about it, let alone how its digestive system worked. Maybe it chewed up men whole and shat out powdered bones?

The tunnel opened up to a large cistern. Smith hesitantly stuck a foot forward. There was another drop. One more foot and the water would be near his shoulders. Another and he'd be under water with no way to breathe. He walked to the far end of the tunnel to see if there was some kind of ledge that ringed the cistern.

Smith put a gloved hand on the wall and stuck his foot forward. He leaned in but could only feel the slosh of water through his boots. A wave pushed up against his back, and he slipped on the muck.

His foot hit ground and he regained his balance. The water was eight inches higher, stopping at his armpits. He looked up and around the cistern with his helmet lamps.

It was fifty feet across and twenty feet to the ceiling. He was trying to place it in his mental map when he had a realization. He was deep underground in a manmade sewer. There shouldn't be any waves.

His stomach tightened like a fist as he realized something had pushed him into the cistern. The water was deeper here. The thing could conceal its entire bulk in there and he'd never see it coming.

Smith pushed his back against the wall and looked around the chamber. There was the usual debris he'd come to expect, newspapers, bottles, a few planks and tree branches. He looked to his left and his right to see if there was anything he could shield his body with.

Despite the armor, he felt so naked and open. If he got pulled under, there would be no way he could survive. The weight of it would pull him to the bottom. Taking it off would leave him defenseless.

He was such a stupid man, he told himself. He'd come to believe the stories others had whispered about him. Smith had deluded himself that maybe he was the supernatural creature Lindestrom suspected.

Foolish. If only they knew that his survival was in part because of his absolute avoidance of things that could cause him harm.

The water looked black as ink in the red light of the helmet. Smith scanned the surface looking for any trace of the creature. Garbage and flotsam made tiny ripples in the water. He looked at the waterline and noticed for the first time that the whole chamber was acting like a wineglass as the wine gently rocked back and forth. Only it wasn't a clumsy hand giving inertia to wine in the glass, it was the movement of something very large deep under the water making it rock back and forth.

It was swimming in circles. Was this how it hunted? Circling in front of its prey? Would it circle around him if his back weren't to the wall?

How would the attack happen? Would it slip a tentacle around his ankles and pull him under? It was a powerful beast. Miss O'Mallory said it lifted Carnegie into the air.

Its tentacles had to be at least thirty feet long to reach up through the gutter and pull a man down. Smith stared at the center of the cistern. He did the math in his head. Thirty-foot tentacles plus another ten for the body. It was at least forty feet long. If the cistern was fifty feet across, that meant it was a little over one hundred fifty feet in circumference. The animal took up almost a third as it went round.

Smith had no idea how any of that was immediately useful to him. But it gave him some idea of where it was as he watched the waterline trace a wave around the chamber. He could tell when the bulk of the body was in front of him.

He looked over at the tunnel he had just come through. If he timed it right, he could wait for the creature to pass and then climb back in there and make a run for it. He'd travel a little bit faster with the slightly lower water level.

Would it be fast enough? The creature had showed it was quite adept at navigating the sewers. It may have preferred the depth of the cistern, but it certainly didn't need it.

Was it going to pursue him if he made a retreat? Smith had no way of knowing the mind of the creature. He hadn't even seen it yet. But he knew it was out there. Was it waiting for him to make a move?

In its eyes, whatever they could see from beneath the water, he looked like a different animal than the ones it was pulling from the surface to consume. His metal exterior and large glowing red eyes set him apart.

The glowing eyes. Smith wondered if the creature thought he was some other species of squid. An ocean predator like itself.

He was sure that illusion was shattered when it observed him clumsily stumbling in the water. Smith was no sea creature. There was also the scientific fact that being another squid wouldn't exclude Smith from the animal's eating list.

Smith felt the surge of water gently pass him by. How long would he let this go on? Presently he was waiting for the squid to make the first move. Perhaps the squid had the same inclination.

Smith could hope that it lost interest and swim away. But waiting for that to happen also meant waiting for it to strike first. He thought of the story Broderick had told, about how it outfoxed them and picked the men off the harpoon gun one by one.

That was an incredibly adaptive thinker. Maybe it had seen whalers before, but that kind of planning, organized planning with its mate, was hard to comprehend.

If Smith tried to exit, that meant turning his back to it. That could be deadly.

He felt the surge again. This time it seemed a little more powerful. Smith could feel pressure from the water getting closer.

It was widening its range.

Soon, it would brush up against him. Smith knew that he had to act. The creature was getting more aggressive. No matter how confused or entranced it may have been with his bright red eyes, it was going to make a move soon.

Smith recalled that sailors sometimes said sharks would bump up against men in the water before they struck. Was this common to other sea creatures? Smith remembered something about whales doing it, too.

If he waited for contact, that would solve the nagging problem at the back of his mind -- how to deal with the range of the Gatling under water. The bullets would only travel a few feet before they lost their velocity. After that, they'd just plummet to the bottom.

If it got close enough ....

Smith put both hands on the Gatling and pushed his buttocks against the wall while he leaned forward, aiming the gun at an angle into the water. His fingers were ready on the trigger.

He felt a stronger push and almost pulled the trigger before he realized it was just a bigger wave. What would he do after he fired? He might hit the body, but the business end of the squid was its powerful tentacles. And those were what was moving past him after the body.

He still had his powered gloves and a little electric power left. That might be enough to discourage a tentacle. Maybe no more than a flea on a dog.

Smith had timed out the waves and got ready for the next one. But it didn't come. He felt a moment of relief before the recognition sank in. It was creating an expectation of a pattern in him.

On instinct, Smith jerked to his right and aimed the gun into the water. Something crashed into his chest. He squeezed the trigger and sent twenty rounds into whatever just hit him. The gun made a loud racket as it sent a spray of bullets into the bulk in front of him.

He felt something twitch and violently thrash. There was a sucking sound as it changed direction and shot away from him, creating a small vortex in the water. It wasn't expecting that kind of reaction from him. Bullets were an alien thing in its world.

Smith turned to the opening and waded toward it. He moved inches at a time, while the thing could go yards in the same span. He stepped up into the tunnel and ran as fast as the suit would allow him.

He heard the echo of splashing water in the cistern as the angry animal thrashed around looking for him. Smith kept moving. He didn't turn around. He had to reach a ladder.

The pile of rotten animal flesh passed on his right. He paused as he heard a splash at the mouth of the tunnel he was in. He looked back and saw a surge of water. For the very first time, he saw the glowing orange eyes. They were racing toward him.

He couldn't make it to the next junction in time. Smith threw himself on top of the dead flesh and climbed up it. His feet skidded and slid as he tried

to find purchase. He strained and shaved and got his chest and then his waist on top of it. He pulled his legs up as glowing eyes came near.

Smith thought of his own eyes. He resisted the urge to throw the helmet away when he couldn't get the switch to work. His nervous fingers finally found it and dimmed them.

Smith stood up on his island of dead animal parts, pulling his body as far away from the orange eyes as they passed by. He watched as they glided into the junction he had been heading into. They stopped.

Smith could imagine the creature was trying to figure out which way he had gone. By now, the green fire had died away. There were three other directions.

By what senses it was trying to determine this, Smith could only guess. Was it using its tentacles to feel for vibrations in the water? Smith waited for it to choose a direction and glide away, but the eyes just stayed there, faintly glowing under the water.

It was confused.

It knew something wasn't right.

It suspected it had been tricked.

Smith looked up at the drainpipe that was spilling blood and bile onto him. He reached a gloved hand to the lip and grabbed hold. He might be able to pull his body up there but not with the armor.

He looked down at the pile of bones. If he crawled into the abattoir's drainpipe, he might find an exit. There was probably a removable grating covering a trough that led to the pipe.

He looked back toward the junction. The eyes were gone.

Did they always glow? Was it another trick?

Smith waited in the dark. He listened to the trickle of the water as it splashed over his suit and onto the refuse pile he was standing on. He tried to listen for waves but heard none.

Smith began to strip off his armor.

21

Smith unhooked the helmet and set it into the drainpipe above his head. He faced the eyes outward, so their dim glow could provide some light. But not enough to attract its attention, he hoped, knowing full well he hadn't a clue what the squid could see.

He took off his boots and set them on the pile next to his bare feet. The rotten flesh squished between his toes. He pulled off the leggings and used them to stand on. Lastly, he slid the chest plate over his head. The gloves were attached via thick cables and came off like a child's jumper.

He was soaked to the skin in his boxers and shirt with sweat and water. Blood and bile dripped down on him, adding to the fluids staining his shirt.

He tried to push the chest plate into the drainpipe, but he knew it was too large. He didn't want to abandon it just yet. Even without the mini Gatling attached to it, the batteries, plating and electrical apparatus made it weigh a considerable amount. He almost fell over trying to get it through the small opening.

He settled for clipping the fingers of one of the powered gloves to the lip of the pipe. This also made climbing into the pipe easier. Smith reached up and grabbed the pipe with both hands. He placed a foot into the neck opening of the chest piece and climbed up.

His other foot pulled away from the pile. He tried not to think of the rotten flesh still clinging to the soles of his feet and squished between the spaces of his toes.

It was only animal flesh. He'd climbed through much worse, he reminded himself.

Smith pulled his body into the opening and nudged the helmet out of the way with his forehead. Below him, he heard a small splash as one of the boots fell into the water. Smith scrambled to get his whole body into the pipe.

It was a narrow fit. Just enough space for his shoulders. He used his hands to push the helmet further in and then pull himself deep enough to keep his legs from dangling.

Once his toes came over the edge, he breathed a silent breath of relief. He turned the helmet to face down the pipe. He adjusted the dimmer and saw what looked like a hundred feet of decaying meat and bones trail off into the darkness.

The tunnel was at a gradual incline. It wasn't going to be easy work pulling himself through it, but it was manageable enough. He reached his arms forward and pulled himself farther in. He nudged the helmet and pulled himself a few more feet.

Bits of bone poked into his chest while he tried to control his breathing -- so he wouldn't open his mouth and get any of the filth inside of there. Ahead of the light, he could see tiny little eyes looking back at him. More rats.

He welcomed their presence, given the alternative. At the moment, he thought of himself as one giant rat crawling through a pipe to gain entry into the abattoir. He began to think about what he was going to do next. Anything but the filthy claustrophobic space and what lay behind him.

Once he found the grating that would take him to freedom, he'd have to make it back to one of his safe houses and change into something that didn't

make him look like a blood-covered maniac. His mission to find a body was derailed the moment Flintwick and Dobbins shot him off the moto-cycle.

After everything, he was going to emerge empty-handed. Smith pushed the helmet forward again and looked into the pipe ahead of him. Where had all the tiny eyes gone?

Were they that offended by his presence? He pulled himself forward and then smelled the strong scent of ammonium. He could hear dripping water in the tunnel behind him, water dripping from something besides the pipe he was presently clogging.

He could feel cold water fall on the back of his legs. He froze every muscle and tried to will himself to be part of the blood and muck he was face down in. Something slapped the back of his legs and then he felt a tentacle reach around them and squeeze. It had found him.

Smith clawed his fingers into the pipe to stop from being dragged backward. They ripped free from a seam as the creature pulled his legs out of the pipe. Smith's hands clung to handfuls of rotting flesh and bone as he tried to hold anything to stop him from being extracted from his hiding place.

The creature pulled at his legs again and jerked him halfway out of the pipe. Smith felt the knuckles of the powered glove scrape by his testicles as the creature yanked him free of the small space.

At the last instant, Smith grabbed hold of the armor he'd hung from the pipe. The creature swung him into the middle of the chamber and held him aloft in midair. Two orange eyes looked up at him from the water. That was all he could see in the darkness.

Was it confused by Smith being out of his shell? Whatever the reason, Smith used the hesitation to slide the chest plate back over his body and pull the gloves over his hands. He pressed a knob on his chest and powered the wrist pistons. The suit began to hum.

Smith punched the broad part of the tentacle grasping his legs and sent a ton of force into an area the size of a silver dollar. He could feel blood and fluids shoot out and trickle down his legs.

The creature loosened his grasp, and Smith fell into the water. He quickly righted himself and made sure everything was plugged in. Another tentacle lashed out and pinned his arm to his waist. Smith had to wait a moment for the piston to reset.

He punched the tentacle and felt another spray of fluid. Smith didn't delude himself into thinking these were anything more than pinpricks to the beast. It dropped him into the water.

The orange eyes looked straight at him. Smith felt two pairs of tentacles whip around his body and pin both arms to his sides.

Damn! It learned fast. The eyes grew larger as it pulled him toward its beaklike mouth. He could hear the sound of cartilage cracking as it opened wide. Somewhere inside there was its razor-like tongue ready to lick the flesh off his bones.

Smith breathed in and let the creature bring him closer. The ammonium smell was so powerful his sinuses began to burn. He could hear the sound of something flicking around in its beaklike mouth. The creature pulled him forward.

Inside his glove, Smith pressed the switch that would power the copper loops and studs that covered his suit. He only had a small charge left.

There was a flash of light and a loud crack as the squid got its first taste of electricity. It flung Smith against a wall as it spasmed.

Smith's head hit the concrete, and he passed out. Surprised by the new sensation, the creature wasn't sure what to do. It'd never met anything like Smith.

SMITH'S BODY sank into the water. The crook of his arm landed on a plank and helped to keep his mouth barely out of the sewer. He was struggling to regain consciousness when he could hear the faint sound of voices. He opened his eyes and saw two figures on a rowboat backlit by a lantern.

He tried to warn them about the creature, but he was still too dazed to say anything. He blacked out.

Hands pulled him out of the water and into the boat. He looked up and saw Broderick smiling back down at him. He put a finger to his lips and looked at something in the shadows. He brought a harpoon gun to bear and fired. It hit the wall with a clang.

"Damn!" Broderick shouted before muffling his voice.

Smith raised his head to look over the edge of the boat. He saw the two orange eyes and its serpent-like tentacles. Broderick started rowing away from it.

Smith tried to shake his head but it wouldn't move. It was lodged in a soft place. There was a familiar smell, a pleasant one in the air. It made him feel relaxed.

"It's gaining on us," said Broderick. "I don't think that's going to do much good."

Smith looked up and saw a shower of smoke and sparks fly past his head and illuminate the tunnel. He heard thrashing and the sound of something snapping. There was more splashing and then it faded away.

"It's running the other way," said Broderick. "Might give us enough time to get to a ladder."

A rough hand leaned over and slapped Smith on the face. "Wake up, boy! We got to run."

Smith lifted his head again and looked at where the creature had been. There was a lone tentacle pinned to the wall, like an insect on a specimen tray.

"Nice shot," mumbled Smith as he got to his elbows.

"Don't be looking at me. Thank the Mad Dog Capt. April," Broderick replied as he pointed behind Smith.

The still-dazed Smith turned and saw April sitting at the back of the rowboat holding on to the handle of the umbrella.

"I think I broke it," she said as she tried to make sense of the knobs.

Broderick slapped Smith in the face again.

"OK! OK!" said Smith as he sat up. He turned to April. "It's a complete failure. I couldn't find a body."

"We'll have three of them if you don't help me row," snapped the old sailor.

"What about that?" asked April as she pointed to the tentacle on the wall.

"Of course!" shouted Smith before anyone could pull him back into the boat. He splashed into the water and ran to where the creature had ripped away from its arm. He pulled the smoldering umbrella free and five feet of tentacle splashed into the water.

He dragged it back to the boat. Broderick pointed to a ladder. "No more boats."

April went up first. Broderick helped the still-delirious Smith lug the muscular appendage up the ladder as they pulled themselves to the surface. Once he felt the relatively safe cobblestones beneath his body, Smith passed out again. Blood seeped from deep gouges in his legs where the creature's claws had dug in.

22

April looked up from his legs where she and Broderick were bandaging them. She shook her head. Smith smiled weakly.

Broderick wiped a bloody hand on his jacket. "Not as bad as the chunk that it pulled out of my leg. I'd get a proper doctor to have a look in the morning."

The sky was still pitch black. The only illumination in the street was from the lantern April had carried up the ladder. She looked over at the tentacle that lay just a few feet away. Five feet long, as thick as a man's leg at the widest, it flattened out into a spoon-shaped appendage that had scores of suction cups and claws that stuck out like teeth. To her mind, it looked like something that would give a snake nightmares. She wrinkled her nose at the pungent ammonium smell it gave off as it oozed dark yellow fluid onto the street.

"I don't suppose it will be coming back for that?" she asked.

"Not for that," said Broderick.

Smith looked over at him. "Why the change of heart?"

Broderick nodded at April. "Miss Malone convinced me I should be avenging Mr. Webb and not trying to outrun his ghost."

Smith turned his head to her. "How did you find me? The boat?"

April wiped her wet hands on her sleeve. "I heard the gunshots and the sound of your contraption crash. I ran out to the street as fast as I could but only saw the green fire and ... I knew something had gone wrong, so I went to get Broderick." April took off her hat and ran a finger through her hair. "That moto-cycle is nothing like the velocipede you had me practice on. I nearly killed myself on it. I think I need more practice."

"Yes, but how did you get to me so quickly?" said Smith.

"I've been rowing boats all my life. We had the tide. Took two hours, but we kept in the main line. Straight line. We could hear its thrashing from almost the harbor," replied Broderick.

Two hours? Smith turned to look at his chronograph strapped to his wrist. He hadn't realized how long he'd been down there as the creature's plaything.

Smith got to his feet. Water dripped from the chest armor and gloves he was still wearing. Cold wind chilled the parts of his legs where the bandages didn't cover them. He bent over to pick up the thick end of the tentacle.

"Let me get that for you," said the sailor as he leaned over and threw it on his shoulder. "Been hauling sea monsters all my life," he said with a wink.

Smith watched as the severed end poured out a stream of vile fluid. "Is our man from MIT at the station?"

"I know how to reach him if he's not. Coen should already be there," April answered.

"I gave it a shock from my suit. It barely did anything to it," said Smith, shaking his head.

April stood up and looked at the remnants of the armor. "What about with a full charge?" she asked.

Smith shook his head. "It was too big. My bullets barely penetrated the skin. The suit couldn't hold a large enough charge to do it much damage."

His eyes turned back to the open manhole cover. "I think the harpoon on the other was a lucky shot. I don't know what to do here. Poison, bombs, I don't know."

"But electricity could kill it?" she asked.

"If you have enough of it," replied Smith. "More than I have." Smith paused. "What are you thinking, Miss Malone?"

SMITH PUSHED OPEN the front door of the South Boston police station and walked inside.

Mr. Coen, his lawyer, was seated at a desk near the back talking to a captain with a pointy white beard. They both turned to look at the ridiculously dressed man in his armored upper torso and underwear.

Coen just shook his head. A short man with refined mannerisms, he knew the firm's mysterious client had a knack for showing up at odd times in unusual predicaments.

The captain got up from his desk and walked over to the night desk.

"Smith, I presume?"

Smith looked at Coen, waiting for his attorney to tell him if it was OK to respond.

Coen nodded.

"At your service, captain," Smith said as he looked at the brass nameplate, "Capt. Brooks."

"There's an arrest warrant out for you," said Brooks.

Coen held up a sheet of paper. "That's been rescinded, as I've been explaining to you, captain."

"Not until I speak to the judge," reprimanded Brooks.

"This is most illegal, captain. First you get some flim-flam man of a consultant to convince a senile judge to sign a bogus writ. Now you refuse to rescind it."

Brooks looked at Smith. His eyes lingered over his armor. "Are you responsible for the green fire? What happened to Dobbins and Flintwick?"

Coen spoke up. "That's an entirely separate matter that I assure you my client isn't responsible for." He shot a glance at Smith, telling him to keep his mouth shut.

"We'll sort that mess out." Brooks gave Smith a wary look. "I'm told you're our maniac." He noticed bits of blood and flesh that were stuck between crevices in the armor.

Smith looked down. "It's not human. I think. I fell onto a pile of animal flesh in the sewer below an abattoir. Mostly pig, I believe." He looked up and saw Coen shaking his head.

Brooks arched an eyebrow. He looked over at April. "How do you fit into this mess?"

She stepped up to the desk. Coen nodded to her. "I'm his assistant." She almost said "computer." "I saw the thing. The thing you're after. I promise you it's not a man. If you ask Miss O'Mallory, she'll confirm this."

"Confirm what? A monster?"

"Not a monster," said Smith. "Not in the bedtime story variety, although this would make a frightful one. It's got a haunted sailing vessel, an avenging ghost and a very nasty creature." He noticed that Brooks was not amused. "Er, sorry. Like Miss Malone said. Not a man. Not a monster."

The doors burst open behind them. They turned to see Broderick's backside as he dragged something into the station. "Least you could have done was let me catch up a bit," he muttered.

Smith ran over to help the man place the bundle on the large desk.

Brooks gazed down at the pale oozing tentacle. He looked to Coen and then to Smith.

"It's a form of cephalopod, we think at least. We'll need a marine biologist to confirm it. If you let Miss Malone use your telephone, she can ring one up," said Smith.

Brooks tried to process everything. "You mean to say this is what's responsible for the missing persons? It's a foul thing to be sure. But I hardly see how this ... this thing could be responsible."

"Oh my, captain. This ...." Smith jabbed a finger into the pale flesh. It suddenly spasmed. The clawed end whipped past Brooks' face before smashing back onto the desk.

The startled captain pulled out his service revolver, not sure where to point it. Several other police officers who had gathered behind him did the same.

"Er, sorry. Just a reflex, I think," said Smith. "As I was saying, this isn't the creature. This is just a part of it. It's got several more appendages just as nasty as this one. My companions managed to corner it and pin part of it to the wall." He ran his finger over the charred end where the flames from the umbrella had burned its flesh. "The creature cut his losses, as you might say, and left this behind. Maybe it'll grow back another one?" Smith glanced at Broderick. He shrugged.

Brooks shook his head. "This is our maniac? Or rather this is part of our maniac?"

The door opened and a chilling voice called out. "Don't be fooled, captain. Mr. Smith is quite a cagey liar. And a dangerous one." Lindestrom walked over to the desk and looked down at the tentacle. "Is this his monster in the sewer?" He turned to Smith. "Couldn't find a dead ape in the monkey house? Resorting to tall tales about giant squids? Find this at the fish market?"

"Does this look like something you get at the market?" said Smith.

"It's a pickled scientific specimen, probably pilfered from a museum. You can smell the ammonium preservative," scoffed Lindestrom as he lied through his teeth.

"Pickled specimen?" said Smith. He held up his finger. The gathered crowd took a collective step back, except for Lindestrom.

Smith jabbed his finger into it again. The appendage thrashed around on the table and then fell flat. Lindestrom stared down at the ooze coming from the open end. He shrugged.

"A specimen none the less. And not an uncommon one in some circles. Just a theatrical prop of sorts. Admittedly of flesh. But proof of nothing." Lindestrom proudly crossed his arms over his chest. "In fact, I have an entire animal just like it in my possession. Dead, of course."

"You have one of these?" asked Capt. Brooks.

Everyone turned to Lindestrom.

"Well ... yes. As I said, quite common in some circles."

"What circles would that be, Dr. Lindestrom?" asked the captain.

Broderick stepped forward. "He's the one that chartered the John Jackson. He's the one that paid us to bring back the one he has. The one that made this un' follow us back."

Lindestrom shook his head, noticing Broderick for the first time. "I have no idea what this man is talking about."

"How did you acquire your specimen? How recently?" demanded Brooks.

Lindestrom waved his hands in the air. "That's not germane to the capture of the maniac." He looked at Smith. "We have our culprit here. I've given you an extensive profile. If you execute the warrants, I'm sure you'll find the evidence you seek."

Brooks waved his hands over the quivering tentacle. "So this isn't relevant?" He looked down at the tooth-like claws. "The idea that the owner of this thing, as these three witnesses claim, is waltzing around in our sewers isn't relevant?" His face was red as he looked at the pompous Lindestrom.

"Don't be a fool," replied Lindestrom. "Their trickery will become apparent once we search Smith's premises."

Brooks took the writ rescinding the search warrant and arrest from Coen's hands. "For the moment there will be no search or arrest. I think we're best advised to pursue the allegation, crazy as it is, of the sea creature in the sewer."

"Fine. Be the fool," said Lindestrom, trying to act indifferent but knowing his gambit had collapsed.

Brooks continued. "If we find the owner of this down there, I'll look forward to a full explanation from you as to why you're the owner of the other part of a matching set. And I'd like to talk to some of the other shipmates of this man over here," he said as he pointed to Broderick. "We'll be sure to have the gentleman from MIT in the room to clarify some of the things you have to say."

Lindestrom waved a hand in the air. "It seems my services are no longer of use to you while you chase this fantasy into the gutter. Good day."

He turned and left the station. Broderick muttered a curse under his breath.

Capt. Brooks poked a finger at the Gatling gun on Smith's chest. "If that's what I think it is, you better have a good answer as to how to stop this thing."

"A notion, perhaps," said Smith as he winked at April.

23

Broderick helped Smith fit the dive helmet over his head and fasten it to the shoulders of his armor. They'd had to cut off the sleeves from the rest of the dive suit so he could wear the metal plating. The helmet wasn't a perfect fit, but it was close enough.

Nearby, a group of police officers was standing around an open manhole cover. They aimed shotguns into the dark circle.

"Couldn't this wait until morning?" asked Broderick.

"My fear is that it runs away and then comes back when we least suspect. I saw a little of its behavior. It outsmarted me down there."

Broderick spat on the ground. "Clever demon."

"Hand me those cables," said Smith. "And make sure the air pump has plenty of fuel. I don't know how long I'll have if it severs the air line. But a few seconds are enough."

Smith fastened a thick cable to a battery box on his suit. He held up one of his gloves and looked at the piston above the wrist. He squeezed an activator in his gloves and a sharp harpoon tip shot ten inches past his wrist like a large dagger.

"Those are made for piercing and holding on to flesh, not stabbing like a back alley pimp with a penny knife," said Broderick, disapproving.

"Yes," said Smith as he turned a knob on his wrist. "But I don't think you've seen a penny knife do this." He held his wrist out as the metal blade jerked back and forth at lightning speed. The police officers turned to look at the ratcheting sound.

Broderick shook his head. "Toys."

"I have other ones ..." said a slightly dejected Smith.

Capt. Brooks walked over to them. "The harbor master says he was able to roust up enough men to cover the exits with harpoons if it comes running out of the drains."

Smith nodded. "Are your men ready with the grenades?"

Brooks brandished the flare gun at his side. "Waiting for my signal."

The fog was heavy and dark. Streetlights barely pierced it. The men standing around the manhole cover had made a ring of lanterns around it so no one would fall in.

Smith walked over to the edge of the cover and peered down. He'd strapped an electric lantern to his diving helmet but left it off. The plan was to lower a large light into the opening and illuminate the cistern from above. That way, he could avoid giving away his position.

"Is Miss Malone ready?" asked Smith.

Brooks nodded. "She's at the station."

Smith looked down the hole again. He could smell faint ammonium through the open window on the front of the helmet. He would leave it open unless he had to submerge.

"Why not just use the grenades to flush it out?" asked Brooks for the third time that night.

"It might work, but there are a lot of places down there that it can hide. They're four other cisterns like this one. If we drive it here, I think we stop it. We need to know it's down there." Smith waved at the police officers.

They walked over and helped him into the manhole. Four men grasped the end of the rope to lower him down, while Broderick kept him from

bashing into the sides. Smith looked up as his helmeted head went past the opening. Brooks was staring down at him, shaking his head.

It wasn't his best plan. But Smith knew he could kill the beast. The stun it got from his drained batteries showed him that it could be caught unawares. The loss of the tentacle showed that it could be severely wounded.

Last time he'd been caught off-guard with an undercharged suit and just one clip in the Gatling gun. The plan had been to use the harpoon gun, but that had gone sour the moment Flintwick and Dobbins unloaded the barrels of their shotguns on him as he drove by. This time he had better tools and a team of men ready to pull him to the surface. Most important, he had the remarkable Miss Malone standing by.

He felt his boots dip into the water. They'd measured the water depth at four feet using a rock tied to a piece of cord. That would put it at his upper abdomen once he finished his descent.

His toes touched the bottom of the cistern. Smith gave them a thumbs-up and the police officers fed him some slack. Broderick lowered the lantern down to illuminate the chamber, shaking his head and muttering.

Smith backed up to the curved back wall so he could see every spot. The lantern threw off more light than his head lamps did the last time. He could see the surface of the water more clearly. It still looked like a vast ocean of black ink, but details were easier to make out.

He could see tiny ripples from floating debris but no tell-tale signs of the creature. Remembering how it disturbed the waterline like swirling liquid in a wineglass, he searched the walls for any motion. Nothing.

Smith checked the cables attached to his body and made sure the right lights were lit up on the panel on his chest. He gave the all-clear to the men on the surface.

Broderick said something to Brooks and then Smith heard a pop followed by a red flash that illuminated the fog above the manhole cover.

A moment after the flare went up, he heard the first grenade go off. Its boom echoed down the tunnels. A second later another one went off at the opposite end of the city. Starting from the far ends, they were intended to startle the beast toward the center of the city to the main drainpipe and through the cistern Smith was standing in.

More explosions went off and the entire sewer system sounded like a battle in hell. Smith had packed some rags into the helmet to help deaden the noise, but it still rattled the brass shell like a bell. Distant memories of cannon fire floated through his mind like a fog.

There was no doubt the beast knew something was afoot. The question was whether it would go past Smith and try to leave the sewer system, hopefully getting skewered by one of the whalers at the exits, find some other place to hide or come for him.

His eyes darted to the left as he saw a wave come rolling into the cistern.

24

Three blocks away, Sgt. Robertson looked down the manhole cover into the void below. His arm dangled a lantern in the depths, casting a dim yellow glow on the walls of the sewer. The newly minted Sgt. Miles watched on, his palms sweaty on the shotgun he held.

"Sergeant, I don't know if that's wise," said the nervous young man.

"Mind the end of the gun, Miles. Keep your eye on the street. Make sure no early risers are out for a stroll."

Miles turned his head to look at the street. His own lantern was at his feet, next to the fire ax, projecting his shadow into the fog like a phantom. "Sorry about the grenade. I thought it was like the ones I used in the Army."

"Misfires happen, son. It was a naval issue. No bother." Robertson was trying to see where it had landed. Each two-man unit had been given a grenade to drop into the sewer. They were a naval type used to cause concussion blasts. They didn't fragment and were intended to not blow up the entire Boston sewer system.

"I'd feel a bit easier if you moved away from there, sir," said Miles as he watched Robertson lean more of his body into the dark hole.

"I need to see where it landed. I can't have some poor city worker stumble onto it. Just mind the street," said Roberts. He thought he saw

something bobbing up and down in the water as the waves from the other blasts passed by underneath them. "Mind passing me your ...." Robertson jerked around when he heard the sound of boot heels drag on the cobblestone.

Miles was gone.

Robertson ran to where he'd last seen the young man. He saw a faint shape being pulled to the gutter. He kicked the lantern in that direction. The light rolled across the ground and cracked open as it hit the edge of the sidewalk. Fuel dripped out and made a puddle of flames. In the flickering light, he saw a tentacle like the one on the desk at the station, wrapped around the younger man's head. Miles' hands struggled at the slimy mass.

Robertson pulled out his revolver but couldn't get a clear shot that wouldn't hit one of Miles' flailing limbs. His boot touched the ax. He picked it up and ran to the edge of the gutter in back of the tentacle as it slowly retreated into the sewer.

The sergeant raised the ax above his head and slammed the sharp blade into the creature's flesh. Dark yellow liquid sprayed out at him. He smelled the pungent scent of ammonium. The limb quivered but didn't release Miles. Instead, it flung him flat to the ground and tried to retract more quickly.

Robertson swung the ax into a new spot as the last wound retreated under the sidewalk. He struck again and again. More fluid sprayed over him. The creature's grasp slackened and Miles let out a scream as he tried to get more air.

Robertson caught a glimpse of his face as the tentacle tried to re-grip him. Blood poured from punctures where the claw had bit into his head and shoulders. Robertson struck again and threw his whole weight into the blow. The ax blade hit cobblestone as it half severed the limb.

There was a violent spasm and then it flung Miles away. The beast pulled its tentacle back into the gutter. Robertson brought his face down to

look where it had gone. In the back of his mind he remembered the story the old sailor had told them in the police station as they prepared for the night's work.

Robertson rolled away from the gutter as quickly as he could. He pried the shotgun from the shocked Miles' hands and aimed it at the other side of the street. He saw something whip toward him. He lost his balance as it pulled at his leg.

He could feel the cobblestone running across his spine like stone knuckles as it dragged him to the gutter. With his free hand he undid the strap that held his artificial leg to his body. The tentacle whipped it away. Robertson fired the shotgun.

There was a loud slap as the other tentacle, the one that had come at them from the gutter on the other side while he hacked away, smacked into the street with fury. Robertson pumped the gun again and fired at the dark shape in the fog as it reached up again. It pulled back, and he could hear a splashing sound from the manhole below. Robertson rolled back over to the hole and peered down. It was right below him.

He pulled his service revolver from his side and aimed downward. He fired at the bottle-shaped object that bobbed up and down. He rolled away as soon as he squeezed the trigger. He heard a loud pop and felt a blast of hot air and smoke rush out of the manhole as the grenade went off.

There was the sound of thrashing and then silence as the creature skulked off.

Robertson crawled over to Miles and looked at his wounds. The young man's face was soaked in blood. Teeth were visible from a gash in his cheek. A puncture by his collarbone gushed red. Robertson squeezed it while he pulled a knife from his pocket to slice his shirt into bandages.

He called for help and then bound Miles' shoulder as tightly as he could.

"Howz zbad," said the young man. Blood whistled out of the side of his mouth as he spoke.

"Seen worse. Good thing you're married," said Robertson.

"Waz zat?" asked Miles.

"Ain't nobody gonna want to marry you now after they see your face."

Miles tried to laugh. It came out in a gurgle.

"Easy there. We'll get you patched up." You'll have a nice scar to impress the people on your beat.

"Didth thwe geth ith?"

Robertson shook his head. "Wounded it a bit. But mostly I think we made it really, really mad."

25

Smith watched the wave glide into the chamber. He resisted the urge to fire. This was the concussion from the grenades they'd dropped into the sewers. He'd failed to account for that. The agitated water was going to make it harder to tell when the beast actually entered.

He'd have to remain still and wait. Smith stared into the dark chamber and looked at the four entrances. He was certain it would be passing through there soon enough. That was if it hadn't already passed by him.

Smith decided to deal with one problem at a time. His eye caught a tiny flicker of movement several feet above the water level. A small rat stood on a one-inch ledge where bricks gave way to concrete. It lifted up on its hind legs and sniffed the air.

"Care to tell me what you smell?" whispered Smith.

"Pardon me?" answered Broderick's crackly voice over the telephone line they'd run from the street above into the suit.

"Quiet, I'm talking to a rat," said Smith.

The rat decided it didn't like what it smelled and vanished around a corner. Smith thought about recommending a nice pile of dead animal flesh to it and then he heard a thrashing sound in the junction entrance to his right. The creature was near.

"Miss Malone, are you there?" he asked.

"Ready and waiting," her faint voice replied on the party line.

There was more thrashing and the sound of gunfire.

"What was that?" asked Smith.

"Brooks is sending some men to go look," answered Broderick.

"Tell them to be careful. I think it's under where the gunfire came from."

"Aye," answered Broderick.

Smith turned his body toward the right entrance. That was going to be the spot the creature would be coming through. Would it stay? Or would it keep going?

If it wanted to keep moving, there was little Smith could do to stop it. Maybe it would get skewered by the harpoons in the pier. Maybe it would find some other corner to hide. Smith hated uncertainty. He pushed away from the back wall and treaded water toward the center of the cistern.

He reached the middle and faced down the tunnel from which he'd heard the splashing and gunfire. The surest way to solve this particular elliptical problem was to disrupt the equation.

A large wave splashed against his chest as he heard more thrashing. Off in the distance he could see the faint sparks from a gun as it fired. There was a flash of light and an explosion as a grenade exploded. The silhouette of the squid was burned in his eyes as the orange ball of fire erupted.

Having spent the last half-hour trying to get his eyes acclimated to the dark, the flash of light blinded him. Smith closed them shut in vain. It would take a minute for them to adjust again well enough to see any kind of detail.

He felt a surge of water on his chest as something pushed its way through the tunnel. Smith gripped the Gatling gun and waited for it to run into him. To shoot blindly into the dark, or even just a few feet away through water, would have little effect. Not that his last encounter gave him any confidence in the device's stopping power on a creature like this.

Smith braced himself and pushed one foot forward so he wouldn't be easily toppled over.

There was a surge of water.

The beast slammed into his chest and knocked the wind out of him. Smith squeezed the trigger. The Gatling gun sent a barrage of bullets into the animal as it continued to push Smith backward.

He emptied the entire gun into the creature's husk. It kept charging forward. Smith's feet slipped entirely. He reached out with one hand and grasped the animal's slick flesh. With his other, he activated the motorized spear point and began punching into the animal's thick skin.

Still blinded, Smith could feel thick, viscous blood erupt and spray him in the face through the open window of the suit. It tasted foul. He spat it out and kept pulverizing the creature with his right hand. He knew it had little more effect than a tattoo needle on a fat man's arse.

The purpose was to annoy the beast. Smith felt the wall slam into him as the creature pinned him to it. He couldn't understand the tactic until he felt a tentacle slap against the side of his head. It hit so hard he had a metal taste in his mouth.

For the first time in a minute, he could see vague shapes in the lantern light. He could make out the claws of the tentacle as they scratched on the helmet and clung to the inner edge of the window.

Suddenly, he was pulled out of the water by the beast.

"My god!" shouted Broderick over the telephone connection as he watched from above.

"Quiet, please," said Smith in a voice far more confident than he was feeling.

His body was slapped against the water. Another tentacle reached around his legs. Smith could see the orange glowing eyes. They were getting closer.

The beak made a cracking sound as it opened. Smith was pulled under water. He tried to slam the window shut but the claw from the tentacle stopped it from closing. He held his breath as water poured into the suit. His hand managed to turn on the lantern light attached to the side of the helmet not covered by the tentacle.

Through the opening, he could see the razor-sharp tongue flick back and forth. Smith's abdomen was pulled toward the beak. It gnashed down to tear into his stomach.

Smith punched at the side of the beak with his harpoon point on his left glove and activated the reciprocating action. The serrated point punctured the hard casing, ripping into it.

He reached out with his right hand and brought the other motorized blade into the beak and began to saw it off. The creature convulsed. It was confused by how he was resisting.

The light from above faded as the creature used all of its remaining tentacles to pull him in. They closed in on Smith like a plant trapping an insect. The beast's tongue extended from its mouth and scraped across the metal chest plate.

"Contact, Miss Malone!" shouted Smith.

THREE MILES AWAY, at the streetcar electric power station, April Malone turned from the receiver and shouted to the men standing next to the two 10,000 horsepower Edison Dynamos.

"NOW!" she shouted.

The men nodded and pulled two massive switches.

One hundred thousand volts raced at the speed of light from the station, down three miles of overheard street car lines, to the bypass above the open manhole cover and down a thick rubberized cable that led to an electrical junction on Smith's suit.

As shielded as he was by the rubber suit he wore and the grounding cable, Smith felt an intense shock as he sent the bulk of the current into the creature about to devour him.

The animal shook violently. Its tentacle shot away from him like fingers exploding open. Smith punched a fist into a thick section near where one of the tentacles met the body and continued feeding electricity into it. The bright orange globe-like eyes stared into his own. He could see them begin to boil. The creature vibrated as its entire nervous system quivered from the electrical impulse.

The tongue stopped trying to lash at his chest and came to a stop. A blue electric arc ran from its tongue to Smith's metal body. Smith shoved his left fist into the scaly surface of it and continued to unleash the full force of the dynamos. Over the telephone set, Miss Malone was trying to tell him something, but there was too much interference from the massive amounts of current.

The water filled with black ink as the creature lost control of its own body. The right eye exploded, shooting a spray of strange orange liquid out of the fissure.

Smith got to his feet and stood upright. He started punching the beast with his gloved fist, pushing spear points of electricity into its body. He could smell the scent of burning flesh.

The crackle of the current finally died as the overheated dynamos gave out.

Smith didn't know what counted as "dead" for an animal like this. So he used the remaining power in his suit to saw off the limbs with his powered blades. Broderick leaned his head in from above and watched as Smith moved from limb to limb, cutting them from the body. The reciprocating blades on his wrists sawed into the flesh. Yellow fluid spilled into the chamber as Smith turned it into an abattoir.

"I think it's dead, son," shouted Broderick.

Smith ignored him and kept carving at the body. Tentacles occasionally spasmed and lashed out as it slowly gave up the ghost. Finally, Smith finished.

A crowd of heads peered down from the manhole and looked at Smith's handiwork. Handkerchiefs covered their mouths as they tried to avoid the stench.

There were twelve limbs in all. Two of them had already been lopped off at the tips. Six of the others were just as thick and potent as them. The other four had no obvious function other than grasping for sex or pulling apart smaller prey.

When he was satisfied, Smith finally looked up. His eyes were stinging from the effect of the ammonium. "I think it's dead."

Capt. Brooks leaned over and looked down at him. He looked at the severed limbs bobbing in the water and the still-smoking corpse. "I think that's an accurate assessment."

26

The locomotive pulled only three cars through the forest. From his window in the passenger car, Lindestrom observed as the engineer brought it to a halt, hopped on to the tracks and pulled a lever switching tracks from the main line to a side track. The boilers fired up again and the train began its journey through several miles of the thick trees that covered the private estate in upstate New York.

Lindestrom massaged his aching knuckles. His stomach was a pit of despair.

A short round man was waiting at the small private depot when the train pulled in. Lindestrom stepped from the train and looked at the man with some hesitation.

"Is it on here?" said Doyle, gesturing to the sealed freight cars.

Lindestrom nodded. "Packed on ice. Ready to be sent to the conservatory."

The shorter man nodded. "I read your reports. Interesting. We have some buyers for the beak and claws. There's some interest in the ink, too. Some think we might be able to find a nasty poison in there. Perhaps something untraceable."

Lindestrom's interests were more medical than diabolical, despite his own machinations. "I think the blood should be of particular interest. The creature can go long periods in freezing temperatures and still manage to pump blood to its heart and not freeze."

"Maybe that's your man from Boston's secret, too? Something in the blood?"

Lindestrom couldn't tell if Doyle was joking or not. The round little man was far more clever than he let on. "I'm beginning to believe that his methods are something other than what I've suspected. His use of gadgetry and science has made me think its time to take another approach." Lindestrom hoped that he could still prove useful to his employers. People who were no longer of service to them had a habit of either vanishing or becoming the subjects of unpleasant experiments themselves.

Doyle reached into his pocket and pulled out an envelope. "You know they don't like exposure. The mess in Boston was most unpleasant. Some think you're getting too arrogant, treating rich dowagers and barging into police stations trying to buffalo them into trapping the man, so you can poke around his basements. Clumsy." He pointed a stubby finger at the freight car. "Letting one of these get loose was a mistake."

Lindestrom's eyes narrowed. "While I'll accept part of the blame for that, the real cause was the late Mr. Reece. Who, I might remind, was assigned to me by them." Lindestrom tilted his head in the direction of the huge mansion hidden by the trees. "His methods were not my own. I had to deal with the aftermath. As far as the man in Boston is concerned, it seemed prudent to act on the opportunity." His eyes drifted down to the envelope.

Doyle shook his head. "It's going to take a while before the repercussions of what they found in your basement die down. It's been decided that your skills could be better put to use elsewhere."

"Such as?" asked Lindestrom.

Doyle tapped the edge of the envelope into his palm. "There's a German chemist who has been doing some interesting experiments with gases. There are some obvious military applications. Unlike bullets, gas can find a soldier in a trench. We need someone to run the laboratory outside of Graz. We're curious of the effects some of these gases may have on human anatomy."

"I'm not interested in making weapons, Mr. Doyle," said Lindestrom in a terse voice. "I am a doctor, after all. My concern has always been life."

Doyle stepped toward him and poked a finger into Lindestrom's chest. "Your concern should be life, Dr. Lindestrom, continuing to have one. You're not in a position right now to make requests. Personally, I think they're being far too lenient with you."

Lindestrom realized that matters were as bad as he feared. He had no choice. He nodded to the man. His eyes drifted toward the road that led to the tall mansion. Inside its curtained windows were men he knew as little about as he did Smith. He feared them more than anything else.

Doyle handed him the envelope. "Tickets and passport."

Lindestrom held the envelope in his hand like it was a sentence from a judge. Gone was the high life of Boston society where he got to enjoy all the privileges of being a prestigious physician catering to the wealthy and often lonely.

"Don't be so glum. While you were focusing all of your attention on the man himself, others were looking elsewhere and made more headway than you have in the last several years. We've managed to obtain the records of all of the supply houses that we know have been making regular shipments to the man in Boston."

This was new to Lindestrom. "What of it?"

"Some of those components can be used to make gases like the ones our clients are interested in for use on the battlefield and for certain, let's say, 'hygienic' purposes. Our German scientist has a theory that I think you

might find intriguing. He thinks that certain gas mixtures might be used to not stop but slow down the body's biological functions."

"You mean like hibernation?" asked Lindestrom.

Doyle smiled. "A perfectly biologically rational explanation for our man in Boston, wouldn't you say? A chamber perhaps of some special mixture?"

Lindestrom's weary face lit up. His life had been dedicated to dissecting and figuring out how creatures obtained their special evolutionary advantage. Now, he was present for an alternative explanation for the apparently preternatural man who called himself Smith.

"How soon may I leave?" he asked, eager to get as much distance from the mansion as possible.

27

April watched as Smith sat at his desk and placed a piece of cardstock into his interpreter. He used a small brass tool to punch notches into it in different places.

"My mistake," he started, "was my assumption about what we were looking for."

"How do you mean?" asked April.

"I jumped to a conclusion a little bit too hastily when I saw the pins on the map."

"Did I do something wrong?"

Smith shook his head. "No. Not at all. The way you laid them out told us it was almost a certainty we were looking at an animal. I gave you a vial of ammonium because I suspected we were dealing with something of the sea. Initially I thought it was some kind of amphibian that felt comfortable in the fog -- the thick fog ruled out most land animals because few things would want to hunt out in it, except the two-legged kind, of course."

"I'm not following you," said April. "What was your mistake?"

"It's why I had to kill it that night." Smith looked up from his brass machine. "That wasn't a hunting pattern as I assumed. That was a nesting pattern."

"How so?"

"When I was down in the sewer, I didn't realize it at first, but the creature was acting very territorial. The pattern of pins was what you would expect from a creature seeking out prey in a limited area and not a hunter ranging far and wide. I wanted a hunter. I saw a hunter. This thing was about to give birth to more creatures. Creatures born in the sewers and about to be taught how to feed off of what lived above."

April thought about Broderick's story. "Broderick said that when Lindestrom's man, Reece, dissected the mate, he found eggs. So they weren't a breeding pair?"

"In some sea animals the male can carry the eggs. These things, however, appeared to be hermaphroditic. At least the one I dissected. It could be something that turns on or off. Either way, when I carved it apart, I found the egg sack. They looked fairly well along. There were hundreds of them."

April shuddered at the thought of hundreds of those monsters loose in the sewer. "My goodness. What of Lindestrom?"

"He collects things, he and his masters. The more exotic, the better. The poor creature we dispatched was just one more victim."

"Poor creature?" asked April. She stole a glance at the metal door she knew he was about to step behind. She wanted to stall him with questions.

"What would you have done had someone killed something you love? Let it go?" replied Smith.

"Is that what the creature felt for the other? It seems like a rather alien emotion for such a beast," said April. She'd watched as the men from MIT packed it up in preservatives to bury away in some basement.

"Love, passion. They all have the same roots. Who knows what kind of bond the animals felt. What we call love is an emotion that began millions of years ago. We didn't invent it. We named it, refined it, perhaps." He pulled the card free and gave it a flick with his finger to knock free any

punches that were still clinging to it and fed it into a slot in his desk. He turned a handle and looked up at April, who had been sitting across from him at her desk, staring at him.

"Don't look so forlorn, Miss Malone. I'm sure they'll catch up with Dr. Lindestrom after what they found in the basement of his apothecary shop. Human remains from the pauper's cemetery. How grotesque." Smith placed another card into his interpreter and began notching holes.

April gave him a skeptical look. "I'm sure you and Mr. Broderick had nothing to do with that."

"Miss Malone, I'm shocked by the accusation." He looked back at the punch card. "Only returning what he'd bought. Fool."

"Will you be attending the service for the people they found in its gullet?"

Smith shook his head. "I've seen enough death."

"I think they'd like to see the hero who killed it," she said.

"And they will, Miss Malone. You. If you hadn't ventured down after me and shot the umbrella at it, I never would have made it out alive, and we'd have had no proof to show what was down there. And it was you that figured out how to stop it." He looked back up at her. "You really are quite remarkable."

April looked away, hiding her blush.

Something mechanical made a sound from within Smith's desk. A card popped out. He held it up and looked at it in the light of the gas lamp. He shook his head.

"Is the matter still unresolved? Your elliptical problem?" she asked.

"The current one is righted. But one of the longer-term ones, the reason this all began, sadly, no."

April tried to read his face. He talked in circles without trying. "I see."

He leaned back in his chair. "I know I must be a cipher to you, Miss Malone. Tell you what, I trust you and your integrity, ask me anything you

like. Any question at all and you'll have the truth. You've certainly earned it."

April looked at the metal door and then back at him. She stared directly at him with her piercing blue eyes. "Will I ever see you again?"

Smith took in a breath and then looked down at his hands. "Yes. Yes, Miss Malone." He sunk down in his seat and looked toward the window. "But don't wait for me."

He pushed another card into his desk and waited for it to spit it back out. The two of them sat in silence. The card finally returned, and he crumpled it up and threw it on the floor. He placed his elbows on his desk and rubbed his temples as he stared at the interpreter.

"This isn't what I've chosen for myself," he said softly. "It's not what I wanted, not this way." Smith stood up and walked over to the metal door and pulled it open.

April left her desk to hold it open.

Smith gave her a grin. "Until next time, Miss Malone."

She reached out and pulled him by the collar and placed a kiss on his cheek, leaving a bright red blotch of lipstick. "Until next time."

They both looked away, embarrassed.

The door closed behind him and locking mechanisms whirred into place. April stood there for a while with her hand on the door.

AFTER FIVE MONTHS, she'd stopped looking at the metal door every day when she sat in the office. She continued her work, filling the coffee pot, getting pastries that would be thrown out, reading, filing and all the other things that were part of her routine. She had a better idea how important those trivial bits of knowledge were, so she filed them all away, even the most mundane things. Smith had showed her how even the smallest detail could have grave importance.

Sometimes she could feel machinery below the floorboards come alive. She'd look at the three light bulbs above the door, hoping they would come on. But they didn't. Sometimes she pressed her ear to the door trying to listen for anything beyond it. Once she thought, but only fleetingly, that she could hear the sound of a child's laughter.

She found time to continue acting. Although it wasn't anything she wanted to pursue beyond a hobby. She was cast in a local production and took the role when she was convinced it wouldn't conflict with her working hours.

It was a small production by a local playwright. By what seemed a coincidence, Sgt. Robertson was cast as the male lead. April played his outspoken daughter. Most nights the house was half empty, but the players gave it their best no matter how small the crowd.

On closing night, she looked out into the crowd as the cast members took their bows and she thought she saw a familiar face. As soon as the curtain went up, she raced out of the theater still in her costume to the street outside.

She saw a figure walking down the dark side of the street and ran up to him. The man heard her footsteps and turned around.

"Oh hello, Miss Malone," said Mr. Coen. "You startled me."

April looked around the street. Other than the crowd waiting for carriages under the light of the marquee, there was no one else there. "Hello, Mr. Coen," she said out of breath. "I'm delighted you could make it."

"You were wonderful."

Robertson, continuing his paternal role, caught up with her. He looked over at Mr. Coen and nodded.

"Well, good evening," said Coen. He smiled and then continued walking down the sidewalk.

"Are you all right, April?" asked Robertson.

"Yes. Yes I'm fine."

Robertson gave her a knowing look. He put a hand on her shoulder and guided her back to the theater. April stole another glance behind her. All she could see was Coen fading into the dark.

"I shouldn't be telling you this, and don't ask me how I know," said Robertson with a wink. "But I think Mr. Coen is the benefactor that paid for our play."

"Benefactor?" said April.

"Didn't you know? One week into rehearsals and someone stepped forward to make sure we got a full run in a nice theater. Not that second-rate vaudeville shack they do the other plays in. Nice man, that Mr. Coen." Robertson waved to a woman waiting under the marquee.

EPILOGUE

Two months later, April felt the floor vibrating below her. She resisted the urge to put her ear next to the door. She continued reading the copy of National Geographic that had arrived for her.

She turned a page and read with genuine interest about a race of cannibals on the island of Borneo. Out of the corner of her eye she saw the first red light turn on.

April forgot to breath.

The second light came on.

April hesitantly stood up and straightened her dress. She looked down at her feet to make sure she was wearing proper shoes this time.

The third light came on.

From behind the door came a clicking sound as sliding rods unlocked. The door slowly swung open, revealing darkness beyond. April touched her hair to make sure it was in place.

Footsteps ran up the stairs.

A shape emerged from the shadows and a disheveled Smith emerged. He bolted into the room and his eyes locked on hers and he smiled. April put a hand to her mouth. Her cheeks felt on fire.

He read the card in his hand. "Hello! Er, it says here that my name is Smith." He looked at her with a hopeful look. "Have we met?"

April noticed the lipstick mark on his cheek. It was in the same place where she'd last kissed him goodbye.

"Oh dear," said Smith. "Are you all right Miss ...?"

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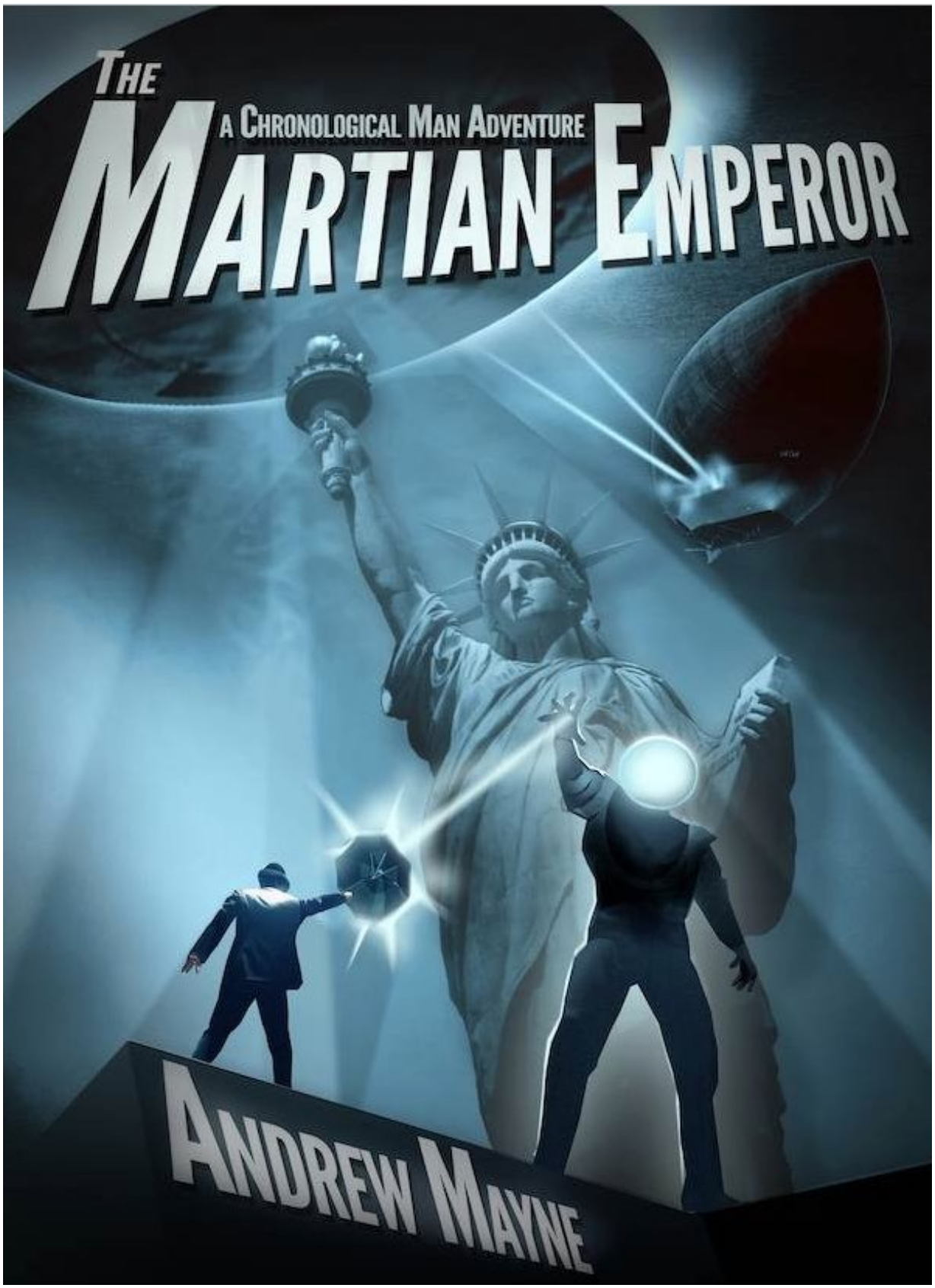
THE
A CHRONOLOGICAL MAN ADVENTURE
MARTIAN EMPEROR
ANDREW MAYNE

Author's Note

The events described here were among the first of a series of ‘Airship Hysteria’ panics leading into the decade preceding World War I. Due to the embarrassing nature of what happened, both to government and major newspaper chains, the entire event was written off as a hoax. At the express request of the Secretary of War, details and information were excised from public archives to protect vital U.S. Military interests.

A.M.

New York City, Central Park 1892

POLICE SERGEANT ROBERT NELSON was in the middle of a dream where everything was green when the telephone rang in the downstairs lounge of the boarding house he lived in with a half-dozen other bachelors. Never having much use for the infernal devices, he put a pillow over his head and did his best to ignore the annoying bell.

He was surprised at how well the pillow worked until he realized that someone else had picked up the telephone. All the better. If only he could get the pillow over his eyes to block out the bright green moonlight glowing from behind his window shade.

The stairs creaked as someone came walking upstairs. Nelson pulled the pillow tighter over his head, hoping that it would act as a talisman to prevent the inevitable knock on his door.

Mr. Granger, owner of the boarding house, rapped on the door with his familiar three and one knock. Nelson wanted to ignore it. He contemplated for a moment pretending to not be there, but he knew Granger saw him come in for the night. A call at this hour could only mean the incompetents at the police sub-station had managed to lock themselves in the holding jail or do some other foolish deed.

He let out a grunt, informing Mr. Granger that he was headed down to the telephone. The footsteps retreated down the hall and Nelson pulled himself out of bed. He regretted the double-night cap the moment he stood up.

“What is it?” Nelson said into the receiver.

“Ssssorry to disturb you sir.”

Nelson rolled his eyes. It was the nitwit Winfield. Nelson had been told that he only stammered in his presence, but wasn't sure if that was a put-on or not. "What is it Lieutenant?"

"It's, it's about the the the light sir."

"The light? What are you talking about?"

"We've been getting hundreds, hundreds of calls sir."

"What light?"

"The light over Central Park. The green, the green light."

Recognition seeped into Nelson's mind. The green moonlight. He couldn't remember that ever happening before. "What am I supposed to do about the light? Call an astronomer."

"People, people, say it's getting closer."

"Closer?"

"Closer," Winfield repeated.

"How close?"

"People are calling to say they think it's landing."

"Landing? What am I supposed to do about that? Call central."

"They called us. They said the Mayor called them. His sister can't, can't sleep."

"Fine. Fine. Meet me at the east entrance. I'm two blocks away."

Nelson put the receiver back in the cradle and shook his head. He went back upstairs and donned his police uniform over his pajamas and tucked his revolver into his belt. He wasn't worried about the light as much as the low-lifes and drifters that tended to use the park as a kind of shanty town when nobody was looking.

As he walked out the front door he could clearly see the bright green light. His first reaction was that it was some kind of balloon lit with electrics. As he grew closer he could see that it appeared metallic and was shaped like a pie plate. The green light emanated from several portholes around the circumference of the whatever it was.

Nelson didn’t know what to make of it. He just kept walking towards the park and staring up at the sky. He nearly tripped crossing the street when his foot got caught in the gutter. When he made it to the east entrance, Winfield and Lieutenant Haywood were waiting for him, as were several hundred other people who’d gathered at that late hour to see what the light was. Most of them had dressing gowns and robes thrown over night clothes.

Winfield and Haywood were keeping people out of the park. Nelson walked over to the entrance and stared up at the thing. It was now now just a few dozen yards above the ground, just over the tree tops.

Nelson looked at Winfield. The man returned the look, expecting him to explain everything.

Nelson turned around. The crowd was silent, but waiting for him to do something.

“It’s, it’s like something put of one of those Jules Verne novels.”

Nelson grunted. He had no idea what Winfield was talking about. “I guess I should I have a closer look.” He hesitated, hoping that someone else would have a better idea. When nobody spoke up, he entered the park.

He kept his eyes on the green thing as he walked across the grass meadow. As he grew closer he could make out rivets and seems in the hull. It had to be some kind of flying contraption he decided. But whose?

He stomach began to feel a bit unsettled as he thought about the possibility of it being some kind of war machine. Perhaps a submarine of the sky?

He reached down to tap the edge of his holster when his foot hit something. There was a loud scream. Nelson fumbled with the catch to pull his gun free. Several shapes low to the ground came running past him, all of them making bleating-like sounds.

As his gun came free he realized they weren’t making bleating-like sounds, they were bleating; because they were sheep. The flying machine

was hovering over the sheep's meadow in the park. They in turn all decided at the same time that it was a good idea to leave.

Nelson put his gun back in his holster, although he wasn't sure if the sheep had the right idea after all.

He reached the edge of the clearing where the strange object was now hovering only a few dozen yards off the ground.

Now what? Nelson wasn't quite sure what his civic duties were at this point. Should he shout at it? Ask them to leave? Ask who to leave?

Almost in answer to his question, a large shaft of light poured out of the underside of the craft. The buzzing sound he realized that he'd heard all the way back at the boarding house had grown louder. Something was happening.

He hoped it wasn't a bad thing, but couldn't imagine a good thing happening under these circumstances.

The light shut off below the craft. Something now stood underneath it.

Nelson thought it was another strange device at first, then it moved. Only loosely man-shaped, it was definitely not man-sized. And it was carrying something massive in its arms.

The strange man had to be nine feet tall by Nelson's reckoning. It had two arms, two very long legs that ended in heavy boots. For a head it had a large red globe that seemed to be filled with red gas. It looked kind of like a deep sea diving suit, with the exception of the single globe for a helmet.

Nelson was still trying to figure out what he was looking at before he realized it was walking towards him. He wanted to run away. He touched the holster of his gun again and flipped open the catch.

"Stop right where you are!" Nelson shouted.

The strange man kept walking towards him.

"Stop or I'll shoot!" Nelson raised his gun on the strange man.

"PUT AWAY YOUR WEAPON, EARTHLING!" A loud voice echoed across the meadow.

Nelson gripped the gun with both hands.

A blinding flash of blue light shot into his eyes. Something knocked him over. When he looked up the strange man was towering over him. He raised his gun to fire then noticed the barrel was bent ninety degrees to the side.

The strange man turned the large grey object he was carrying and set it down at Nelson’s feet. It made a loud thud and sank into the grass.

“WE BRING YOU GREETINGS FROM THE MARTIAN EMPEROR!”

Nelson couldn’t tell if the sound was coming from the strange man or the craft above his head. He looked at the metal slab that was now standing at his feet. It was covered in writing.

The strange man who had placed it there turned and walked back towards the center of the meadow under the vessel. A cone of light surrounded him and then he was gone.

The buzzing sound grew louder. The craft began to lift. Nelson watched as it floated into the sky then vanished.

He was alone in the dark meadow with the metal slab. Too dark to read what was written on it, he could only make out its silhouette against the stars of the sky.

He had no idea what just happened, but was pretty sure it was important. He screamed when he felt something touch his ear. His heart tried to beat its way through his chest. He relaxed when he heard the familiar munching sound of the sheep eating grass.

2

THE SLEEPER

April Malone looked into the face of the strange man standing in the middle of the office. Their eyes were locked. Her lips were apart, frozen in mid-utterance as she was about to remind the man of her name. He'd shushed her and insisted that she give him the chance to remember it.

He'd only moments before emerged from the mysterious vault-like door behind which he spent months – perhaps years – doing god knows what. April had seen him emerge only once before, the first time they'd met. He'd been experiencing a kind of amnesia then as well. He couldn't remember then if he'd ever met her.

This time he could tell in an instant when he saw the crestfallen look upon her face when he'd emerged and asked, "Have we met?"

It would have been an innocent question if Smith hadn't been the most extraordinary person she'd ever met and taken her on an equally extraordinary adventure. The question was like a hairpin in her heart. His face was helpless. The moment the question left his own lips, he saw her reaction and regretted it. April's reaction would have gone from surprise to hurt if he hadn't followed up the question with a quick addendum.

"You seem like a very special person," he said, followed by fumbling in his pocket for a white notecard. "It says my name is Smith. But you already

know that.” His nose caught the scent of fresh pastries and coffee and jerked to the service trolley she’d set them out upon. His feet took him there, yet he never broke eye contact with April as his hands forced creme-filled dough-nuts and eclairs into his mouth.

April reached a thumb out to his cheek and wiped away a crust of white sugar powder.

Smith smiled, “Where are my manners!” He held a jelly dough-nut out to her.

April waved it off. His child-like innocence was hard to stay angry at. She knew he couldn’t help his condition, at least she thought he couldn’t help it. She still wasn’t quite sure what the cause was or if it even had anything to do with his long absences.

“Miss…” Smith started the sentence hoping her name would come to him as he the syllables rolled off his tongue, to no avail. He looked at his card again then turned to the desk at the right side of the room. “I have a feeling that we’re supposed to do something very important…”

“I think…”

“No, don’t tell me your name. Please. Let the fog clear.” He sat down at the desk and turned a crank. “Here we go. I think that’s doing something.”

“You…”

“Please, Miss. Let me think of it.”

April closed her mouth and watched as Smith continued to turn the crank. He ignored the blue punch card in the middle of the desk. He was supposed to place that into the brass slot, or at least that was the way it worked the last time he sat down at the contraption.

Smith turned the handle a for a minute then looked at the desk confused. “It appears to be broken.”

April cleared her throat and looked at the blue card.

“Oh of course! How silly of me,” said Smith. He smiled and picked up the card. He stared at it in his hand unsure of what to do next. “Whoops,

looks like a got a bit of jam on there.” Smith wiped the red glob off the corner. He absentmindedly licked his finger as he held the card up to the gas light. “Hate to foul up the works with a bit of jelly.” He continued to stare at the card.

April raised an eyebrow.

“All right Miss Malone, tell me what I’m supposed to do with the card, but please don’t tell me you name. Sometimes it could take days, or never come to me at all. Please don’t be hurt.”

April shook her head. “The slot. Place it into the slot on the desk.”

“Yes, of course!” Smith leaned over the desk and fed the card into the brass slot then began to turn the crank. He looked up at her and smiled as he turned it then looked back down at the desk when it began to make a mechanical sound. “I just said your name, didn’t I?”

“Yes.”

The desk made a bell sound. “How extraordinary.”

April walked over to the desk and looked down. The dials were still spinning.

Smith gazed up at her and smiled. “I don’t normally remember names so quickly. At least I don’t remember remembering them.” The dials stopped spinning. A card spit out of the slot in the middle of the desk. Smith pulled it out and slid it into a metal device and started to slide metal plates back and forth over it. “This will take just a second, Judith.”

Judith? April’s smile vanished.

“That was very clever what you did with the canon on the pirate scow. Always a quick thinker.” Smith made a few notes on a sheet of paper and continued to be oblivious.

“Who’s Judith?” April tried to make the question flat and neutral, as if it was just a matter of small talk.

“Judith is dead,” Smith looked up. “Why did you bring her up?” His face looked hurt.

“I…” April wasn’t sure what to say. “I misunderstood you.”

“Yes. I’m sure things are quite confusing. I feel especially foggy today. I can’t quite seem to get this contraption to work. I’d like to ring the neck of whoever built it, but I suspect that it’s me. I’m certain there’s something very urgent for us to deal with.”

“Smith, perhaps,” April started.

“Now, now, Miss…Miss. Damn it. In a moment.” He was frustrated that he forgot her name again. “Very foggy. I had the strangest dream about a sewer and a giant squid. A squid in fresh water! How peculiar.”

“Sounds interesting,” April mumbled.

“Quite. If it wasn’t for the most extraordinary young woman, I would have met my end. Amazing girl. Very intelligent. Quite pretty. If only she…” Smith looked up at April’s blushing cheeks. “Oh my.”

If only she? April wanted to know where the sentence finished.

“I don’t mean to carry-on about another young woman like that. I don’t know if that’s presently rude or not. No matter. Miss, are you alright? You look a bit flushed.”

April turned around and walked over to her desk and picked up the newspaper that had been sitting on it since Smith burst into the room.

Smith looked up from the contraption as April dropped the paper onto his desk. “I’ll take a look at it later. In the mean time I have to figure out what’s so urgent that needs my…I mean our attention.”

“April Malone.”

Smith looked up at her. “I told you not to tell me!”

“My name is April Malone and the papers all say that the Martians are invading.”

“Good lord, Miss Malone. Why didn’t you tell me sooner!”

3

THE MANAGERIE

Ebelin Contral felt goosebumps on the back of his fleshy arms as he read the headline of the newspaper again. Creatures squawked and roared from the various cages in his menagerie, none of them interrupted his concentration. They never did. Even when they cried out in pain or loneliness. He was immune to their pleas. He had to be, to do the kinds of things that he did.

He set the paper down and placed a large bloody scalpel on the crease to weigh it down. Martians. It had to be a hoax. He was fairly certain of that. But still. His mind wandered. What if they were real? And so close at hand?

“Monsieur, it must be a charade of some kind,” came a gravel-edged voice from inside a small cage near his desk.

Contral turned to the speaker. “I didn’t know you could read.”

“Oui, Monsieur. I can read. I can dance. I can even sing if you would like.”

“No, I don’t think that would be necessary. Tell me, why do you think it’s a hoax?”

Small feet shifted. Furry hands clinched the bars of the cage. “Perhaps I spoke to hastily. I think this opportunity is too much to pass up. Perhaps

you should return me to the carnival so you can pursue this with all your energy. After all, how often does one get to meet men from another world?"

"I think we are more than up to the task of entertaining you and all the other guests here. Wouldn't you like to meet these Martians as well?"

A tiny fist knocked on the walls of the metal cage. "Not under these conditions, Monsieur. I'd much prefer it in some place a little less… depressing."

"A necessary health precaution," said Contral.

"Whose health? Yours or mine?"

"Everyone's. We can't have our city overrun by strange vermin. It's my responsibility to see to it that doesn't happen."

"I assure you Monsieur, I am no rat. I was born of Christian blood, just as you. My father was a Huguenot missionary and my mother a converted Algonquin. A sweet, pious woman who misses her son dearly. If only you would let me send her a letter to inform her that I'm well and being taken care of."

"A likely story." Contral picked up the scalpel and tapped his chin with it as he looked into the small dark cage. "We still haven't determined what you are."

"I'm a freak. A mutation. That is all. Some men, like you are destined to be bald. Me, the opposite. Some to be tall, me the opposite. That is all. I was unfortunate enough to have two afflictions. Or blessed, depending upon how you look at it. You'll have nothing to gain by looking inside me, Monsieur. That's the least interesting part about me."

Contral wasn't so sure. He wanted to know if the small furry man was a freak as he insisted or some other race of man, previously unknown to science. He was tempted to have a look at his internal organs, but was afraid that once that was done, if he proved human, the inquiry would reach an impasse and he would have to answer to the people that paid for his menagerie as to why he wasted such an interesting specimen.

He had the curious desire to see what would happen if he attempted to mate the little man with a woman. One of his assistants was making gentle inquiries into the Bowery and Tenderloin districts to see of a suitable woman could be found. Perhaps a Chinese would do. There were plenty of them secreted about various basements.

Would the offspring be human? Another furry man? If so, what would that mean? Was there yet another lower-race for him and his superiors to be mindful of? His eyes drifted back to the artist's illustration of the Martian ambassador and was overwhelmed with a frightful thought. What if these Martians were real? What if they looked upon humanity in the same way he regard the furry little man and other undesirables? Was the Martian visitation a precursor to a planet-wide cleansing?

Contral used the sharp blade of the scalpel to cut the illustration from the newspaper. He placed it at the top of his desk and scribbled a note for his assistants. Hoax or not, it was of the utmost urgency that they capture one of these Martians. Either to negotiate with, perhaps a secret alliance, or to dissect and find a weakness.

"Monsieur, my friends. I am sure they miss me. They are bound to be looking for me."

"Oh, they have. But they won't find you here." Contral's gaze drifted across the dark stones that lined the menagerie. "We're in a most secure location. Practical as well," he grinned.

"My friends are clever."

"How clever can they be if they work for pennies at the Coney Island sideshow? Besides, I have the law on my side." Contral jerked a thumb towards a plaque on the wall behind his desk. It sat between two dirty cages and a blanket of cobwebs.

"I have admired your placard, Monsieur. But I couldn't help but notice that it says nothing of public health. It seems your political appointment is that of Chasseuse de rat Officiale. Perhaps my english is not as good as I

thought. But that would make you the city's official rat catcher and not its public health supervisor."

Contral waved a hand at the cages and tables in the menagerie. "Not all rats walk on four legs." He tapped the drawing of the Martian. "Some may come from the stars." He was struck by an interesting thought. His hand pulled a folder from inside his desk with large red letters written across it. "Would you consider this a very disrupting event?"

"My capture, Monsieur? But of course. If you mean this Martian affair, why yes, I suppose so. But not nearly so personally distressing."

"I agree. My colleagues have been in search of a particular rat, one that likes to burrow for very long lengths of time and then poke his nose out when it's the least convenient. A very long-lived rat it would appear. I've been under the impression that what we've really needed is the right bait to catch this rat." Contral picked up the Martian illustration. "Hoax or not, I think this affair could provide for just the thing. I suspect the rat I'm seeking won't be able to resist this."

"I hope he's smarter than moi, and doesn't find himself unconscious from a tainted bottle of rum and a sharp blow to the head."

"He's quite smart. Perhaps the smartest. But that's his undoing. With his intelligence comes a great weakness. His curiosity. It's quite possible, with the right nudging, I can get him into step right into one of these cages." Contral smiled.

The furry man in the cage looked at the maniacal glee on the cruel man's face. For the sake of the other man, he hoped he'd be more clever than he was when Contral's men in black coats came for him backstage at the carnival, and avoided the city altogether.

Martians or not, he looked at the blood stained floors, and knew that nothing good could come for this man if he crossed paths with Contral and his minions.

4

SECRET PASSAGE

Smith's private train roared across the track at eighty miles an hour towards the island of Manhattan. April looked out the window at the night sky. Sparse lights could be seen between the forests and small towns between Boston and New York City.

"The train, it's so quiet," said April. Other than a gentle swaying, it barely seemed to be moving at all.

"It's electric. Powered by a dynamo and a large battery. An engine charges them when necessary. Otherwise, yes, it's quite silent. Technically, we're not supposed to be using these tracks."

April turned away from the window? "What if another train is coming? Will your engineer have enough time to react?"

"Engineer…well, Miss Malone, there is no engineer. It's controlled by an automaton. I mean, really. There's only two directions, forwards and backwards. As far as colliding with another train, I have two systems to prevent that. One is a kind of microphone that listens for other trains. The other is a kind of sonic eye, I call it. There's a device at the front of the train that blows air through a high pitched whistle. Another microphone, tuned to only that frequency, listens to see if it returns. If it does, then we know we have a problem."

“Then what?”

“Then we have a problem.” Smith gestured to a map of the Eastern seaboard on one wall. Railway lines were marked out in sharp blue. Small metal trains magnetically stuck to the map appeared to move slowly. “That shows us where the trains are supposed to be. It’s updated from telegraphs time-to-time as stations send signals down the line.”

April sat down on a crush red velvet couch. The salon car looked far more fancy than something she would have expected from the eccentric, yet practical Smith.

“Is your room to your liking?”

“Quite so,” said April.

Smith nodded. “And your mother?”

“Excited, that I get to go to New York on such short notice.”

Smith had hesitated to ask April to accompany him. She’d insisted and he only made a slight protest. Things were still a bit foggy for him. He still wasn’t quite sure about much of his own history and he only had a vague recollection of her. He could tell, from the feeling in his gut, that he was very fond of her.

They’d only boarded the train an hour ago. After April had shown Smith the newspaper, he decided that it was urgent that they get to New York City as quickly as possible. At first he led her up a staircase behind the big door. He then stopped half way up and decided to take a different means of transportation and led her to the basement where his secret train was waiting. April wanted to ask him what means of transportation was waiting in the attic, but decided to ask him at another time.

She’d heard of underground rails in London and knew that there was talk in Boston of building one and a failed attempt of a pneumatic in New York, but to her knowledge, Smith’s train was the first operating one outside of Europe. The train had travelled a mile underground before emerging from a warehouse near the central rail lines that serviced Boston.

The tunnel, Smith explained, had been dug as a test for the Boston Metropolitan Rail system in the 1860's and then abandoned. One of his companies had purchased it at auction for pennies on the dollar when the company went bankrupt. The public and Boston at large, forgot about it. April suspected that much of Smith's enterprise was based upon people having very short attention spans.

She sat there watching him out of the corner of her eye as he poured over the newspaper and wondered how many little details of his own life had he forgotten or overlooked in pursuit of the big mysteries that he chased. She looked back up at the map with the moving trains and marveled at Smith's offhanded creativity.

"Bagatelle," said Smith.

"Pardon me?"

"I like to make amusement games. A while ago, quite a while ago, I came up with a mechanized version of the Bagatelle game. I think you call it pinball now. The machinists that make my games also make some of my notions like the map with the moving trains."

"Yes, but you said it was updated by the telegraph? We haven't stopped yet."

"Pardon me, Miss Malone, but you've given me an idea. It's a bit dastardly, I admit. But under the circumstances, maybe necessary." Smith sat up and walked over to a wooden cabinet. He pulled a key from his pocket and unlocked it. "There's something missing in the newspaper accounts. They show the front of the Martian Monolith, but not the back. On the front they've got this indecipherable language. On the reverse I suspect is the translation into English. I wonder why they haven't revealed this?"

Inside the cabinet was a brass machine with several nobs, cylinders and a telegraph switch. Smith pulled a stool over to the device and sat down. April moved closer on the edge of the couch to watch.

“You must keep this a secret, Miss Malone,” Smith began to tap the telegraph switch.

“Of course.”

“When they started stringing telegraphs across the globe, I was struck with an interesting thought. A telegraph is a means of converting the spoken word into a series of simple patterns. Take for example, dot dash, dot dash dash dot, dot dash dot, dot dot, dot dash dot dot? That’s your given name in Morse code. If someone wanted to listen in on a conversation between to parties, it’s a very easy matter to do that. I know with good reason that all the world governments do this very thing, despite whether it’s proper or not. Foreign embassies uses coded signals to avoid eavesdroppers from listening in on this. But within a country, communications between one government agency to another usually are not encoded. If some fiend decided to listen in on a communique between officials in New York City and Washington, it would be a simple matter.”

“But would you have to be actively listening for the transmission and connected into the telegraph?” April wondered if Smith had people doing that very thing.

“That’s one way to do that. But an inefficient way. Why use a person when a machine could do the job better? Remember, words on a telegraph are converted into dots and dashes. You can use the same parts that make a telegraph relay into a device that listens for certain words. Like the dot and dashes of your name. Or the dot and dashes of a word like “Martian”, then those dots and dashes could be recorded to a cylinder and replayed at a later time.”

“If some fiendish person went through the trouble of doing such a thing,” said April.

Smith tapped away at his telegraph. “Said, fiendish person could build a box that waited for a series of dots and dashes that told it what to listen for

and place it critical telegraph junctions. And then have them replayed after a matter of time."

"Yes, but we're still moving."

"Induction, Miss Malone. This rail line and several others have a telegraph line running along the tracks. A special fitting can receive and transmit along it. Did our subscription to American Railroad Journal lapse?"

"I must not have got to that issue yet," April rolled her eyes. Smith subscribed to every print publication imaginable, and a few unimaginable. Part of her duty was to help keep track of them and remember the details of ones singled out for her.

"I'm using Martian as a keyword. Do you have any suggestions?"

"Ares? The Greek counterpart."

"Brilliant, Miss Malone. I would imagine officials would want to use some kind of light code to prevent loose lips at telegraph offices from leaking the details to the press." Smith types the sequence into his telegraph switch. A series of beeps and longer beeps played back, indicating the signal was received. "Excellent. Now we just have to wait." Smith looked up at the moving map. "Another three hours. It should still be nightfall when we arrive." He picked up the paper and held the illustration of the Martian up for April to see. "What do you think?"

"Life on other planets? Why not? After all, there must be thousands of planets out there."

"Millions. Yes, Miss Malone. But do you think this Martian ambassador is indeed that? It's not the same question." He turned the newspaper towards himself. "I'm troubled by a few things."

"He does look very man-like," said April. "I would expect something with tentacles."

"Yes, there is that. But there's something else. Take a look again at the illustration. What stands out to you?

April took the paper form him and examined the drawing. The Martian appeared to be wearing a suit, not too different from Smith's own mechanical armor, which looked like a diving suit. "I'd expect the atmosphere to be different, so that explains the glass helmet. I'm not sure why the gas in it is red. I don't believe the Martian atmosphere is red, so much as the planet. At least not according to what the astronomers have said."

"There's one detail that really bothers me."

April tried to see what he was talking about. The Martian appeared like a very tall man. The arms and legs seemed exaggeratedly long. She took a closer look at the legs and noticed something peculiar. "The boots."

"The boots?"

"Wasn't that what you were talking about?"

"No, I thought the backpack looked odd. The pipes weren't going into the helmet, like you'd expect. What is it about the boots?"

April tapped a finger on the thick soles. "I had an uncle, a short man, he used to wear boots with very thick soles and lifts on the inside. They gave him another three or four inches."

Smith examined the boots in the illustration. "Yes. Very good, Miss Malone! These boots would add at least a foot to his height. Maybe more. Our Martian is trying to masquerade as a taller man."

"So you're convinced it's a hoax?"

"It has to be. That I'm certain. The reason why, is a different matter. It seems our make-believe-Martian friends have gone through a lot of effort for this charade and I fear this is only the beginning," said Smith.

"So you're convinced he's not a Martian?"

"Of course not. He looks nothing like a Martian."

April was about to ask Smith what he meant by that statement when his telegraph machine began to emit a series of loud clacks. Smith grabbed a paper tape that was being fed out of it.

“Curious,” said Smith. “It appears we’ve found the purpose of the Martian’s visit.”

5

THE MAYOR GETS PHONE CALL

“Ransom!” shouted the Mayor. “It’s a shake-down from space! I’ve got your man Croker at Tammany Hall shaking me on one end. The President forcing me to bring in that do-gooder on the other. And now, and now! I’ve got bug eyed-aliens showing up from space asking for a pay off.”

“What did the President say?”

Mayor Grant stared at the phone receiver he’d just slammed down. “Talked to him again. He doesn’t believe it. I don’t believe it. It’s got to be a hoax.”

“What about this Sergeant Nelson?” asked Horace Mayweather, the Mayor’s unofficial political advisor, and very unofficial bribe collector.

“Honest enough. War hero. Trustworthy enough to be on the right take.”

“So you think it’s a hoax?”

“It has to be? Right? It looks like a shake-down to me. You should know.”

Mayweather ignored the comment. “What’s the President want you to do?”

“Get to the bottom of this. Keep a lid on it. It’s only a matter of time before the ransom demands get out.”

“May I see the document?” asked Mayweather.

Mayor Grant pushed the photograph over to him and sat back to look out the window while he stroked his beard.

THE EMPEROR of Mars decrees that all inhabitants of the Planet Earth are under his Supreme Rule.

ALL NATIONS of the Earth shall cease their conflicts.

The Citizens of Earth shall raise the red Martian Flag of The Emperor on all Government Buildings and submit to his benevolent rule.

The Citizens of Earth shall pay the Sovereign Martian Emperor a tribute of 1,000 kilos of gold and deliver it to the location where this monolith has been placed on the fifth day and do so every 500 days.

FAILURE TO OBEY to the rule of The Emperor of Mars will be considered an act of war, subjecting the inhabitants of Earth to the terrible Space Ray.

"WHAT MAKES you so certain it's a ransom?" asked Mayweather.

"Isn't it? Even if he is from Mars, it's still a demand that we pay up or get hurt, in this case by that 'Space Ray'. There's a hoot." Grant swiveled in his chair to face Mayweather. "You're sure your pal Croker has nothing to do with this?"

Mayweather shook his head. "I don't think it's his style. Nor any of the Five Points Gangs."

"So it's an out of town job."

"Very out of town from what they want us to believe."

“What’s the angle? I don’t get it. I have no idea how they pulled off the stunt with the glowing vehicle. Damn thing woke my sister. Half the town saw the glow. The Martian man, maybe a guy in some getup. I have no idea how he could have listed that monolith. The damn thing weighs a ton!” He shook his head. “I’m sure it’s a trick. Like the sideshow at Coney Island. But for what end?”

“Looks like they want gold. A lot of it.”

“Yes, that’s what it says. But whoever is pulling this has got to know we aren’t going to fall for a light show and man playing Hall-o-ween dress up.” Mayor Grant picked up the photograph of the back end of the monolith. “A lot of trouble for a bit of sport. Don’t you think?”

“Have you considered the possibility that it’s legitimate?”

Grant’s mouth froze trying to decide if he should take Mayweather seriously or not. He was one of the most clever men he’d known. A bit on the rough side, self-educated, but very intelligent. “Now you’re sounding like my sister. If this gets out we’ll have half the city, half the world, putting out red flags and bowing down to this Martian Emperor!”

“It is a possibility worth considering,” said Mayweather. “It’s my responsibility to make you aware of all the angles. That’s all I’m saying. They chose New York City for a reason.”

“What are you saying?”

“I’m suggesting that we should be aware of a potential opportunity. If it’s a one-time hoax, then that’s the end of it. If it’s not, and its the product of an entity with more resources than we’re aware of, then we need to keep that in mind. 1,000 kilos of gold is a lot of money.”

Grant rapped his fingers on his desk. “So if it is real?”

“The Martians chose our city. Your city. Perhaps they’ll want to build an embassy. Maybe even make us the seat of Earth’s government.”

Grant let that idea roll around in his head for a moment. “So you’re saying there’s something to made out of the fact that they chose us and not

Washington or London?”

“There’s something to be made for the fact that they chose you, Mayor. They chose you to be the representative for our world.”

“They didn’t exactly choose me. They dropped it off in Central Park.”

“True. But not the White House nor the Governor’s Mansion or Buckingham Palace. All I’m suggesting is that maybe we want to make sure that’s not lost on the world.”

“And how do we do that?”

Mayweather picked up the photograph and turned it towards the Mayor. “We leak this to the press. But we emphasize that the Martians chose you. That they chose New York City. We explain that we’ve already been declared the center of the world, and you our ambassador.”

“But it’s a hoax! Nobody will fall for it.”

“That’s why we leak and we don’t endorse. We call it a hoax. Meanwhile we plant the idea we want them to believe. Cover all our bases.”

“Protect every angle.”

“Exactly.” Mayweather sat back satisfied.

“There’s one problem.”

There was a knock at the door outer door. Grant’s secretary could be heard talking to a man. Mayweather turned then looked back at Grant.

“The President sent one of his men to come ‘assist’ in this investigation. He might keep us from running this show.”

“Can we get him in on it?” asked Mayweather.

Grant shook his head. “He’s insufferably honest.”

“Maybe a soft threat?”

“Lord no. He likes to speak softly but carries a very big stick.”

Mayweather raised an eyebrow. “Oh my.”

“Yep,” Grant stood up to greet the man as his secretary opened the door. “How’s buffalo hunting?”

“Funny. How’s the graft business?” said the man as he nodded to Mayor Grant and looked down at Mayweather.

Grant introduced them. “Mr. Mayweather, I think you know our friend here. He tried to win election to this office a while ago, if I remember correctly. Now he does some work for the President on a few tasks forces I believe.”

Mayweather gave the man a curt nod. His reputation had a habit of interring a room long before him and never quite leaving.

“So tell me about this Martian non-sense,” said Theodore Roosevelt as he pulled out a cigar and sat down.

6

THE MONOLITH

It was night by the time Smith and April made it from the train yard to Central Park in a hired carriage. Smith had wanted to use the motorcycle he kept in the storage car but demurred when he realized that would mean Miss Malone would have to ride in the back in her dress. She was too polite to protest, but he could read the look in hers eyes when he mentioned possible modes of transportation. It also made sense to attract as little attention as possible when the city was already under-siege my strange men and machines.

Both entrances to the park were blocked off. Uniformer policemen stood on either side. A large crow of several hundred people had gathered to look at the site of the Martian landing, although the couldn't see anything from either edge of the park.

Off to one side there was a crowd of newspapermen and a few photographers with large wooden cameras an tripods. Smith took April by the elbow and guided her towards that direction. An official in a top hat was making a speech.

Smith tried to push themselves in closer, but the crown was to thick. He could make out a few details of what the man was saying.

“It doesn’t look like they’ve announced the ransom demand yet,” said Smith.

“Is that good or bad?” asked April.

“We’ll find out.” Smith escorted her to a policeman standing near the West entrance.

“Can I help you?” asked the frustrated looking man.

“I’m Doctor Hellgood. I’ve been sent to have a look at the monolith,” Smith lied.

“Are you now?” The policeman rolled his eyes. He pointed his billy club towards the press crowd. “Your section is over there.”

“Listen, my assistant and I just spent a long train ride from Philadelphia. We were asked specifically to come here and take a look at this monolith and help decipher it.”

“Sent by whom?”

“I can’t really say,” said Smith.

“Then I can’t really let you in.”

April spoke up. “Alright Professor. Maybe we should just go on over to the newspapermen and explain to them what you already deciphered. I’m sure they’ll be interested.”

“Er, um yes,” Smith was taken by surprise by April’s ploy. “I’m sure they’d love to hear about the gold bars and the space ray.”

“Shhh!” The policeman put a finger to his lips and grabbed Smith by the arm to turn him away from the crowd. He gave a nervous glance over his shoulder to see if anyone else had heard. “How did you know about that?” he asked in a low voice.

“The Professor deciphered it, of course,” said April. “That is after all what he does.”

“All right. All right. Go through the path to left. You’ll see Sergeant Nelson near the tent.”

“Tent?” asked Smith.

“They put a tent over the damn thing. Pressman have been climbing on buildings with telescopes to get a look. One of them even tried hanging a camera on a balloon. The Navy had a fit over that one.”

“The Navy?”

“They’re arguing with the Mayor over who has jurisdiction. I hear the Army is too. Nobody knows what’s going on.”

Smith nodded to the man then lead April down the path. They crossed the sheep’s meadow, where a scattering of sheep munched on grass and ignored the men walking about. Filament lights illuminated the tent in the middle of the park.

Sergeant Nelson stood guard outside the tent. He gave them a wary eye. “May I help you?”

“I’m here about the deciphering,” said Smith. “The military said they wanted one more expert. Don’t know how much help I can be. Any child can decipher that Martian text and read the demands and the ransom.” He looked Nelson up and down. “I bet you saw it right away.”

Nelson scratched his mustache. “Not exactly, mister…”

“Professor Hellgood,” said April.

“And this is my assistant, Miss June,” said Smith. “I was just telling her that you were the man that bravely faced down the Martian brute. Wasn’t I?”

“Oh my!” April knew from acting training that she was overdoing it, but decided to push it. “I would have died of fright, Sergeant. You are the most brave man.” She reached out a gloved hand and touched the Sergeant’s arm. His cheeks blushed.

“Just doing my duty, miss.”

“Sergeant, I was wondering if I might have a look at the monolith up close?”

“Of course. Of course.” He held the flap open for them. “Edison’s men came out and rigged the electric earlier in the day.”

“Edison?” asked Smith. His voice was flat.

April could tell there was something wrong, but decided not to ask at that point. Smith waved her into the tent and followed in after her.

The monolith was nine foot tall and an imposing artifact. It tapered from the bottom to the top and was made from a dull grey metal. The Martian script covered the front of it. On the back, in simple type-set lettering, was what they assumed was the English transcription. Smith reached out and touched it.

“Lead.” He stood back. “Quite heavy.” He turned to the open flat. “Sergeant, may we ask you a few questions?”

Nelson poked his head in the tent.

“The newspaper accounts say that the Martian actually carried this and set it down.”

“Yes, sir. I watched him step from his space-craft and set it down right here.” He pointed to the grass. “I was laying right there when it happened. That was when he used his stun pistol on me.”

“No ill effects?” asked Smith.

Nelson shook his head. “It’s what I imagined getting hit by an electric eel would be like.” He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out his revolver with the bent barrel. “They’ve tried to take it from me, but I won’t let them.”

“May I see?” asked April.

Nelson smiled and handed her the gun. She admired it then handed it to Smith.

Smith felt the bent barrel. It was an almost ninety-degree curve. Other than that, it looked brand new. He rubbed his sleeve on it then handed it back to Nelson. “Can you tell me anything that wasn’t in the newspaper account?”

The Sergeant thought for a moment and pulled at his mustache.

“Even a small detail,” asked April. She put a finger to her lip, feigning nervousness.

“Well, there was one thing. He had a smell about him. I remember thinking to myself afterwards, that’s what Mars must have smelled like. A kind of sulphur smell.”

“Like rotten eggs?” asked Smith.

Nelson shook his head. “No. More like a burnt sulphur. Kind of like gunpowder, but this is different.”

“Interesting. So the Martian stunned you before you were able to fire your gun?”

“Like a clever devil. Knocked me on my…” he looked at April. “Knocked me on my back is what he did.”

“I take it you’re a good shot, otherwise,” asked Smith.

“Quite. Now excuse me. I have to make sure the Army and the Navy don’t come to fisticuffs outside. This is still NYPD jurisdiction. Be much longer?”

Smith could tell that was Nelson asking them politely to leave.

“Just one more minute, Sergeant. I want to show Miss June some of the deciphering.”

Nelson nodded then closed the flap.

“All right, Miss Malone, tell me what you see.”

April walked around the monolith and gave a nervous look back at Smith. She couldn’t tell if he’d already observed something and was playing one of his games to see if she noticed it too, or if he genuinely wanted her to notice something.

“Well, the sheep’s meadow is an odd place, for one.”

Smith nodded.

“I have to say I’m not that impressed by the monument. Although it looks angular, I can’t say that it looks like something from an advanced race.” She traced her fingers along the letters.

“And what would you expect from an advance race?”

“Something we couldn’t make. I think any foundry could make something like this.”

“Even god uses stone tablets, Miss Malone.”

April smiled. She started to look around the tent. Smith ran his hand along the monolith.

“The meadow at night is too convenient,” Smith said. “If they were real Martians, I’d think they’d do this in board daylight. In the President’s garden no less. I think Nelson is on the up and up, but I’m not so sure I buy the idea that this was just dropped into place by a man in a Martian suit.”

April was looking at the grass. “Would you need proof of that?”

“Yes. Some kind of physical evidence. But I don’t see what.” He reached his fingers up to touch the top of the monolith.”

“Like a deep footprint, perhaps? Proving that the Martian carried it?”

“Which we won’t find, because he didn’t.”

“Oh really, Smith?” April lifted the hem of her skirt and knelt down by a tent pole.

“Yes,” Smith wasn’t paying attention. He was counting handspans on the monolith. “I’d think the men in the NYPD would have made note of such a thing.”

“How much do you think it weighs?” asked April. She took Smith’s umbrella from his arm and shoved it into a hole in the ground.

“Easily seven-hundred pounds.”

“Plus a two-hundred pound man equals a hole of at least six inches in this grass?”

Smith rapped his fingers on the edge of the monolith as he counted something else in his head. “Yes. At least five. Maybe more depending upon the moisture last night. But I don’t…” He looked up in the air at nothing. “Oh, I see, Miss Malone. Quite clever.” Smith turned around and looked at the footprint under the tent pole.

April handed him his umbrella back and stood. She gave him a small grin.

“How interesting.” Smith knelt down to look at the hole. “How very interesting.”

“Still think it’s a hoax?” asked April.

Smith looked up at her. “I must say this leads to the credibility of the claim. But a deep footprint like this could be planted.”

“And no one else noticed?”

“Maybe we should ask Sergeant Nelson,” said Smith.

7

THE MEN WHO DRESS IN BLACK

Smith held the tent flap open for April to step outside. Sergeant Nelson tipped his hat to her the looked over at Smith. “Find what you were looking for?”

“I think so.” Smith cast a glance over his shoulder at the monolith before the flap fell back down. “Most remarkable.”

“I didn’t know what to believe myself until I saw the space-craft. And then when the Martian Ambassador appeared before me. I knew, I’d witnessed something special. And there’s your proof.” He pointed to the tent.

April looked over at a two men with a large box camera on a tripod. They were panning it around the North Park. It made a clacking sound.

“Not much use at night,” she murmured.

“Depends on the film,” said Smith. “Sergeant, so we can put you in the camp that believes this is a genuine alien artifact?”

“Indeed. I can’t see how it could be anything else.”

“And the ransom doesn’t bother you?”

“I don’t think it’s much different than Cortez or Pizarro.”

“Pardon me?” said Smith.

“The Conquistadors,” replied April, who was still staring at the men with the strange camera.

“Of course. I see your point, Sergeant. When they came to a new world their first reaction was to demand gold and tribute.”

“The Greeks and the Romans too. Some might say it’s the civilized thing to do.”

“Er, not if you consider killing the natives and burning books civilized,” said Smith.

“I hadn’t thought of that. Let’s hope this encounter goes smoother.” Nelson tucked his thumbs into his pockets and stuck out his chest.

“Indeed. Sergeant, I don’t suppose you found anymore footprints?”

“Footprints?

“Near the back left tent post, Miss…Miss June found a rather deep footprint that would seem to vindicate what you said you saw. It appears our Martian did indeed carry the monolith and set it into place.”

“As if I had any doubt.”

“No. I’m sure you don’t. But I’m sure there have been some whispers, perhaps?”

“That there has been. But they’ll see.”

“Right? What makes you so certain?”

“Because the Martian said so.”

April turned away from the men with the camera. “He said what?”

“He whispered it to me. Not in that loud voice they could hear all the way to the south end of the park.”

“What did he whisper, Sergeant?” asked Smith.

“Watch the sky to the south for a sign.”

Smith noticed that the Sergeant had kept his gaze towards the south end of the park the entire conversation. He thought it was because he was keeping watch. Now he realized the Sergeant was waiting for a return visit. No matter how frightening the previous night’s encounter had been, it was

the most important event of his life. He'd experienced a kind of euphoria familiar to soldiers in the heat of battle and mountain climbers on the edge of death.

"Well, I hope you keep a careful distance this time," said Smith.

"Are you kidding? I hope they invite me to onboard. That's why I insisted on standing an extra watch here. I want to make sure I'm here when they come back."

Smith looked up at the dark sky and the twinkling stars. "Fancy a trip to Mars?"

"Indeed."

"Well I'm glad the conquest of this continent has done nothing to diminish man's thirst for exploration," replied Smith.

"Pardon me Professor Hellgood," said April.

Smith was still staring at the stars. "Oh, er yes?"

"I believe the men with the camera contraption have been taking photographs of you."

"Quite a lot I imagine. It's a motion-picture camera." Smith looked over at April. "Of me?"

"Yes, Professor. They seem to be very interested in you and only you."

Smith turned his back to the camera. "Sergeant Nelson, do you know who those men are with the large camera?"

"You mean the Navy folks?"

"They don't look like Navy men to me. They're dressed all in black like undertakers," said April.

"I think they're with Naval intelligence or some health agency. I can't remember. Lots of folks running around here from funny departments I've never heard of before. Are they friends of yours, Professor?"

"Likely rivals from another university. You know how that can be." Smith gave him a sheepish grin while trying to find something interesting to

look at in the seams of the tent. “I think we’ll be going now. Miss…Miss June, care to take a walk towards the north lake?” Smith held out his elbow.

April gave the Sergeant a polite smile then followed Smith around the tent and away from the men in black.

“Are they following us?” asked Smith.

April held her hand up to her mouth to cough away from him and looked backwards. “They’re picking up the camera and following us. Are they trouble?”

“The worst kind,” said Smith. “They have a habit of showing up in places where unusual things have taken place.”

“Well so do you.”

“Yes, but I try to help. Lets keep walking and see how long they follow us for.” Smith glanced down at his heavy umbrella. Using it would attract more attention than he wanted.

They walked further into the meadow. April held his arm tightly. They could make out the outlines of the trees and some of their surroundings, but it was still quite moody at night. She was amused by the fact that Smith had no idea how improper it looked to anyone as he escorted her into the dark corner of the park. She was about to suggest they go towards a more lighted area when something caught her eye.

“Are they still watching us?” asked Smith.

“No. I think they’ve lost interest.” April was looking behind them.

“Well that’s good.”

“No. It’s not. Smith, the southern sky is glowing green!”

“What?” Smith turned around as the southern end of the city glowed bright green.

“What on earth?” asked April.

Almost in answer to her question a man came running down the meadow shouting at the top of his lungs, “The Martians have set the Statue of Liberty on fire! The Martians have set it on fire!”

“Well this is odd,” said Smith as he broke out into a run towards the direction of the green glow.

8

STATUE OF LIBERTY

Thousands of people crowded the grass around Battery Park at the south end of Manhattan to look on in shock at the burning statue. Normally all but invisible at night, save the faint glow of the torch, the dull copper Statue of Liberty was enshrouded in green flames that lit up the night sky.

Smith held out his hand and helped April down from the hired carriage so they could get a closer look. People crowded to the edge of the sea wall and were only held back from being pushed into the chilly water by a thick metal chain. To the left, a few officials were standing on the now defunct Castle Clinton emigration building trying to get a better look.

“Martians,” people whispered with certainty. Some of them looked to the sky for a sign of a space-craft.

Smith found a stone wall to stand on and helped April up. Although the statue was quite a distance aways, it was unmistakable. Its outline was magnified by the eerie flame and the smoke.

Two fire boats could be seen at either end of the island trying to spray water onto the conflagration. Their steam powered hoses could barely make it halfway up the pedestal, let alone reach the statue.

“What does this mean?” asked April. A gloved knuckle touched her chin.

Smith looked around at the crowd. He saw two policemen whispering to each other. “It’s a warning.”

“A warning of what?”

“Our Martians want the powers to be to know that they’re real. They want them to take this ‘Space Ray’ seriously. I’m sure in a few hours we’re going to get another message.”

“Saying what?”

“Probably making an even larger threat. This is supposed to be a small example. To frighten us.”

“Well, it’s working,” said April. She saw the concerned faces. They had no idea yet about the mention of the Martian space ray. She was certain it was only a matter of time before it was leaked out. She could only imagine the kind of panic that would create.

“Up until now we had a very elaborate hoax, the full force of it witnessed by one man. Now we have this public spectacle. People are already in fear and don’t know why yet. They read the account of the Martian and are now drawing their own conclusions.” Smith turned away from the blazing monument.

“Will they be able to put it out?” asked April.

“I should think it will burn itself out soon enough. It’s a parlor stunt, really. Just a very large parlor stunt. It’ll probably speed up the oxidation process though.”

“Is that bad?”

“Only if you have something against the color green.”

April noticed that Smith’s attention was elsewhere. “What are you looking at?”

“Oh, nothing. Just wondering.” His eyes turned to the sky. “Our Martians are quite the showmen.” Hundreds more people were cramming into the park and onto the ferry dock to get a look at the statue. “I get the

feeling that they wouldn’t want to miss this.” He looked at the different faces in the crowd, hoping to see something, maybe a look of pride.

“You still think it’s a charade? Even after the footprint and this?”

“Yes. Quite so. I’m just concerned with how big of a hoax this is.”

April tried to see if anyone stood out. Most of the people wore heavy working class coats. A few uptown residents were getting out of carriages, attracted to the spectacle despite the late hour. “Do you think he’s here? The Martian Ambassador?”

“Or the Emperor. I know I wouldn’t want to miss a show like this.”

HIGH ABOVE THE crowd the Martian Emperor watched the city staring in awe at the inferno he’d created. The light from the fire cast a green pallor on their frightened faces. For all their pretense of sophistication, he’d cowered them with the simplest of technologies of all; fire. In time he hoped that at least some of them would understand the significance of the feat and see the futility in trying to resist a superior intellect. The gold tribute was just a start, an acknowledgment that they understood that they’d been outmatched. He was confident that after a few more demonstrations the world governments would be ready to surrender to his will and welcome his rule. Those that wouldn’t, would be brought to heel by the others and forced to submit his dominion. He had a great number of plans for the blue planet.

9

MARS IS CALLING

President Benjamin Harrison looked at the telegraph cable that had been placed on his desk. His Secretary of State, James Blaine was still sitting in the chair across from him.

“It’s that New York business,” said Harrison. “That statue is on fire. Green fire. They think it may be that cosmic ray.”

Blaine shook his head. “They can’t be serious. Don’t tell me they’re believing the pap they put in their own papers.”

Harrison pushed the telegraph to the other man. “Elkins sent a few men to investigate. I asked Roosevelt to have a look. Just in case a foreign power is involved.”

“I’d check on the whereabouts of PT Barnum, too.”

“I believe he’s still dead,” said Harrison.

“Better check the grave.”

“You don’t hold much on the Martian story?”

“I don’t even think it’s worth your attention. When I was a newspaperman we just laugh ourselves hoarse making up tall tales to fill the blank spaces. This is amateur yellow.”

“And now this green fire?”

“I’ll believe it when this man from space walks up to me and says hello. And even then I’d ask him who he voted for before I gave him the time of day,” said Blaine in his grumbly voice.

The phone on the cradle sitting on the desk rang. Harrison picked up the handset and put it to his ear. He was still to nervous to touch the light switches in the White House for fear of electrocution, he’d begrudgingly had the telephone placed on his desk as a sign of modernity.

“Yes,” said Harrison, and waited for the voice of the switchboard operator.

“THIS IS THE MARTIAN EMPEROR,” the voice sound mechanical and even more distant than voices normally sounded on the device. “BY NOW YOU’VE BEEN MADE AWARE OF A SMALL DEMONSTRATION OF OUR SPACE RAY. YOU HAVE FOUR DAYS TO RAISE THE MARTIAN FLAG, CEASE ALL MILITARY ACTIONS AND PAY OUR TRIBUTE.”

“Now hold on,” said Harrison.

Blaine moved his chair closer to the desk to more clearly hear the sound coming out of the speaker.

“END OF TRANSMISSION.”

Harrison set the handset back in the cradle and looked across the desk at his Secretary of State. “Could it be a ploy by a foreign power?”

“If it is, it’s an act of war. I know the British are still a bit unsettled about the Canadian business. But this is so beyond the pale.”

Harrison turned to look out the window at the dark sky. “The world is moving fast. Electricity everywhere. Shopkeepers installing telephones. A fellow sat right where you’re sitting a few months ago and played back the sound of my own voice from a clever contraption. I’ve heard Edison and others talk about the wireless transmission of voice. Automobiles. Countless men are trying to conquer flight.”

“That will take a hundred years,” said Blaine.

“Will it? We used men in balloons as spotters in the war.”

“But heavier than air? An automobile can scarcely make it from one side of town to another without sputtering out. An air-craft? Not in my lifetime.”

“Perhaps, not. But what if the Greeks had discovered the combustion engine or the telegraph? Would we be arguing now about British claim to minerals on the moon? What would we have achieved in the two millennia hence forth? Imagine two great races, one on Mars, one on Earth. One spark, one leap of the imagination and the other jumps ahead. While we clobbered each other over the heads with wooden clubs in the primeval forests of Europeans, were our Martian counterparts building railroads, lighter than air travel, mastering electricity? To think, you and I wouldn’t be in this office, in this great country, if it hadn’t been the happenstance of a few exceptional individuals in Jefferson, Franklin and Washington. You might be a correspondent for the London Times and I a barrister arguing over land contracts.”

“So it’s Martians, is it?” Blaine managed a small grin. “Am I to open up negotiations?”

“No. Of course not. I just think that it’s important that two old men like ourselves make certain that we don’t become too calcitrant in our ways.”

“So what is our reaction to be?”

“When faced with a problem such as this I often ask myself what one of my wiser predecessors would have done. In this case, Jefferson. He held the sciences very dear. I say we maintain a cautious approach, but keep an open mind.”

“And what of the demands?”

“I’ll leave it to our Secretary of War to tell me when I need to take this as more then a hoax. I’ve also got Roosevelt in New York digging his nose into things.”

“Roosevelt? I wouldn’t be surprised if he was halfway to Mars to launch a counter invasion by now.”

“Pity the Martians.”

10

THE AERONAUT

Smith and April found a cable car and took it uptown towards the sidetrack near Lexington where his secret train was sitting. In the distance, fire bells could be heard as horse drawn pumps raced to different parts of the city. Constables and firemen were standing on corners keeping watch in case the mysterious green fire that had engulfed the Statue of Liberty spread. Their car passed two blocks from City Hall, several pump trucks were already parked in front.

“Quite a commotion,” said April.

“Quite a distraction, too,” replied Smith. He looked along the roof tops of the buildings as they passed. A few dark silhouettes were visible against the night sky. The green fire was already fading.

“I don’t want to sound the fool. But what if it was Martians? Earlier you said Martians didn’t look anything like the illustration. What did you mean?”

“Oh, nothing. Just a guess, that’s all. In answer to you question, if it is the Martians, then we’d better pay up.”

“How would we know?”

“I was thinking about that. If we operate under the assumption that it’s a few earthmen masquerading as Martians, then we need to look for the

evidence of that."

"Yes, but suppose they are hoaxers of some sort. We just saw what they did to the Statue of Liberty. What if they could do that to the whole city? An entire continent?"

"I don't. I don't believe there is a 'space ray', Miss Malone. I believe their weapon is fear. They're using deception to accomplish that. And by the look of things, quite well. If they are humans playing Martian make believe, then we know that fighting them is a different matter than fighting the genuine thing."

"And if they're genuine?" asked April.

"I have contingencies for that," Smith's voice trailed off. "Some things are best left unsaid. Right now we need to focus on the facts. That begins with the physical evidence."

"Other than the monolith, what is there?"

"Lady Liberty. If that green fire was the result of some genuinely alien technology then that would support the Martian hypothesis. If we inspect it and find the physical evidence I suspect, then we know it's more likely a terrestrial stunt."

They got off the cable car and walked to the alley that led to the sidetrack. Hidden between several warehouses, the train was in the middle of the city, yet accessible only through a metal gate on either end. Smith walked up to the car second from the rear and stepped onto the back. He pulled a key from his trouser pocket and unlocked the door. He looked over at April and thought for a moment.

"This may take me a few hours." He gazed up at the night sky. "Perhaps you'd like to read some magazines?"

"What are you going to do?"

"Inspect the statue."

April stared at the rail car. "From inside there?"

“Don’t be ludicrous, Miss Malone. Of course not. I have an alternative means of transportation inside of here. I hesitated to use it, but I think the circumstances call for it.”

“Let me come,” said April. She had no idea what was inside there and her stomach felt butterflies at the thought of another rocket propelled umbrella ride.

“Er, well,” Smith scratched his chin. “It’s not the safest mode of travel and you’re dressed altogether wrong for it.”

“I have a pair of riding bloomers in my valise I brought onboard. I shall change into them.”

Smith had no response. April darted off to the passenger car to get changed. He stepped inside and started turning a series of switches. Mechanical arms opened the roof of the car to the sky. He turned several valves and gas cylinders began to hiss.

April returned a few minutes later and waited at the doorway to the car. Inside was what looked like an eclipsed boat or gondola. She looked up and saw the large gas bag inflating over the top of the car.

“Oh my, that’s large,” she said.

“I’ve built bigger, but it will do.” Smith gestured to several large cylinders along the walls. “I use a rare gas, I collect it near vents in the earth. Much safer than hydrogen. Not quite the lifting capacity, but close enough.”

“You mean helium?”

“Well, yes, Miss Malone. That’s right, I suppose you do have a mind for details like that.”

“I didn’t know that existed on earth in any quantity.”

“It does, if you know where to find it. But let’s keep that our little secret.”

“I’ve been thinking about the green fire. You think it’s chemical? Boric acid perhaps?”

Smith turned away from the gondola. “Well done, Miss Malone. That’s how the jugglers and magicians make their green fire. A bit of boric acid and some wood spirits.”

April walked around the gondola in the car. Ten feet long and half the width of the rail car, there were windows all along the sides and a very large curved one on the front. She reached out and touched the material. It didn’t feel like glass. It almost gave a bit as she touched it.

Smith stepped inside and smiled at her through the window. “It’s a kind of celluloid. Non-combustible. Very light weight. Every once counts.”

April thought for a moment Smith could have protested her coming along by pointing out that she added weight to the craft, then realized that he probably wanted to show it off to her but was too timid to be direct about it.

She stepped back. “How do you control it?”

“Barely.” Smith steeped out of the cabin and swung an armature out from the side part way. “Once we clear the carriage, one of these on either side will extend and the propellers will spin. For up and down movement we can use the force of the propellers, or the central gas bag. It’s heated by an element and makes us slightly positively buoyant. In an emergency we have a spare helium cylinder onboard. Still want to come along?”

“More than ever,” said April. She was terrified of the contraption but wanted desperately to see what it looked like from the air. Dirigibles and other airships were over a century old, but no one had managed to make a practical one yet, other than for exhibitions.

Smith held the rear door open for her. There were two seats, one in the front and one slightly elevated to the back. She took the rearmost seat. Smith sat down in front of her.

“Please use the lap belt, Miss Malone?”

“Pardon?”

“The strap on the seat. Wrap it around your waist and clip it to the other side.”

She looked down and saw a canvas strap. It was the kind of thing you’d find in an amusement ride to keep you from falling out. She belted it across her waist.

Smith turned a gauge and the hiss of the gas flowing into the balloons stopped. April was impressed by the variety of gauges and controls, it didn’t look like a hastily put together machine. She wondered how Smith found the time to do all that. She already knew he was quite older than he looked, much older, but she couldn’t see one man doing all the things he’d done even in several life times.

“That’s quite an array of controls,” said April, hoping he’d explain some of them to her.

“Overkill, really. I’ve simplified things as much as possible. Maybe if we get a chance I’ll let you give it a whirl.”

“Oh, I couldn’t,” she lied.

“It’s quite simple. Pull back on this lever between my legs to go up. Push forward to go down. Squeeze to go faster and turn it to the left or to the right.”

“Did you build all of this yourself?”

“Oh no. I don’t have the time for it. I’ve engaged machinists all around the world to work on my devices. Once upon a time I used to build everything myself. But then, time became so precious,” his voice trailed off.

“Are you worried about people stealing your secrets?”

“Secrets? People have enough trouble using the ideas that are in plain sight, they rarely trouble with the ones that are a little more obscure. Take the incandescent light, for example. That’s an idea thats been around for over a hundred years. I even saw…never mind. My point is, that all the elements were there. What it needed was a man like Edison to come along and say this is important, its time is now.”

“What about this? This seems far more advanced than any other dirigible I’ve ever heard of.”

“It’s a toy. I used everyone else’s best ideas with a few improvements of my own. In a few years maybe a decade from now we’ll have more exciting modes of transportation.”

“Like what?”

“Engines like the one I use here to power the battery are getting smaller and lighter. I think they’ll make a lot of things practical we’d never considered before.”

Smith flipped a switch and an electric light illuminated the instrument panel. “Ready, Miss Malone? Once I release the lever, the ascent is going to be quite dramatic.”

“Ready, Smith,” she gripped the edge of her seat.

Smith pulled the lever and they shot up into the air. She watched as they emerged from the carriage into the alley. The buildings quickly fell below them. She felt a strange sensation in her stomach, but ignored it. She was too amazed by the sight of the city from the air at night. Electric lights and gas lamps lined the streets in every direction. Lanterns on carriages moved back and forth. The entire city appeared as if it were one giant intricate machine, a sum so much greater than its parts. She wondered how often Smith saw things from this perspective.

11

LADY LIBERTY

Smith steered the craft to the right so the could follow Broadway all the way down the island towards the Battery and then Bedloe's Island where the statue was located. April marveled at the sight. Her last experience aloof had been accompanied by the sound of a noisy umbrella rocket, this on the other hand was rather quite. The electric motors that turned the propellers made only a soft whining sound. She could hear the sound of the wind as it blew past the cabin, giving it a gentle rocking sound.

"I could go to sleep up here," she said.

"I find it rather exhilarating, myself," said Smith.

"No, I mean it's so comfortable."

"Yes. Yes it is. I quite like these craft."

"You have others?"

"Yes, this is the smallest one. The most inconspicuous. It's a dull grey color. People on the ground aren't likely to notice anything if they were to look up. But they rarely do."

"Perhaps, but they're not usually under the threat of an attack from Mars."

"Well put. I'm keeping her at a high altitude to avoid attracting any attention."

“Do you think our Martians use a vehicle like this?”

“I think so. One that’s dramatically dressed up a bit. The Sergeant said it was made of metal, but I suspect a bit of painted silk made to look like metal would achieve the same result. The process I used for my silk could be easily modified to give it a more metallic appearance. You could even paint on rivets and seams to make it look like it was built by a machinist. That’s part of what bothers me about the Martians. Both the ambassador and his craft loofa exactly like what you’d expect the author of a penny-dreadful to describe. They’re very much our idea of what a Martian should look like. I would think they’d look nothing like that at all. I’d also be sad to discover that they’re capable of traveling millions of miles, but still build their ships like blacksmiths.”

“You’re disappointed in the Martians? That’s why you really think it’s a hoax, isn’t it? I kept wondering why you were so resistant to the idea.”

“Well, yes, in part. Logic and reason tell me it’s not what we’re supposed to believe. But emotion does play a part. What a sad collection of individuals would they be of they travelled all this distance to shake us down like some kind of imperialist bully? We have so much more to offer them than a few paltry pieces of gold.”

The airship passed over the Battery at the southern end of Manhattan. The crowd had already thinned out considerably once the blaze had gone out. The dim glow of the statue’s torch, the only visible marker it had at night when it wasn’t surrounded in green flames, was extinguished. Lanterns moved about the island as men searched for clues.

“I was hoping it would be a little less crowded,” said Smith. There were at least several dozen men on the island and a half dozen boats either docked to anchored around the perimeter.

“Is it safe?”

“From what? We’re up in the sky. Nothing can get us here.”

Smith brought the airship into a wide arc around the statue, still keeping them a hundred feet above the top. The face came into view. Illuminated only by the stars and the moon, her features still looked out to the rest of the world proudly.

“She doesn’t look damaged,” said April.

“Nothing major. Copper has a higher melting temperature than the compound they used.”

“Assuming they used a compound. What if you don’t find anything?”

“Then it’s time for another theory.” Smith unfastened his lap belt and stood up. “I’ll need you to take the controls.”

“Me?”

“This isn’t a sightseeing adventure, Miss Malone,” said Smith as the face of the Statue of Liberty drifted directly into view below them.

“No, of course not.” April slid into the pilot seat and fastened the belt. “What do I do?”

“Just sit there for now. I’ve adjusted the motors to try to keep us at this position. There’s a compass that will correct if we drift to one side or another. A gyro will compensate.”

“Why do you need me then?”

“In case it doesn’t work.” Smith stepped to the rear of the cabin and fastened a harness around his body. He clipped it to an overhead wench.

April looked over shoulder. “What are you going to do?”

Smith tapped a pouch he’d slung over his shoulder. “Get us a sample of the residue.” He opened the back door and a cold wind filled the cabin. The gondola began to rock. “Hold her steady, Miss Malone.”

“Aren’t you frightened?”

“Terrified.” Smith jumped out the back of the craft and fell out of sight.

April leaned over the window but couldn’t see him. He’d last positioned the craft several dozen feet above the crown. She guessed he was near the top of the head or the spikes.

Thirty feet below the airship, Smith swung in the breeze next to the spikes of the crown. A dark ash covered the statue. He tried to reach out with a sample brush but the wind kept pushing him away. The familiar scent of a chemical reaction was carried on the breeze, but he wanted to be certain.

Above him, the primitive autopilot tried to keep the dirigible in position. A gust of wind pushed the craft way and Smith with it. He could hear the motors spin faster as the airspeed sensor tried to compensate. Smith vaguely remembered not having adjusted them since the last time he tried out his craft. The pitch increased and the craft accelerated over the top of the statue, pulling Smith below.

The rope swung wildly and threw him towards the left ear. Smith brought his legs to his chest to brace for impact. He hit the lower lobe with a crash. His legs took most of the impact, but he was still disoriented.

The aircraft continued to move forwards. The edge of the rope went over the top of the crown and was pulling Smith towards the top. In a few more feet he'd fly clear of the statue.

To his left was one of the arched windows that went around the crown below the spikes. Smith reached his hands out and tried to grab hold of the edge. His fingers could feel the hot metal, still warm from the blaze. He kept hold and tried to keep from sliding over the top. The propellers of the dirigible fought against him. The rope kept pulling him up.

Smith pushed his knees under the top of the arch. A gust of wind pushed the airship back, giving him a moment of slack. Smith reached out with his arms and grabbed either edge of the arch and pushed his feet against the underside. The airship began pull him back over the top, this time he stretched out his legs and used his thighs to pull against the motors. It worked, but he was now upside down with his feet at the top of the arch and his head near the bottom.

The leather pouch smacked Smith in the face and began to slide off his shoulders. He reached out with his left hand and grasped the strap before it fell below. Using his teeth to grip it, he reached inside and grabbed a sample brush to wipe on the surface of the statue.

He remarked to himself it was quite a lot of effort to prove something he already suspected. But the delight finding out he could be wrong was what excited him. He ran the brush along the soot until the white was completely dark. He was about to slip it into the pouch when he heard someone shout below.

“Look! It’s a giant bat!”

“A Martian bat is attacking the statue!”

Smith looked around for the bat then realized they were talking about him. He knew this couldn’t come to any good. Searchlights began to scan the sky and the statue. A moment later he heard the sound of what had to be a canon go off and he began to fall.

12

TEDDY AND SCHMITTY

April sat at the controls but wasn't quite sure what she was supposed to do while Smith dangled below. The propellers would spin faster and adjust their position every time a breeze drifted them away from the statue. She had no idea what Smith was doing below. The rope leading down from the wench out the open back door would slide from side to side and occasionally made straining sounds.

She leaned back and looked at the lights of the harbors across the bay in New Jersey and Long Island. The motors drowned out the sounds of the shouting below. The first sign of any trouble was when the cabin was illuminated by a light from below. As it flickered across April's face, she knew something was wrong. She turned towards the back of the cabin and looked at the rope and bit her lip. Should she activate the wench and pull Smith up?

He hadn't showed her what lever controlled that. Other than his stick, he hadn't actually explained any of the gauges and dials. The search light illuminated the cabin again. She reached for the buckle of the lap belt to unfasten it. She wanted to shout down to Smith for instructions. There was a loud bang and the sound of fabric ripping.

The craft began to turn to the side. April fell out of the chair and landed against the bulkhead. Her face was pressed up against the side window. For the first time that night she experience vertigo as she saw the ground below and the lights flashing up towards her. It was getting closer. They were falling.

She tried to move he harm, but her shoulder was bruised. She knew it was more shock than anything else and pushed up against the side wall. The gondola began to shift again and she was thrown to the other side. She reached out and grabbed the back of the chair to arrest her fall. Her hands held it tightly. What now?

SMITH FELT the harness dig into his chest as he was suddenly jerked to a standstill. It hurt immensely, but he was relieved that he was no longer falling. April must have regained control of the craft, he thought. When he saw the dirigible falling off to the side he made a face. His mind searched for an explanation. For a fleeting second he wondered if he'd been caught in some kind of Martian magnetic beam. But then he remembered, there weren't any Martians. He looked up and saw the frightening explanation.

The dirigible had descended off to the side and had passed one of the huge spikes in the crown. Smith's tether was being pulled up and over it like a pulley. The metal structure was fast moving towards him as he was pulled upwards.

He twisted his body so his head wouldn't be smashed into the underside. He held his hands out and braced himself for impact. Smith stiffened his body and stuck out his chest like a diver.

The harness reached the bottom of the pylon and made a clank as metal hit metal. He prayed that the clasp didn't come undone. He slid past the side and over the top. He tried to grasp it to arrest his fall and perhaps stop the descent of the balloon, but it had lost to much buoyancy.

Smiths fingers slipped and he was bounced over the top like a trout on a fish ladder. The impact hurt his chest and stomach. He arched his back and prepared himself for the worst part. His fingers tried to grasp the top edge in a last ditch effort, to no avail. The rope jerked him over the edge.

He was now falling head first towards the ground. The dirigible was descending slowly. Smith passed it on the way down and saw the rather shocked expression of April in the pilot seat.

WHY WAS that fool smiling when he flew past? April put the question out of her mind and pulled at the stick. They were still several feet from the ground. The propellers may not stop them from falling, but she at least hoped they could lesson the impact.

When Smith flew past the window she realized that she needed to make sure the contraption didn't fall down on top of him. She was reasonably certain she could manage the impact, but doubted he could out in the open, especially if the gondola landed on him.

The motors began to whir as she pulled backwards on the stick. There was a jerk and the craft dropped as Smith reached the end of his tether. April looked out the back of the gondola and could see the ground. The craft was almost pointing directly upwards.

"More speed, Miss Malone," shouted Smith from below her.

Relieved that he hadn't snapped his neck, she turned to the control panel and searched for anything that would stop their rapid descent. Her fingers found the autopilot control. She hesitated for a split second then turned it off. She rationalized that there was some find of governor that was keeping the propellors from spinning at their maximum.

She yanked the stick backwards again and the motors spun faster. They were still falling, but not as rapidly before. The statue loomed over the main window, almost chastising her. April's mother had warned her about her

curiosity. She'd been told it wasn't proper for a young woman to go gallivanting off like she was prone to doing. Never could her mother imagine her in a situation like this. She'd told her almost nothing of Smith, much less the adventure beneath the streets of Boston with the giant squid-like creature. Now this.

April shook her head and held the stick back as far as possible and braced for impact.

SMITH FELT like he was going to snap in half when the harness yanked into him a second time. He had to admit the free fall was quite interesting, it was the stopping that wasn't. From prior experiences, he knew the most dangerous part was making certain that your neck didn't get tangled into the ropes. If that happened, even a modest drop could prove fatal.

He looked to the ground below. Several dozen men had gathered in a wide circle. Two of them had spotlights aimed up at him and the craft. Miss Malone had managed to switch off the autopilot and minting a controlled descent. Smith was quite relieved that they both would most likely walk away if they could survive the mob. All of the men appeared armed.

Twenty feet above the crowd, Smith shouted down to them, "Please put away your weapons, gentlemen. There's a reasonable explanation for all of this."

His feet touched the grass near the base. The men kept their distance. Smith smiled until he realized they were looking up. The gondola was still falling directly over him.

He jumped to the side as it hit the ground where he'd been standing. The bag began to sag. Within seconds it had partially deflated and completely covered Smith and the gondola.

April was visible through the window.

"Kill the engine!"

April nodded and shut the whole contraption down. The propellers stopped spinning and avoided ripping into the sides of the bag. Underneath the bag, it looked like they were in a darkened tent. April climbed out of the cabin and pushed the bag over her head to giver he head room.

“I didn’t touch anything!” she said.

“I know you didn’t, Miss Malone. If you hadn’t been at the controls I’d be dead by now.”

“We may still be yet. They look angry.”

“Especially the one that shot at us.” Smith glanced around the underside of the bag. “We could try to escape, I suppose.”

“We’re on an island, Smith.”

“Right. I guess we just have to convince them we’re not Martians if we want to survive this.” Smith gave her a weak smile then held out his arm for April. He pushed their way through the collapsed air bag. It made hissing noises at their them as they moved underneath it.

They reached the edge of the bag and yanked it over their heads. Thirty men with bewildered expressions looked back at them. Firemen wielding axes, policemen holding guns and clubs surrounded them.

“We mean you no harm!” said Smith.

The crowd tensed, frightened by his voice.

“What’s wrong with…Oh my!” squeaked April. “What’s wrong with our voices?” she said in high pitched voice.

“Helium,” squeaked Smith.

The men stared back at them in confusion.

“Seriously, gentlemen,” said an unnaturally high-pitched Smith. “We’re earthlings just like you.” He tried to smile but the sound of his own voice defeated him.

A man began to push his way through the crowd. April and Smith could only see his presence from the rather large rifle barrel poking over the top

of their heads. He finally reached the front and pointed the elephant gun at Smith's chest. Smoke was still streaming out of the barrel.

The man spit out his cigar. "Schmitty?" he exclaimed.

"Teddy?" squeaked Smith.

"It's all right everyone. I know this man. I'm reasonably sure he's not our Martian." In a lower voice he grumbled, "Right?"

"Of course. We're only here to help." Smith's voice began to squeak less.

"God save us all," said Theodore Roosevelt.

13

BRAIN TRUST

“This man is an aeronautical expert I asked to come help us out with this,” Roosevelt explained to the fire chief and police captain.

“Then why’d you shoot him with you canon?” asked the police captain in an exaggerated Irish brogue.

“Because I wasn’t expecting him to show up here.”

“Sorry about that. I decided to use the fastest means possible.” Smith waved to the sagging dirigible. “Still a few kinks to work out. Thanks to my pilot’s quick reactions.” Smith gestured to April. “Er, Theodore Roosevelt, may I present Miss April Malone.”

April held out her hand and Roosevelt gave it a polite kiss. The police captain and fire chief nodded then wandered off to look at Smith’s craft.

Roosevelt leaned on the barrel of his rifle. “Maybe a little warning next time. I almost shot you, thinking maybe the fools were right and you were some kind of Martian bat.”

“Yes. My apologies. I didn’t expect anyone would see us. Least of all someone as well armed as you came.”

“How else do you shoot a Martian?”

“Good point.”

“What’s with the contraption?” asked Roosevelt.

“I wanted to get a closer look,” said Smith.

Roosevelt just shook his head.

Smith reached into his push and pulled out his sample brush. He stuck his other hand inside and pulled out a small vial with a liquid and pushed the brush inside. He gave it a shake then held it up to at in the light of a lantern set on the ground by their feet.

“Boric aside,” said Roosevelt. He tapped the butt of his rifle to the edge of the collapsed bag. “I could have saved you a lot of trouble.”

“Where’s the fun it that? So they know it’s a hoax? Not some space ray?”

Roosevelt shook his head. “All it means is that there could be a chemical component to the weapon. Until we know what a space ray is supposed to be, it could mean some kind of Martian flame-thrower that covers you with green fire. Try convincing the Mayor or anybody else here that’s not a serious threat.”

“I see your point.” Smith looked up at the statue.

“How seriously are they taking it?”

“Very. But the upside of your little stunt is that I think they’ll begin to take seriously my suggestion that we’re dealing with a very clever man and not a Martian.”

“Glad I could help.”

“I’m sorry I had to shoot you down. We have a phone out at Oyster Bay. You could have called.” He looked at the fallen airship. “Can you fix it?”

Smith turned around. “I think so. Happens all the time. I’ve got a bit of kit to patch it up inside and some extra cylinders.” Several police and fire official were still milling around the crashed vehicle. “I guess everyone is taking this pretty seriously.”

“And how. Our Martian has created quite a stir. Two hours ago, while this was lighting up the night sky, he placed a telephone call to the president and repeated his demands.”

“Oh, my. Did he take it seriously?” asked April.

“Not until his telephone switchboard caught on fire from the called from the British Prime-minister, The President of France and all of Congress. It seems it was a party call. They’re all furious that they weren’t told about the inscription on the monolith.”

“What will he do about that?” Smith dropped the end of the airbag he was holding on to.

“There’s going to be a conference tomorrow here in New York. The Secretary of War is coming as are the heads of the Army and Navy. Several ambassadors as well. Some professors from the various universities are going to speak on the subject.”

“What then?”

“If they think there’s a rational reason to be concerned, then they might just try to pay off the bribe.”

“But not end all wars?”

“There’s not much to do right now.” Roosevelt placed his rifle across the crook of his arm and stepped back to get a better view of the collapsed craft. “You haven’t been flying this around the Baltics recently?”

“No, not that I can recall.”

Roosevelt stepped closer and spoke in a hushed tone. “I’ve got sources that have said they’ve seen reports of flying craft of parts of Russia and even Finland.”

“Dirigibles and balloons?”

Roosevelt shook his head. “Metal craft, like the one people claimed they saw last night over Central Park. Heavier than air.”

Smith shook his head. “None of my design. At least none that I can account for.”

April listened closely but kept quiet. She wondered how many flying machines Smith had his hand in. She’d also been thinking about the

Martian’s appearance, but decided to wait until he finished talking to Roosevelt.

“It was just a thought. I’m looking for explanations to bring to the table tomorrow, before they do anything rash. There’s talk about just paying up the ransom and seeing what happened. A few Treasury men are convinced that’s the best course of action, treat it like a ransom then follow the money.”

“That’s fine if you’re trying to track down some garden variety thug, but this individual is thinking several steps ahead. Obviously he’s got international connections. Once that ransom is paid, he could vanish to any corner of the earth. Or sky, for that matter.”

“You don’t think we could track it?” asked Roosevelt. He pulled a cigar from his pocket, looked at the half inflated gas bag and put it away.

“Don’t worry. You can smoke to your heart’s content around this. I don’t doubt anyone’s devotion, the trouble you have is that you don’t have anything capable of tracking him if he takes to the air. You need some kind of air force.”

“Don’t I?” Roosevelt lit his cigar and waved to the grounded aircraft. “What if we were to add some firepower to this contraption. Like a few more rifles like this, or a Gatling gun? That’d be some air power.”

Smith felt his heart sink. “I was hoping aviation could be a civil pursuit and not another weapon for war.”

“Too late on that, Schmitty. The Chinese were strapping fellows to kites to drop bombs a thousand years ago. Half the world’s navies are trying to build craft like yours.”

“I know. I know. I helped design more than I care to think about.”

“Besides, it looks like somebody using a get up more advanced than yours is already using it to wage war, or at least anarchy. How do you suppose he managed to assault our Lady Liberty?”

“Probably poured the liquid from the sky. I suppose. Which means his craft is large enough to carry several thousands of gallons of liquid. More than adequate to ferret away with two thousand pounds of gold bullion.”

Roosevelt puffed out a cloud of smoke and shifted his rifle in the crook of his arm. “You know me Schmitty, I look for a way to avoid a conflict, but once I know it’s coming, I leave nothing on the table. I go right for the nose. If its Martians or not, we’re in for a fight. And the moment I read that headline, I knew the one man in the world I wanted to have at my back was you. Perhaps a slightly older version of you, but I won’t ask questions. This is a modern kind of conflict and you’re the most modern man I know. So my question to you is this, are you just curious? Or are you ready to go to war with these Martian fakers?”

Smith looked over at April. She raised an eyebrow. “I guess I’m in.”

“How about you, Miss?”

“Me?”

“I don’t know much about Schmitty other than he has a habit of showing up in the oddest places and he keeps exceptional company. The way you landed that contraption was impressive. I would have jumped for it, myself.”

“I guess I’m still hoping they’re really Martians with peaceful intent.”

“So are we all.” He tapped his nose. “But I think the three of us know it’s not the case.”

“I hope the men in the meeting tomorrow don’t come to any rash conclusions. I’d be fine if they decided it was time to end all wars, of course,” said Smith.

“That’d be a nice dream. But how long would that last. Peace under what terms? Lots of peace in a graveyard. I just hope the buffoons don’t come up with any harebrained schemes. Although…”

Smith waited for him to complete the thought.

“Think you could manage some kind of demonstration? I think it’s important that we remind them that you deal with hoaxers differently than the genuine artifact.”

“Such as?”

“Surprise me. You already did once tonight.” Roosevelt wandered off.

“You and me both.” Smith turned to April. “He’s a very peculiar man.”

“That says a lot coming from you.”

“In another age he’d be a king or an Emperor.” Smith started to push back the airbag towards the gondola. “I’ve got a repair kit inside here. I think we can get this patched up soon enough and be on our way.”

“What about the meeting tomorrow? Can you convince them it’s a hoax?”

“Maybe. I hope to give them good reason to think so, at least.”

14

CRASH

April and Smith sat in the back of the hall at New York University while one speaker after another stood on stage and bloviated on the possibility of extra-terrestrial life and whether or not they should cave to the alleged Martian's demands. Smith fidgeted, frustrated by the logic of some of the speakers, most of which were university professors, philosophers and clergy. Each one was given ten minutes to make their argument in front of an array of government officials. All of them went over the allotted time.

The auditorium was standing room only, press and photographers crowded the aisles. The contents of the Martian demands had made headlines the night before and now the whole world was debating what to do.

"They're missing the point," said Smith after an astronomer spoke about the inevitability of intelligent life in the universe. "The question shouldn't be whether or not does intelligent life exist, it should be whether or not it decided to drop in on Central Park and throw out demands like a gangster."

"So you do believe in the possibility of life on other planets?" asked April.

"Of course," Smith turned to her. His eyes were still red from the late night they'd spend planning a small 'demonstration'. He'd had eight cups

of coffee before the meeting and devoured twice his usual allotment of powdered donuts and eclairs.

“You just seemed so skeptical,” April reached out to wipe a blotch of powdered sugar from his lapel. Roosevelt had ushered them in minutes before the discussion began, while April had a chance to freshen up, Smith was making last minute refinements and still wore the clothing he had on when their dirigible crashed.

“Believing in one thing is not the same as believing in another.” Smith lowered his voice when a woman in front of him gave him a stern look. “Like god, for example. Believing in a god isn’t necessarily the same as believing in a god that intervenes in daily life. That’s where most religions defer. They all believe in some kind of supernatural being, but they can’t agree in what he does for a living. Does he kill children with typhoid? Or does he try to stop some other malevolent being from doing so? The details are everything. Just like our Martian. Let’s just assume there are aliens out there. Proving otherwise is impossible and won’t tell us how to deal with the immediate situation.” He waved his hand at the speaker at the stage, “It’s all so…so academic.”

“What should we do?” asked April.

“I don’t know. I’m worried this Martian might be more clever then I gave him credit for.” Smith sat up as another speaker took the stage and used the projection lantern to show a map of Europe and Russia on the overhead screen.

“As you can see there have been numerous sightings along the Prussian border,” the speaker continued. “Most of these sightings would indicate that there was an interest from the other-worlders in this region here,” the speaker waved his hands at a mountainous region in western Russia.

“Oh my,” said Smith.

“What’s the matter?”

“I know that place. The speaker is an idiot. He thinks aliens are interested in that area for gold reserves or whatever. If he knew what was really there, then he’d know we weren’t dealing with aliens.”

“What do you mean?” asked April. She looked at the map and tried to make sense of the Prussian towns and cities.

“What’s…” Smith was cut short by a loud voice that filled the auditorium.

“GREETINGS EARTHMEN”

The speaker dropped his pointing stick. People stood up in their seats to see the direction of the voice.

“I AM XYMOX THE 23RD. SUPREME RULER OF THE UNIVERSE. AND I HAVE COME TO GIVE YOU A WARNING…”

Purple tinted smoke began to fill the the air and the lamps flickered and dimmed. Flashes of light came from the cloud that now hung over the audience’s heads. People screamed as a form began to appear in the mist. Long tendrils whipped around and three glowing blues eyes appeared in what looked like a giant head.

“CRIMINALS ARE TRYING TO TRICK YOU. DO NOT BE FOOLED. THEIR SPACE RAY IS A JOKE.”

April leaned over and whispered into Smith’s ear, “Is that the octopus I bought in Chinatown last night?”

Smith nodded, “I didn’t have much time to think of anything else.”

“THESE MARTIANS ARE NOTHING MORE THAN EARTHMEN TRYING TO DECEIVE YOU. PAY THEM NOTHING.”

A woman screamed when the alien’s face became more visible. Another stood up an fainted in the middle of the audience. Angry men stood on their chairs and shook their fists at the apparition. Hundreds of people ran for the doors.

“Oh no!” Smith stood up. “It’s not real! It’s just a projection!” Nobody listened to him.

“DO NOT BE MISLEAD BY SIMPLE TRICKS,” said the Alien.

“He’s just an illusion,” shouted Smith.

“I AM JUST AN ILLUSION,” echoed the alien.

“It’s just a parlor stunt!” Smith stood on his chair and tried to calm the panicked crowd that was fleeing the auditorium.

The onstage speaker crawled out from behind the lectern and tried to make it offstage but kept bumping into chairs.

“I AM NOTHING MORE THAN A PARLOR STUNT,” said the image.

The auditorium thinned out. Several hundred people stayed behind, either not fooled by the illusion or too scared to leave. Roosevelt threaded his way towards the back of the auditorium to Smith and April.

“Do I need to ask?” he said.

Smith tried to grin.

“I COULD APPEAR AS ANYTHING. EVEN A HARMLESS KITTEN,” the octopus with glowing eyes dissolved into a giant kitten.

“Aaaaaaay”, screamed a woman as the kitten’s phantom paw clawed at the air. She stood up and bolted from the hall. Roosevelt watched her retreat.

15

BURN VICTIMS

Smith sat back down in his chair and put his hands over his face, trying to avoid the pandemonium he'd caused.

Roosevelt looked over at April. "Did you know he was going to do this?"

April, not wanting to make Smith look bad, wasn't prepared to admit that Smith she didn't know he was planning on demonstrating it in such a dramatic fashion. "I don't think we anticipated this reaction."

Roosevelt waved his hands at the hall. Professors were poking sticks at the cloud while policeman tried to shield the gathered politicians. A priest was making an exorcism rite in the corner.

The cat vanished from overhead and the smoke began to dissipate. "You!" came a voice from the other end of the hall.

The fire captain who'd been at the Statue of Liberty climbed over several rows of chairs to get to Smith. "You! I recognize you from last night! Are you responsible for this?"

Smith straightened his tie and stood up. "I certainly can't be accountable for people's reactions. Not all of them at least."

"What did you expect?" demanded the Captain. He poked a finger in Smith's direction. "You can't, you can't," he searched for the words. "You

can’t go shouting ‘alien’ in a crowded theatre!”

“It’s my fault,” said Roosevelt. “I asked Smith to give a demonstration. He was supposed to be onstage when the projection occurred, but all of the speakers ran late. The timer went off anyways.”

Smith said nothing and just nodded. He wasn’t actually scheduled to speak, but Roosevelt’s version sounded so much better than the truth.

“I should arrest all of you!” said the Captain.

“And what would that accomplish?” asked Roosevelt.

“It’d keep that menace from causing anymore harm,” the Captain jabbed a finger towards Smith again.

“This man is the only one who has any idea of what’s join on here,” said Roosevelt.

April put a hand on Smith’s shoulder.

The Captain squinted his eyes and stared down at Smith, “Maybe too much of an idea. Two times he’s caused a commotion. If I see him a third time, I’ll put him away myself.”

“I’ll see to it that there aren’t any more mix ups,” said Roosevelt.

The Captain stood for a moment trying to figure out what to do. He looked at April, like men had a habit of doing, she returned a charming smile.

“I think I flipped the wrong switch,” she said as she touched a finger to her lip and gave her most innocent look.

Smith raised his head to speak, but her fingernails clawed into his shoulder.

The Captain’s face released all its tension. “Well, electricity is dangerous, miss. A young thing like yourself shouldn’t be messing with it.” He looked down at Smith. “Putting a pretty thing like that in harm’s way.”

“Oh no sir,” said April, her voice higher than usual. “He gave me strict instructions not to touch it. But I was naughty. I’m so sorry.” She batted her eyes.

The Captain gave weak smile. He gazed around the room. People were calming down and acting embarrassed from their reactions as they realized it was just a stunt. “I guess nobody was hurt. But keep an eye on him, both of you.”

“Yes, of course,” said Roosevelt. “We’re ready at your insistence.”

“Lord, I hope not,” said the Captain. He looked over at April, “Present company excluded,” He tipped his hat and walked back down the aisle to talk to some of the other officials.

“I’m sorry,” said Smith. He leaned over the setback in front of him and stared at the floor.

“No, no. I asked you to do a demonstration.” Roosevelt waved a cigar at the space where the alien had appeared. “And I forgot who I was dealing with. I should have asked for something more subtle.”

“Subtle? Smith?” April raised an eyebrow.

“At least with you around I know he’s got some sense. Maybe next time you tell Miss Malone your plans. Bounce it off a head that’s not as high up in the clouds as your own?”

“It’s why she’s here,” said Smith. He looked up at April and smiled.

Roosevelt folded his arms and surveyed the knocked over chairs and crowd filing back into the hall. “Hell of a demonstration. I’m not sure if it helped or not. I’m going to talk to some of the press boys and explain what it was all about. We can at least count on the newspapermen to get the gist of it. I’m not sure if we changed any of the bureaucrat’s minds.”

“The last speaker, he made me think of something,” said Smith.

“That kook?”

“Yes, that kook. His map of airship sightings, it made me realize something. We’ve been going about this all wrong.”

“How do you mean?”

“We keep trying to prove it’s not aliens. But you and I already know this. What we need to do is not look for physical evidence that contradicts

that, but look for evidence elsewhere that shows that they're human tricksters."

"And how do we go about doing that?"

"Remember the map the kook showed? It was of airship sightings in Prussia. I can tell you what was so special about them, they were all centered around an area where I know there's a fissure in the earth that produces helium. Somewhere in Europe someone is building their own lighter than air craft in secrecy."

"You think they're connected to our Martians?"

"Maybe, maybe not. Even so, I don't know if that fissure is enough to supply them here. It got me thinking. They'd need a local source of a lighter than air gas. But it's not helium. Probably hydrogen. Somewhere they're producing hydrogen gas in large quantities to fill their own airship. Find the gas and we might find our Martians."

"How do we go about finding them?"

"Producing hydrogen involves hydrochloric acid. Lots of it. They could produce it in a warehouse or some out of the way place. The best way to do that is using electricity. They might have their own dynamo. We should talk to Edison and Tesla's people about that. We should also look for any burn victims, in case there's been an accident with the acid. Check some of the out of the way hospitals, the kind of place you go when you don't want questions."

"I think I can get on that. I know the man to talk to."

16

BOSS MIGGS

Smith looked over his shoulder at the pairs of eyes that were watching from windows and stoops. Roosevelt had lead him to an unsavory part of Hell's Kitchen. Smith had been self conscious about the suit he was wearing and wanted to dress down to match the working class residents.

Roosevelt had explained, "I know your usual modus operandi is to disguise yourself like a local, but this is a case where we don't want to pretend we're anyone other than who we are. The key to walking through a part of town like this, dressed as we are, is to look like we know what we're doing. Then the pickpockets and quick thieves will assume that we're connected men."

"Connected to whom?" asked Smith.

"This town is all about graft and corruption. To make that work you need corrupt businessmen and politicians. Everyone hear knows where the money flows from. We either want people to assume we're corrupt bureaucrats, or businessmen looking to corrupt. Either way, connected.

Roosevelt held open a door to a saloon. Smith stepped inside. Two men wearing butcher's coats, covered in blood were drinking down tall glasses of beer. The bartender, an old man in a navy blue sweater, looked at them with his flinty eyes.

“We’re here to speak with Mr. Miggs,” said Roosevelt.

“He ain’t here,” barked the bartender with an Irish accent. He gave Roosevelt another look. “On the account he’s out trying to find me cousin a job because you took the gov’ment one away from him.”

Roosevelt threw two coins on to the counter and lit up a cigar, “I’m sure if your cousin was qualified he wouldn’t have a problem keeping his job. It’s a funny thing, wanting civil servants to know how to read and do arithmetic.”

The bartender swiped the coins away and placed two beers on the counter. Roosevelt took a taste of his then set it back down on the counter. “Looks like someone swipe your beer and replaced it with river water.”

The bartender spit on the floor and turned away.

“Excuse me,” said Roosevelt.

The bartender kept his back turned and started to wipe down the counter.

Roosevelt turned to Smith and held up his hand. He unbuttoned his jacket and revealed a pistol in a holster. He grabbed the gun by the barrel and pounded it on the bar with the handle.

The bartender turned around to say something sharp, but thought twice after he a saw the gun in Roosevelt’s hand.

Roosevelt delicately placed the gun back in its holster. “Now that I have your attention, we’d like to speak with Boss Miggs.”

The Bartender jerked his thumb towards a door at the rear of the saloon.

Boss Miggs was sitting at a desk smoking a pipe while he looked over ledger. He closed it and shoved it inside of a drawer when he saw Roosevelt enter the room.

“Aren’t you a little far east for elk hunting?” said Miggs in a snide tone.

Immaculately dressed, Boss Miggs looked as clean and polished as any politician Smith had ever seen. Roosevelt had explained that he was one of

the operators for the Tammany Hall political machine and the man with the clearest connections to the underworld of New York City.

Roosevelt pulled up a chair and motioned for Smith to sit down. “Still helping your men steal candies from babies?”

“They never know what to do with it in the first place. Mayweather told me you were skulking around. To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? Is it for a campaign contribution? Are you looking to make another run?”

“I’ve moved on to bigger rats for now. No, we’re here about the Martian business.”

“You and everyone else.”

“I’m sure Boss Croker is livid that the Martians didn’t cut him in for a slice of the pie,” said Roosevelt.

“Who says they didn’t?” asked Miggs.

“If they had, your pet Mayor would have paid it up by now and given them the deed for Manhattan.”

“It worked once.”

“I’m here to make sure that it doesn’t happen again,” said Roosevelt. “My colleague and I are assisting the investigation.”

“Which investigation? I’ve got a half dozen different chiefs running around town all pointing fingers and asking questions. They’ve been shaking down the Burroughs trying to see if any of the gangs are involved.”

“How is your family, by the way?” asked Roosevelt.

“What a card. As if any of them had this kind of imagination. Sorry fellows, I’ve got nothing for you.”

“But we haven’t told you what we’re looking for,” said Smith.

Miggs turned to him. “You’re the one with the private train and the airship? If it were me I’d haul you downtown and be asking you questions.”

“That’s been discussed,” said Roosevelt. “My colleague is only here to help.”

“Like I said, I don’t think I can be much help, even if I was inclined.”

“What if I told you that your bartender was stealing from you?” said Smith.

Roosevelt turned to him and let out a puff of smoke as if it was a question mark.

“Donovan? Never,” said Miggs, but his eyebrow was arched.

“Maybe he’s not stealing from you. Maybe it’s just you from your customers.”

“Now wait a second,” said Miggs. “I run a clean joint. I own a half-dozen and nobody accuses me of swindling a man out of a drink, except maybe a drunk or two, but that’s only to there benefit.”

Roosevelt folded his arms and smiled. “Please explain, Schmitty,” he turned to Miggs for a moment and spoke, “It’s always fun seeing his mind work.”

“I heard about the stunt he pulled at the University,” replied Miggs.

“You’ve got two beer taps, right?” said Smith.

“Yes. And before you get started, I check them both. There’s no way Donovan is spiking the line on those.”

“Have you ever pulled both at the same time? It’s be a simple job to put in a fitting that fed water into the line only when both were pulled. Maybe just five or ten percent. When Donovan rolls the barrels out to the back, one of his friends comes out and taps the rest when you’re not here. Of course I’m not saying he’s doing that.”

“Then why are you saying that at all?”

“Because your beer is watered down. And that’s what I would do.”

Miggs looked over at Roosevelt.

Roosevelt shrugged. “He’s a clever man. There’s an easy way to find out.” He jerked his thumb towards the saloon.

Miggs rapped his fingers on his desk. “All right.” He pulled a key from his pocket and locked his desk drawers. “Not that I don’t trust you. Wait here.” He got up and walked out of the back office to the front of the bar.

“What’s that all about?” asked Roosevelt.

“A hunch.” Smith stood up and leaned over Migg’s desk. He picked up his address book and flipped through it. “Got a pencil?”

Roosevelt pulled a pencil and pad from his pocket. “I thought you had perfect recall?”

Shouting came from the front of the saloon. Both men looked towards the door.

“I do, when the amnesia doesn’t get in the way.” Smith called out several numbers to Roosevelt then put the address book back on the desk when they heard footsteps coming closer.

Miggs entered and sat back down at his desk. He looked at it suspiciously for a moment. “Looks like I’m closed for the afternoon, unless one of you men is looking for a job as a barkeep.”

“I’ve done it and didn’t much care for the company,” said Roosevelt.

“Right under my nose,” said Miggs. He shook his head in disgust.

“The ignominy of it all. Right under Ali Baba’s nose.”

“Theodore had clever ways of calling people a thief,” replied Miggs.

“We’re trying to find out if a surgeon or a doctor may have treated any men recently for burns. Or maybe some odd breathing issues?” asked Smith.

“Check the hospitals,” said Miggs.

“These people would probably want to avoid the normal hospitals,” said Roosevelt. “Like for instance if a friend of yours had several chinamen working in a laundry, illegally perhaps, and one of them got his ponytail caught up in the machine but the boss didn’t want the police snooping around on the account that some of the people working there were under age, or maybe not quite there voluntarily.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” said Miggs.

“Nothing? Not even our favor?” asked Roosevelt.

Miggs shook his head. “That’s not the way it works. And when did you start horse-trading favors?”

“I’m merely trying to help my country.”

“Well, fair is fair. If I find anything out, I’ll let you know. What would these burns have to do with the Martian business, anyhow? There wasn’t anyone near the Statue when it ignited.”

“And how did you come by that piece of information?” asked Roosevelt.

“A little bird told me that the men working there got a warning to get clear a few minutes before.”

“A warning? Like the kind that tells union workers when to stay home to avoid a fire.”

Miggs smiled. “Let’s just say we’re even.”

Roosevelt turned to Smith and nodded. “Well, we’ll be off then. I’m relieved to know the Martians are appropriately connected to the underworld of New York City.”

“I didn’t say anything to that effect. All I said was that they got a warning and everyone has managed to keep it under wraps. We don’t know from who or why.” Migg’s tone was serious. He sounded almost confused by it as well.

Smith and Roosevelt tipped their hats then left the empty bar.

“First, you have to tell me how you knew the bartender’s gambit,” said Roosevelt as they stepped onto the street.

“Yes, certainly. But I’d also like to check in on Miss Malone and see if she’s tracked down any missing dynamos.”

17

CHINESE REMEDY

Roosevelt and Smith hopped on a cable car heading South towards Chinatown. Of all the addresses they'd written down, the name of a Chinese doctor who lived there seemed the most likely. Roosevelt had remarked that the Chinese Tongs were so secretive the police had barely made a crack at them and tended to give them wide berth as long as they kept their activities away from uptown whites.

"That's a hell of a way to look at policing. What about the immigrants who are being victimized by them?" asked Smith.

The trolley's bell rang as they rolled through an intersection. "I believe America is for all American's, Smith. It's my hope to see to it that becomes the case. Until then, we have to choose our battles. Now, you've ignored my question, how did you know the beer tap was rigged?"

"It's a silly thing. I'm not much of a drinker, really."

"Neither am I. Depending upon the company."

"It was two things. The door to the saloon had a peculiar gap. Just wide enough to allow in a thin ray of light. When the bartender set down two mugs for the butchers I noticed the way the light looked when it traveled through their glasses. A kind of beer 'spectroscopy'. Against the far wall theirs looked different than ours. It was an interesting sight. I didn't think

much of it. But it was when he filled our glasses, I saw that the pressure from the tap actually increased slightly."

"How could you tell that?"

Smith looked at him oddly for a moment. "They filled faster."

"You time these things?" Roosevelt tapped his cigar ashes over the railing of the street car.

"Not consciously. I tend to be a little manic about certain details, I suppose."

"Yes, I suppose," muttered Roosevelt.

The two got off the streetcar and started walking west through the densely packed streets of The Bend. Sidewalks were filled with peddlers standing behind crates of produce. Shops poured out onto the sidewalks with towers of boots, shoes, dresses and working class clothes. The commerce didn't stop at the street. A shoe cobbler in a tie and rolled up sleeves stood on a fire escape and hammered nails while shouting down to people placing orders into a wooden bucket a small boy hauled up and down by a rope. Every square inch was wall-to-wall humanity.

Smith looked at the faces of the men and women as they passed by – Irish, Italian and Eastern Europeans along with just about every other ethnicity he could identify. He saw a few children threading their way through the crowd who looked mulatto.

To their right, men sat on chairs outside a crowded German beer hall and watched them pass by.

"Factory workers," said Roosevelt. "Either coming from or going to a shift."

"Let's hope their coming from."

"You should see the beer dives," Roosevelt waved a cigar towards a dark alley. "That's where the tramps go at night. For a few cents they drink doctored up beer and sleep on the tables in dark basements. Wretched, wretched places. The floor so thick in filth, it's difficult enough to walk in

there, let alone face up to pitiful condition of the people in there. The police do raids on them from time to time. Two weeks ago they found a two-year-old babe sleeping in the corner on a pile of straw."

Smith shook his head. The city excelled in everything, it was an inspiring testament to man's ambition and a stark reminder of his animal past.

They passed several more blocks and came to the streets known as 'Chinatown'. Pigtailed men in cotton and silk pajamas moved through the streets into shops and businesses with Chinese lettering. The street peddlers sold produce, chickens and strange looking roots and vegetables that looked like they'd make for horrible eating or excellent medicines. None of them paid any attention to Smith or Roosevelt. They only seemed interested in selling to other chinamen.

Smith glanced around the next street. Something seemed peculiar to him.

"You noticed?"

Smith nodded. He waited for a cart filled impossibly high with chairs to pass between them. "Where are the Chinese women?"

"There aren't many to speak of. Thew few that have chinese wives keep them squirreled way. The rest tend to have what they refer to as white wives."

"Prostitutes?" asked Smith.

"A byproduct of the opium den. More than a few young women have found their way into them and found themselves in yellow-bondage. Try as the reformers might, they can't seem to liberate them from the foul habit. They keep clawing their way back into their clutches."

"Some of my favorite philosophers are Chinese," said Smith. He looked around to try to make sense if the almost sterile atmosphere. Compared to the Bend and Mulberry street, it had all the joy of a prison yard.

“These are the cast-offs. Even then, most of them are hardworking. The fools would amount to something if they didn’t like gambling away their money more than making it.” He stopped and looked up at an address. “Here we go. Just as I thought. It looks like our doctor doesn’t keep a normal place of business.”

The stairs lead down to a basement door. An asian man with a brimmed hat stood in front of the doorway reading a Chinese newspaper. He glanced up at Smith and Roosevelt as they started down the stairs. He stepped towards the middle of the door to block them. Roosevelt smiled and gently pushed the man aside.

He relented and moved out of the way. They entered a long hallway that was filled with smoke.

“Remember, it’s always important to look like your business is more important than theirs.”

Smith followed him through the hallway into a room where men sat at tables leaning over squares with piles of buttons in the middle. Coins and bills were scattered around. All of the men looked up at them as they stepped into the room. The ones acting as dealers protectively covered the bets.

“Fan-tan,” whispered Roosevelt. “A simple game. You bet on how many bottoms or whatever will be left in the pile after the dealer pulls them away four at a time.”

“I’ve played a few rounds,” said Smith.

“Where abouts?”

“Singapore, Taipei, a few other places.”

“Of course. Of course.” Roosevelt looked at all of the faces staring back at them. “Pardon us gentlemen. We’ll leave you to your amusements in a moment. We’re looking for Doctor Qi. Could any of you help us find him?”

The faces stared back in silence. Out of the corner of his eye, Smith saw a young boy, no more than twelve look to the opposite corner of the room

where a man with a long white mustache was seated at a table.

“Doctor Qi!” shouted Smith in his most cheery voice. “I have a sick friend who could use your help.” He fumbled a wad of bills from his pocket and made his way towards the doctor.

A loud commotion came from the back of the room and a table was overturned. Porcelain bowls and metal coins clinked on the floor. Roosevelt and Smith turned to look at the commotion. When they turned back to the table where the doctor had been sitting, he was gone.

“What the devil?” said Roosevelt. He searched the back of the room for any sign of the man.

18

PLATINOCYANIDE

April Malone was looking at the overhead fans when the tall woman in grey skirts called her into the office. Everything in the Edison building was electric. She'd never seen so many incandescent light bulbs in one room. The entire office was a testament to the uses of electricity. Men in aprons and coats bustled back and forth down the corridors, some of them stopping to give her a glance or tip their eyeshades as they hurried along like the electrons they shuttled around circuits.

If this was the New York office, she could only imagine what things were like at the Menlo Park facility in New Jersey. That was where the great man himself toiled away at his grand experiments that filled the newspapers.

The secretary extended a finger towards April and pointed at a seat for her to sit down while be interviewed. Beady eyes looked over her application as April sat quietly and looked at the office around her. The entire back wall was lined with filing cabinets. She wondered for a moment if Edison might be planning an electrical alternative to them. Of course, back in Smith's Boston office, somewhere underneath was a system that would probably put to shame anything Edison had ever dreamed.

While Smith and Roosevelt had gone out in search of acid burned men who may or may not have existed at all, April had decided to see if there was anything to Smith's idea of a dynamo being put to use secretly somewhere. She'd searched the papers and found no mention of such a device for several months back. She did however find a curious mention of a large amount copper wire being stolen from the yard in back of the Edison facility three weeks prior.

When April found the want ad in the today's paper for a secretary at the new Edison/General Electric corporation, she decided it was as good as an excuse as any to have a look around.

The newspaper account was scant on details and names. She'd made an inquiry at the local police station for a copy of the police report, but was told it was pulled from the file. The sergeant at the desk had told her that 'Edison's Men' were going to handle it as corporate espionage. She had the sneaking suspicion that meant retribution against the party they thought might have been responsible.

"Can you use a typewriter?" asked the woman.

"Well enough," replied April. She tried to make eye contact with the woman while looking suitably demure.

"How's your technical spelling?"

"I think adequate."

The woman narrowed her gaze. "Electricity?"

"Pardon me?" asked April.

"Can you spell that for me?"

"E-L-E-C-T-R-I-C-I-T-Y." April was confused by the rather pedestrian request.

The woman penciled something on her application. "Fluoroscopy?"

"F-L-U-O-R-O-S-C-O-P-Y."

The woman gave her a cold look and scribbled something down. April had the feeling it wasn't a positive reaction. She was certain she'd spelled it

correctly.

The woman set her pencil down and looked up. “Platinocyanide?”

April bit her lip and thought for a moment. “P-L-A-T-I-N-O-C-Y-A-N-I-D-E.”

“Do you know what that is Miss Rhymer?” asked the woman, using April’s fake name.

“I believe a slat of some kind,” said April.

“Care to tell me how you came by this knowledge, Miss Rhymer? Most of the girls that come in here can only adequately spell their own names. And according to this you’ve never even been to a finishing college or a secretarial school.”

“I read a lot?” April left out that she also had an uncanny ability of remembering things.

“I don’t recall those words being the staple of the Saturday Evening Post. You should know that we treat corporate espionage very seriously here.”

That’s it, thought April. They thought she was a spy. Technically that was correct, but not the kind of spy the woman thought. She needed to think of something to cover.

“I used to do transcription for professor Milton at M.I.T. He’s a physicist.”

The woman looked back down at the application. “I don’t see that mentioned here. Why not?”

“It wasn’t an official position.” April looked away for a moment, feigning embarrassment. “My mother was his housekeeper. There was a disagreement.”

The woman nodded.

April let her arrive at whatever conclusion she wanted. The more sordid and embarrassing, the more convincing.

“That makes more sense.” The woman sat back and took the whole of April in. “You’re far too vibrant for our Serbian friend.”

April assumed she meant Tesla and took that as a kind of compliment.

“I’ll have Mr. Tiller come speak with you. It may be a few moments.”

Miss Wincher looked up as two men walked down the hall. April glanced over her shoulder and saw the men from the park that had chased down Smith and her. The ones with the motion picture camera. She observed the woman making a face.

“Undertakers?” asked April.

“In a way. Government men. They also do some work with Mr. Edison.”

April nodded. She wanted to enquire without being obvious about it. “I imagine a man as important as Mr. Edison has a lot of government secrets.”

“Quite. But those men are more involve with procurement and the like. You know Mr. Edison experimented with over a quarter-million materials before he found the one for the electric light bulb.”

April kept her mouth shut to avoid pointing out that if he’d ever bothered to read a scientific paper on the subject, he could have saved himself the trouble. The filament problem had been solved twenty years prior. The real challenge was the vacuum, which Edison already had.

“Meteors and the like. Odds and ends.”

“Pardon me?”

Miss Wincher leaned across the table. “You don’t know where the next great discovery might come from. A new rubber tree or some special rock. It’s of vital industrial and strategic importance. They’re going to be with Mr. Tiller for a moment. Probably to do with this Martian nonsense. Goodness we’ve had enough of that already around here.”

This was new to April. She wondered if there was a connection to the copper spindle disappearing. “You mean after the Central Park commotion?”

Wincher shook her head. “Men love to tell tall tales. Especially when they’ve been drinking on the job.”

April’s ears perked up. The filing cabinets behind the woman had to contain the records of the men who’d worked there when the copper spindles were stolen. April tried to think of a way to get access to them.

“Miss Wincher, I have an embarrassing confession.”

The woman raised an eyebrow.

“April looked at her hands in her lap. I’m a fine typist and a technical speller, but I’ve not the faintest idea on how to do filing. I know I should have mentioned that. I’ve done some volunteering at the public library, but they never even let me touch the card stacks.”

“There’s nothing to it,” said the woman.

“Do you think you might be able to show me?”

19

OPIUM

“Doctor Qi no here,” said a man near Roosevelt’s elbow. “You go now.”

Smith ignored him and walked to the back of the room. Angry eyes followed him. The rear wall was covered in grime and layers of wallpaper. The floor was dirty except for a narrow rectangle.

“Trap door,” said Smith. He reached down to open it.

“Leave it. I don’t want us getting stabbed in the dark,” replied Roosevelt.

Smith stood back up and walked back to the center of the room, disappointed that he didn’t get to explore the labyrinth of tunnels underneath the streets.

“I can ask the local police to keep an eye out for him.”

Smith tapped his finger to his chin. “I have another idea.” He motioned towards the door.

They both tipped their hats to the indifferent chinamen and left the illicit gambling hall and stepped back into the bright street.

“Let’s hear it,” said Roosevelt.

“Doctor Qi certainly didn’t want to speak to us.”

“That much was very apparent to me.”

“I’d think he’d normally be willing to at least entertain someone waving around cash. I looked at his side of the Fan-Tan table and he was in such a hurry to leave he left behind his winnings.”

“I’ve never known a chinaman or any other to do that.”

“I suppose it’s for two reasons. Either one of the men there was an accomplice, someone he trusted to take care of them. Or he was in such a fright he didn’t care. Both of them leave me to a conclusion.”

Roosevelt leaned against an railing and smiled. “Explain.”

“First, I know where the hypothetical men are who’ve been burned by the hydrochloric acid used to make the hydrogen gas. Both hypothesis lead to the same conclusion.”

“The man sitting near Doctor Qi’s winnings reached of opium.”

“Nearly all of the men down their did.”

“True enough. But this man had neither the glassy-eyed look or any of the other symptoms of the opium addict.”

“So he works in an opium den,” finished Roosevelt.

Smith nodded. He pointed to the basement. “Why does this Doctor have a gambling hall as his address and not a clinic or a remedy shop?” He pointed to several signs covered in Chinese symbols. “I see several of them here. He doesn’t practice out of any of them. There’s a kind a particular patient he treats. The kind you don’t want talking to anyone else. Men who got injured pulling robberies or who are on the run. Men you keep doped up in an opium den so they don’t talk to anyone while they either heal or die from their wounds. Acid burns are particularly painful.” Smith waved his finger in the air the pointed towards the ground. “Tell the police captain to do a search of the opium dens in this block and I’ll bet you a cigar he’ll find our hypothetical acid burned men.”

“I’ll take you up on that offer, Smith. The police station is two blocks over. I can get a squad of men here in twenty minutes,” said Roosevelt. He started walking down the street.

“Er, I was speaking theoretically,” said Smith as he ran to catch up with him.

“Well, aren’t you supposed to test theories?” Roosevelt was grinning from ear to ear.

Smith looked over at a telegraph pole covered in signs and notices written in Chinese. “Yes, well I’ll stay here and look for clues. Maybe our Martian contracted for labor from here.”

“Don’t want to face the police with that theory?”

“I’d prefer to sneak in during the still of night and look, to be honest. I’m quite practiced in the art of ninjutsu.”

“You can’t do everything by yourself, Smith. Besides, these coppers are dying to do something other than stare at the sky.”

“I’ll wait here. After my stunt this morning I want to avoid the authorities as much as possible.”

“Good point. I’ll be back in a moment,” Roosevelt walked around the corner.

Smith turned back to the pole and read the different notices nailed to it. He tried to ignore the fact that a hundred pairs of eyes were staring back at him.

FIFTEEN MINUTES later Roosevelt and the captain of the police station marched back into Chinatown with a column of two-dozen uniformed officers behind him. Smith was speechless.

“What’s the matter, Schmitty? Didn’t think I could pull it off?” said Roosevelt as he exhaled a triumphant puff of smoke into the air.

“I was afraid you would. You’re the kind of man that can talk others into following you into the mouth of hell if you wanted.”

“Just point me in the direction.” Roosevelt nodded to the captain.

The policemen split into two groups and stormed down the street and went down various back alleys.

Roosevelt leaned against the telegraph pull. “This is old hat for them. They know all the dens by heart. Usually they only raid them when things get out of hand or someone fails to grease the right palm. Since this is just a search, the opium den operators won’t make too much of a fuss.”

“What did you tell the captain?”

“Just that we were following down a hunch that some men may have been burned igniting the Statue of Liberty.”

“An acid burn would look different than that kind of burn,” said Smith.

Roosevelt shook his head. “I’m pretty sure these crushers can’t tell the difference.” He looked at the pole.

“See anything interesting?”

Smith yanked a sheet off and handed it to him. “It says there’s going to be a raid on the Green Lotus Fan-Tan parlor next tuesday.”

“That’s how this city works.”

They watched as policemen ran down one alley then came back another. Occasionally a few dozen chinamen would come running out of a doorway across the street after the police went into a building opposite. Some even came climbing down fire escapes.

“It’s a maze down there,” said Roosevelt. “Another city. You’ve got entire gangs living in the sewers.”

A police lieutenant came running out of a doorway and up to Roosevelt. “Captain wants you to see this.”

“What is it?” asked Roosevelt as he and Smith followed the young man.

“We found two men all bandaged up like you said. Doped out of their minds.”

The walked down a narrow alley. Cats boxed up in crates howled at them as they walked by.

“This way,” the lieutenant pointed towards an even more narrow corridor between two buildings. “One of the men keeps saying something in another language.”

“What?” asked Roosevelt.

“Sergeant Balky, his mother was Turkish, I think. He says the man is saying ‘fear’ over and over again.”

The walked down a flight of stairs into a basement underneath a five-story tenement building. Two police officers were standing at the doorway. It took a moment for their eyes to adjust to the dark interior.

The room was filled with row after row of bunk beds. Men and a women, too doped up to notice, lulled about and covered their eyes from the light coming in through the open doors.

They came to bunk where a man whose head was covered in bandages was surrounded by policemen. The captain leaned against the bed shaking his head.

“We found another one in the next bed. Neither one can talk, except this one, but he seems to have passed out from the exertion.”

Yellow-tinged gauze covered the man’s face. The dressings looked like they hadn’t been changed in several days. Completely covered in a ball of bandages, it could be anyone or anything underneath the wrappings.

“Can we have him moved to a proper hospital?” asked Roosevelt.

“I’ll see to it right away,” said the captain.

“And have an armed guard put on him and the other. They were sent here so they wouldn’t talk. We need to make sure that if they recover no one stops them from telling us what they know.”

“Where is Sergeant Balky?” asked Smith.

“Here,” relied a heavyset man.

“You heard the man speak?”

“Yes. It sounded like he was saying ‘fear’.”

“Fear? What was the question?”

“I asked him where he was from.”

“And he said ‘fear’? Are you certain? Is your mother by any chance Greek?”

Balky looked around at the other policemen. “She spoke a little.”

“And that’s how you knew the man was saying ‘fear’? Because it sounded like a Greek word you remembered?”

Balky nodded.

“Very good, Sergeant. But he wasn’t telling you he was afraid. He was naming a place. And this was the answer he gave you? Your question was specifically, ‘Where are you from?’”

Balky looked at his captain. “I think so.”

“Sergeant,” Smith’s voice was sharp. “This is absolutely critical. You asked him where he was from and this is what he told you?”

“Yes.” He stood up and stuck out his chest.

“Well that is peculiar,” said Smith. He sat on the edge of the bed and looked down at the mystery man.

“Well? What is it, Schmitty?” asked Roosevelt.

Smith shook his head. “I guess honesty and openness is the only approach. The word Sergeant Balky heard was Greek alright. But the man laying here wasn’t telling us he was afraid. When asked where he was from, he told the Sergeant, the ancient Greek word for fear. That word is ‘phobos’. Isn’t that correct?”

Balky nodded.

“Phobos, gentleman, is also the name of one of the Martian moons.” Smith shook his head as he gazed at the wrapped body and wondered what was underneath the bloody bandages. “When asked where he was from, this man said the largest moon orbiting Mars. Hardly the kind of jape a man in this much pain would make.”

20

STRANGE VISITORS

April walked up the stairs of the tenement building, carefully dodging the children that ran up and down like it was a vertical playground. Dressed in patched up, but well mended and cleaned clothes, they were obviously the children of parents who had little money but at least cared enough to see to do their best. On her way to the building she'd passed many other children not so nearly well looked after. Scruffy looking boys and girls that looked like they'd never seen a bath. Some of them with gaunt faces. Others with angry expressions in their eyes, even as they went about their play.

She reached the top of the landing and walked down the corridor to the apartment she'd been searching for. A small boy of perhaps six, was playing a game outside the door involving a tin soldier and a handful of buttons and bottle caps.

April had noted the address when Miss Wincher had given her a quick education on the art of filing. April pretended to know nothing and asked several innocent questions before going to the "T" drawer in the employment section and pulling out a file of recent terminations. She memorized two names and addresses at a glance while she made eye contact with Wincher. Both belonged to men who had been fired the day after the copper spindle went missing.

The first man had moved on from the boarding house he'd been staying at and left no forwarding address. Her last hope of salvaging anything from her ruse was behind the door in front of her.

She'd felt a little guilty after departing the office. Despite her guarded crone-like exterior, Miss Wincher had actually been cordial and polite. After April got the information she departed as quickly as she could to avoid the men dressed in black, lest they make a connection between her and Smith. Wincher had been sorry to see her leave and told her to come back the next day. April decided to keep that option open in case they needed more information.

She knocked on the door to the apartment. The little boy looked up.

"Are you here to see papa about a job?"

His eyes looked hopeful. There were traces of dried tears at the conners of his cheeks.

"I'm just a friend," said April.

The boy nodded his head then went back to his play. The door opened and a petite woman looked up at April. A toddler clutched at her skirt.

"I'm here to speak with Mr. Garret," said April.

The room was dark except for light streaming in from a rip in the window shade. The woman had an exacerbated look about her face. A bed and a table with thin slice of bread and a piece of cheese was visible to the side.

April's heart sank. It was obvious that the family had fallen on hard times since the man lost his job. She could see his shadow in the corner sitting in a chair, staring back at the doorway.

"You work for Edison?" asked the man.

"No. I've come to ask you about the night the copper spindle was stolen."

"You're not the police. I'm not interested in talking."

“April patted her coat pocket. I’m prepared to pay you two dollars for your story.”

“And look like a fool in the newspaper? Not interested.”

The small woman looked back at her husband. There was a hurt look in her eyes.

“Lot’s of people are looking foolish. Besides, it can be anonymous,” said April.

“Anonymous?” The man thought about it for a moment. “Alright. Alright. Martha, let the young lady in. Find her a chair.”

The woman brought chair from the kitchen. April smiled and sat down. She did her best not to stare at the squalid conditions and embarrass the people any further. The man sat up in his chair. He was wearing a cap and a vest that had been buttoned up wrong. He looked like he was on the sober side of a several day drunk. Unshaven, his eyes were bloodshot.

He seemed like a bit of a lout the way he commanded his wife, but April got a slight nod from him to the woman after she brought the chair over. She then stood by his side and he reached up and held her hand. There was a tenderness there that both warmed and saddened April.

“Tell me what happened the night the copper spindle went missing,” said April.

“One minute it was there. Another it wasn’t.”

April could tell that a lot more happened in that minute than Garret wanted to admit to.

“Mr. Garret, I don’t think you’re a fool. Nothing you can tell me would surprise me. You’ve seen what’s been going on these last few days.”

Garret nodded. He had the look of a man who was tired of telling his story to deaf ears.

“I think what happened to you is related. It’s very important you tell me what you really saw that night. Why did they fire you?”

“$500 dollars worth of copper wiring went missing on my watch in the yard. That’s why. And all I had was a fool story. Told me I was drunk and covering it up. Said I was on the take. The take! Look around you. Does it look like I’m getting any kind of graft?”

April shook her head.

“It was a foggy night. I look after the yard in a watch with Vincent. Lots of expensive equipment there. Sometimes deliveries come at night Menlo or other parts. We open the gates and let them in. That night I was sitting on a stack of crates looking up in the sky at a bright red star. I thought it was peculiar how bright it was. Then I realize it’s getting closer. I holler to Vincent, but he’s sleeping behind a pile of crates. I look up and the star is right over us. So bright I’m casting a shadow. I have to hold my hands up to look at it.

“I didn’t know what to do. They tell us what to do if the gangs try to bust in and steal a shipment. They don’t tell us who to call when a star is falling on your heads. It comes down just over the top of the building. I’m staring up at it, my mouth open like a carp. I don’t know what to think. A beam of light shoots down to the ground, like a pillar. Then I see them. I didn’t know what they were then. I called them devils. Large red heads. Tall, real tall. But I guess that’s how they grow on Mars.

“They walk over to the copper spindle. It’s chest high. Weighs several hundred pounds. I can see they’re fixing to take it. I manage to shut my mouth and go over to them. I’m so scared. But I know my job. My job is to not let them take anything.

“I walk up to the closest one and shout at him. He just turns to me. You can’t tell by the head cause it’s just round. His shoulders turn to me and he sticks out a hand and hits me in my chest. That’s how I got this.”

The man opened up his vest and shirt to show April the red scar burned into his skin.

“Oh my,” said April.

“They say I did this to myself.” The man looked down at the scar. “Why?”

April shook her head. The man didn’t seem like the type to fake something like that.

“Next thing I know I’m waking up and the morning supervisor is kicking me in the ribs, calling me a no good lazy drunk. They fired me that day. I offered to speak to the police, but they told me they were going to handle it. Didn’t even pay me the rest of my wages. Just like that. All I got is this scar to show for it. Vincent, he headed off. He’s not got a family to worry about.”

“Did you get a good look at the craft?”

“Burned into my eyeballs.” He reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper and handed it to her.

It was a pencil sketch of a saucer shaped craft with various embellishments. There was also a drawing of a space man.

“May I keep this?” asked April.

The man looked at his wife.

“I’ll pay you an extra dollar for it,” said April. She pulled the bills from her jacket. It was her entire week’s pay.

Garret nodded. “You’re very kind.” He took the money and handed it to his wife.

April stood up. “Thank you for sharing that with me.”

“Which paper will this appear in?” asked the wife.

“I don’t know yet. I’m a bit of a freelancer.”

The woman looked at the rolled up bills in her hand. “What happens if you can’t sell the story?”

April could tell the woman felt guilty for taking the money. “Oh, don’t worry. I always do.” She headed for the door and stopped. “Mr. Garret, have you sought work with Tesla’s company? They might have a use for a yardman with knowledge like yours.”

“No. That’s who Edison’s people said I was working for. I didn’t want to look a crook.”

“Well, if they already assume that, then why not?”

Garret nodded.

“And one more thing. I don’t know much about the man, but if Tesla himself asks to interview you, be sure to tell him the exact circumstances of your firing. He might be more sympathetic then you think. He’s got a peculiar interest. I’d also show him the scar.”

April smiled down at the little boy and walked down the flight of stairs. The story and drawing had cost her over a week’s wages, but she felt it was well spent and would go to a good cause. Of course, the really interesting detail to her wasn’t the drawing or the tale. It was the scar on Garret’s chest. It was the most damning evidence of all. She’d known it was common for men working on inside jobs to fake injuries so they didn’t look culpable. But the scar on his chest was not only an unusual injury, the most outstanding detail of all told April that it had to either be the work of an insane man or the truth.

Why fake an injury from a burning hand. More importantly, why fake a burn mark from a hand with only three fingers?

21

RENDITION

Smith walked out of the Western Union office with a telegram in hand. The sun was going down and cast long shadows. Roosevelt was watching three workmen wrestling a steel girder onto the fourth floor of a building across the street. A steam powered crane stood nearby with an angry mechanic slamming his wrench into the mechanical workings without much success.

“Good news?” asked Roosevelt.

Smith shrugged. “I asked Miss Malone to check in by sending an update to this office.”

“Charming lady, that Miss Malone.”

“This is interesting. Very interesting.” Smith handed the telegram to Roosevelt.

Roosevelt held it up to his spectacles. “Quite interesting.” He handed it back to Smith. “Say, you didn’t happen to…”

“Count the fingers on our wounded Phobosians? I think we would have noticed. Besides, you’re not really entertaining the idea that these are real Martians?”

“I’m not one for goblin stories. But I’ve been told a few by men I hold in high regard. There has to be a point where you take the notion seriously,”

said Roosevelt.

“Do you?” asked Smith.

Roosevelt spat a cigar tip on the ground. “Hogwash. I’m just curious to know what you threshold is. We don’t want to be two dunderheads that dismiss everything that flies in the face of our sense of reason.”

“So far our most promising leads have been when we chased down evidence of a hoax. We looked for men burned by acid used to make lighter than air craft and we found them. Miss Malone went looking for our dynamo and found a missing copper spindle.”

“But each time we also find a clue suggesting some kind of Martian interference. Either a word or a three-fingered burn.”

“The burn is easily enough faked. It’s the kind of trick I’d use if I was inclined to cruel pranks. As far as Phobos is concerned, well, I don’t know what to make of that,” said Smith.

The crossed the street and started walking uptown towards the yard where Smith had rented out to work on his airship.

“Quite a showman,” said Roosevelt after half an hour of each man in their own thoughts.

“Yes. I was thinking the same thing. I keep getting the feeling there’s some part to all of this right in front of our noses.”

“Friends of yours?” asked Roosevelt.

Smith looked up and saw two men dressed in black walking towards them with a determined expression. A metal barrel poked out below one of their coats.

“Nobody whose acquaintance I’d like to meet.”

“Say, there’s a pretzel stand right down this street. Why don’t you go ahead and grab two? The mustard is quite good.” Roosevelt nodded to Smith and tapped his jacket pocket where he had his revolver.

“I don’t…”

Roosevelt grabbed him by the shoulders and turned him down the alley. “Just go, Schmitty.”

Smith relented and hurried down the alley. If it had been any other man he wouldn’t have let him stand in his stead, but he knew Roosevelt could more than handle his own. He glanced over his shoulder and saw him jog ahead to go confront the men nose to nose.

Smith didn’t want to waste his friend’s distraction so he hurried down the narrow alley and ran up the next street. He found a dark alcove that gave him a clear view of both sides of the street and backed into it.

A gun shot echoed across the block.

“Damn.” Smith shook his head and ran back.

He came to the narrow alley again and started walking back down. Defensively, he held his heavy umbrella in front of his body. A man in a balk coat appeared in front of him from around the corner. Smith turned around and found two more men in black coats coming from the other side. It had been a trap.

“Come along, Mr. Smith. The Health Service Department has requested an inspection.” The man in the front held up a very official looking green document.

“That’s quite alright. I’m feeling fine,” said Smith.

“It’s not your health we’re concerned about,” said a man from behind him.

“That’s my concern.” Smith lifted his umbrella above his head. He was nervous about the close-quarters of the alley.

The men knew Smith was trapped. They slowed down their pace as they closed in on him. When he raised the umbrella they thought it was an odd reaction. The man known as Contral pocketed the document and pulled out a heavy blackjack and slapped it against his palm.

“We can do this unofficially and quite pain free. Or you can make us go through all the channels and we’ll make it much more difficult for you,”

said Contral.

Smith looked at the men getting closer over his shoulder. His nose got a whiff of formaldehyde and he made a quick decision.

“I really hate bureaucracies,” said Smith has he opened his umbrella and twisted the handle.

Sparks and smoke flooded the alley from the tips of the umbrella. Contral and his men shielded their eyes.

“Don’t let him get past you!” screamed Contral.

The three of them stretched out their arms to touch the walls on either side and closed in on where they’d last seen Smith. The smoke was thick and caused them all to cough.

Something pushed against Contral’s chest. He slapped down hard with his blackjack and felt it hit a skull. “I’ve got him!” he hollered as he leaped to the ground and put a knee in the man’s chest. He slapped the metal blackjack into the body over and over. “Filthy vermin! God damn vermin!”

“Contral!” shouted one of his men a few feet away in the smoke.

“Help me subdue him!” Contral fought with the man as he tried to get up.

“Contral! That’s George!” shouted the man standing in front of him.

Contral pulled the blackjack back for another strike and froze. The smoke had cleared enough for him to see the bloody face of the man underneath his boot. He shoved the weapon back in his pocket and pulled the dazed man to his feet.”

“Good god, George! Look what that fiend Smith did to you.” Contral gave the other man a glare to tell him to keep his mouth shut.

Contral stood back and tried to compose himself. George looked confused and still half unconscious. Besides the three of them, the alley was empty. He was certain Smith didn’t pass him.

“Did he pass you?” he asked Anderson.

Anderson was still shocked by the beating he'd watched Contral give his partner. "Um, er, no. There's no way he could have got past us."

Contral glowered. "Then where the hell did he go?"

22

A PECULIAR SIGHT

Smith glanced down at the three men from the top of the building that overlooked one side of the alley then took off in a run. He gripped his still warm rocket umbrella under his arm and dig under clotheslines, leaped over rooftop gardens and passed by shacks built on top of the row of tenement buildings.

While part of his mind was still trying to make sense of the altercation in the alley, he marveled at the ecosystem that existed on top of the buildings of the city. Almost invisible at night from his airship, he had little understanding of what was on top of all the buildings he'd passed by walking or in street cars. Every inch of the city was being used for something, whether it was the sewers underneath or the tar paper roofs overhead.

He leaped across a four foot gap and came to a standstill when he almost tripped over a row of several hundred flower pots. An old woman in a threadbare gown holding a candle used a dented bean can to water them. Smith knelt down to have a look at a white flower.

"Gardenias?" he asked.

"Most people think it's too cold to grow them here. Secret is watering them at night," said the woman as she tilted the can into a pot and sprinkled

a small amount of water.

“And you don’t overwater them?”

“That’s right. Too much water makes the soil too cold. They like a warm blanket just like you and me.”

Smith watched as the woman went along the rows of flowers and watered them. It was a distraction for him while he decided what to do next. Instincts told him that the shot he heard was Teddy warning the men off, and the route in the alley had gotten past him too. Most likely, Roosevelt was on his way back to the train or waiting for Smith near a busier street like Broadway where the men in black coats wouldn’t try to snatch him.

“Did you happen to see that business with the green airship?” asked Smith.

The woman looked up from her watering. “I see lots of things up here.”

“I’m sure you do.”

“Night the Lady Liberty got fire I saw an airship pass overhead. Not very big though. Kind of smallish.”

“Yes, well I’m sure it gets the job done,” Smith coughed to the side.

“I suppose. I was asleep when folks said they saw the other one. Not surprised though. I see lots of peculiar things up here.”

The woman’s voice was old but certain. Her eyes bore into Smith.

His curiosity was piqued. “What kind of things?”

“Strange things. Saw a bird once as big as a small horse.” She pointed towards the corner of the roof. “I saw it perched right there one night. I shooed it away with my broom. I didn’t want it snatching one of the babes that play in the street.”

“No. Of course not. Big as a horse?”

“More or less. But that was years ago. It doesn’t cow round here no more,” she said.

“Anything else?”

The woman thought for a moment. “The usual I guess.” She pointed to another roof. “There’s a young couple that likes to make whoopee over on that roof some nights.” She gave Smith a grin. “I suppose I would if I had a man who was inclined.”

“You’re far too young for me. What about the unusual? Anything else?”

“You mean besides the two suns?”

“Two suns?” asked Smith. “What do you mean?”

The woman tilted her head. “The two suns.” He gnarled finger pointed past Smith’s shoulder.

He turned to his left and saw the fading sun glowing orange back at him in the east. He jerked his head to the right and saw the sun sinking in the west. “Well, that is peculiar.”

“It only lasts for another minute,” said the woman.

Smith looked to eastern sun and watched as it began to fade then vanished. Nightfall fell on the city.

“You’re the other person whose seen it,” said the woman.

“Try telling other people and they think I’m mad.”

“You’re not mad. You’re brilliant and very observant.” Wheels began to turn in Smith’s head. A giant part of the puzzle started to resolve itself. He looked down at the flowers. “How many will five dollars get me?”

“All of them and more,” smiled the woman.

“I’ll just stick with the flowers,” said Smith.

The woman wrapped a large bouquet for him. She then showed him the quickest route to a busy street. He thanked her then took off uptown across several more rooftops. He found a fire escape and descended down to the street.

Roosevelt was waiting for him at Chambers and Broadway.

“Flowers for me? I don’t think I deserved them.”

“I heard the shot. I thought it was the end of you,” said Smith.

“One of those louts guns fired as I shoved him into the bricks. I realized too late there were more of them. I was going to search for you until I saw the others regroup. Looks like you went to work on one of them.”

Smith shook his head. “They eat their own.”

“Had run ins with them before?”

“Not these ones. But their kind. Usually they don’t work so out in the open.”

Roosevelt pulled a wallet from his pocket. “I filched this out of one of their pockets.” He handed Smith an identification card and a badge. “Some kind of health commission.”

“Legitimate?” This worried Smith.

“Or as illegitimate as any other cocked-up two-bit commission in this city. It wouldn’t surprise me if they’re getting paid by some public agency. Not that that gives them any right to do as they please. But you can get away with murder under the pretext of public health. Especially in a city so filled with immigrants and public health problems.”

“And a Martian scare.”

“There’s that. I think they have their eye on you. It’s time we took extra precautions. I’ll try to clear this up with the Mayor and make sure they keep their hand off you.”

23

ABDUCTION

Mayor Grant laid his cards on the table and took a sip from his brandy snifter. He'd and his partner had just lost a rubber in a game of whist and were done for the evening. His total loss for the night was six dollars, a small price to pay for the distraction from the current events. He was sick of talking about Martians and had made it clear to anybody who tried to broach the subject. The rules of talking shop at the Peacock Club were quite clear, but all the men ever wanted to talk about was business and politics.

The meeting at NYU had been a disaster, even without the interruption from the eccentric man with the phantasmagoria show. When he found out the man was the same one who'd crashed his private dirigible into the Statue of Liberty, he'd been livid. Of course he'd be an acquaintance of Roosevelt's. Probably chomped on cigars with Mark Twain over at the Lotus Club too whenever that rogue was in town.

The trouble with the city, Grant had decided, was all of the same reasons it was so interesting. He'd had a mathematician explain to him that not only would New York City be the most populous city in the United States by the end of the century. It would be the largest one ruled by the white man since the days of Rome. It was a sobering thought. There was a reason why the mayorship carried more gravitas than most governorships

and why foreign dignitaries knew the two officials in the United States to speak to were the President first and the Mayor of New York City a close second.

He'd spoke to the president earlier in the day on the scratchy telephone. "What are you going to do about this Martian situation?" the president had asked.

"What am I going to do?" Grant had answered back. "Not unless you're going to open up the gold reserve, there's little I can do."

"Well, deal with it," the president had replied before hanging up.

Deal with it? There wasn't much Grant could do. The Martians are whoever they were could keep setting off all the fireworks they wanted, but he was in no position to meet their demands. Mayor of the most important city in the world or not, he was still just a mayor.

He mumbled a goodbye to his gaming partners and trudge off to the coat room. His hands in his pockets and eyes staring at the floor, he avoided the rest of the club, lest he have to be asked one more time 'what he was going to do about this Martian business.' Decorum prevented him from using the four letter gutter response he wanted to use.

As he dawned his coat and the valet called for his coach, he wished for a moment that P.T. Barnum was still among the living. If for no other reason then to get the man's assurance that this was indeed a 'humbug'. Grant trusted the opinions of others more than himself. Except those idiots who paraded on the stage earlier that day and brayed on and on. For all of that intellectual power, not a commonsense wit about them.

He shrugged and stepped outside and boarded his coach. His driver snapped the reins and the two horse pulled the carriage away from the colonnades of the club. There was a bit of a fog that night. Grant closed the door to avoid the fouled smell coming from the bay.

The carriage traveled two blocks then took the side street so the horses didn't have to watch their steps on the trolley track in the dark. Grant lit a

cheroot and puffed away as he tried to think about nothing. He wondered if his sister would still be up. Most likely. She was a delicate sleeper. He'd hoped to hand her off to some eligible man sooner or later so he could finally take his own wife. Grant was the youngest mayor the city had ever seen. In his political ambition he hadn't stopped to get married. He knew he'd have to remedy that soon or later. It didn't look well to be a bachelor in politics for very long.

His mind ran through the faces of the politically connected young women that might make a suitable wife. When the green glow shot into the carriage he pulled the shade down as to not be disturbed. Although, for a moment he was amused by the ghastly specter form the smoke from the cheroot made in the green light.

The carriage came to a stop. Green glow? Grant sat up. The horses began to make a whining sound. There was a bounce as Albert hopped off the driver's bench and walked over to his door.

Grant waited for the tap to come at his window, but it never came. He thought that odd. He opened the door at the sound of footsteps running away from the carriage. Albert's tails followed after him as he retreated under the light of a gas lamp and kept running in the opposite direction.

Grant set foot into and looked back in the direction his coachman had gone. There was the feeling of acid at his throat when he thought for a moment that this was some kind of assassination. Had he displeased Croker? Were the gangs making a move? He thought those days were behind the city. Nobody murdered politicians in the street anymore? There were far better forms of assassination now. Chiefly the press.

He looked down at the green cast on the ground and his memory clicked into place. His shadow shimmered and flickered in the mysterious light. He was too terrified to turn around. All of the Martian business had been just that up until now. It wasn't real It was just a sea serpent story in the Times.

The president, the panic, everything he had to deal with was about the reaction, not the thing itself.

His hear pounded against his sternum. He felt the urge to chase after Albert, but fear locked his knees. Still unwilling to turn around, he stood still.

It was no use. Another shadow looked behind him. It drew closer. He could already tell it was much larger than his own. The shape was…the shape was inhuman.

A hand grabbed him by the shoulder. He saw a searing white light, then passed out.

Frightened witnesses, cowering behind windows, saw three Martian men carry his body into their glowing craft and then ascend back into the sky. Too terrified to say anything, it was an hour before the first police station heard that the Mayor of New York had been abducted by the Martians. But it only took twenty minutes after that before the newspapers started planning the morning’s headlines.

24

RAILROAD CAR

Smith opened the gate to the private train yard and held it open for Roosevelt. He saw the light from the main salon car and jogged across the gravel when he saw April's shadow.

"I've made the most interesting discovery," he said as he burst through the door.

April looked down at the bouquet of gardenias and smile. Her face turned to a frown as Smith tossed them onto the red velvet couch.

"I need a map!" he began digging through a cabinet behind the mechanical train map.

Roosevelt entered and tilted his hat to April. He saw the bouquet on the couch. "Er, Schmitty."

"In a moment Teddy. I'll tell you everything. Sorry for making you wait." Smith pulled out a map of the Spanish coast line and tossed it aside as he dug through the rolled up sheets.

Roosevelt picked up the flowers and handed them to April. "He bought these for you, I believe."

April smelled the flowers and grinned.

"Yes, of course. But the real reason is what I'm about to tell you."

Roosevelt rolled his eyes. “He really couldn’t wait to tell you. He refused to tell me anything until you were here.” He tilted his head to the flowers. “I think that’s his real way.”

April gave a curt nod and looked for a vase to put the flowers into.

Smith looked at a complicated map. “My way? Pardon,” he said in an absentminded manner.

“The flowers, waiting to tell Miss Malone your great revelation. Why just on the way here you were telling me what a keen mind she has.”

“Yes. Of course. No need for me to compliment her. She knows her virtues.” Smith grabbed a map and unrolled it on the table.

“You sir are astonishing.”

“Thank you.”

“That wasn’t a compliment.”

“Oh?” Smith looked up from the map. April was pouring water from a pitcher into a vase with the flowers. “Gardenias. They smell quite pleasant. Anyhow, you can leave those for later.”

Smith explained to them the second sun. Roosevelt and April exchanged looks.

“I’m sure you might think I’m a bit mad.”

“No. We both know you’re quite mad. That’s not the question. We believe you. In your own obtuse way,” said Roosevelt. “Explain to us what this means.”

“A second sun!” said Smith. He looked from face to face expecting them to make the connection. “I kept thinking that this Martian is such a showboat, he has to be right in front of our noses! Then I saw it!”

“He’s hiding in the sun?” Roosevelt raised a skeptical eyebrow. “Did those men knock you about today?”

“What men?” asked April in a protective manner.

“Oh, the usual. Anyhow. Yes.”

Roosevelt shook his head.

April looked down at the map. “I think I understand what he’s telling us.”

“He’s not a circus pony tapping his damn hoof to answer arithmetic questions,” growled Roosevelt. “What did you see?”

“There was no second sun,” said April. “He saw the Martian’s secret base.”

“In the sky disguised as a sun? Not what I’d call inconspicuous.”

“The sun was a reflection. Right?” asked April.

“Yes!” said Smith. “Visible only from one point near dusk.” He stabbed a finger on the map in the position where he was on the roof. He drew a pencil line straight across Manhattan to the east.

“A building?” asked Roosevelt.

“A building that isn’t there. Imagine a large stage illusion. The kind where a horse or woman is caused to vanish. Only, she’s still there. This Martian has built himself a secret base right in the heart of the city. Only we can’t see it,” said Smith.

“Does any of this make sense to you Miss Malone?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“My god, it’s contagious.”

“No, no. Look over my shoulder. What do you see?”

Roosevelt glanced up from the map. “A window.”

“Are you certain? What’s behind it?”

“I can’t see behind it because it’s too dark out.”

“Then what do you see?”

“My face.”

“Imagine a mirror high up in the sky that reflected the sky. What would you see?”

“Sky? But at different times of the day I’d see opposite parts of the sky,” said Roosevelt.

“Yes. But there’s a clever arrangement you can make with mirrors so you’d see the sky in back of it and never know it was there.”

“Except for the seems,” said April.

“Yes!” said Smith. He beamed at her.

“But you could hide them in an unfinished building. Like one of those unfinished skeletons of steel,” said April.

“What’s the tallest building in New York City?” asked Smith.

“The World Building. Pulitzer’s office is on the top floor.”

“Is it?” asked Smith.

“It’s the tallest finished…I see what you’re getting at. There’s that skeleton on Park Row. Still waiting for funds to complete it. Builders went bankrupt.”

“It’s the tallest structure in New York, but not the tallest building. People ignore it. Look right past it. If you wanted to lord over everyone in this city. Everyone in the world, what better place in the tallest building in the world. Only nobody knows it’s even there. Hidden by a series of mirrors in the framework, you could hide an entire floor. You could even moor an airship there at night and nobody would know it was there if the weather was right.”

“I don’t know. That’s an awful big hunch, Schmitty.”

“I saw the reflection.” Smith pointed to Park Row on the map. “It was coming from that direction. I didn’t know that until I looked at this map.” He turned to April.

“I think it’s an easily testable hypothesis,” she said.

“Let’s go get my aircraft. The machinists should be finished with the modifications by now.”

“Hold up there, Schmitty. It’s late at night. We need to go there with the police.”

“But he could flee by now.”

“I almost lost you today to those bogus health officials. Let’s plan this right. We got to get the police on our side with us.” Roosevelt was distracted as a metal chime ringed out in the salon car.

Smith waked over to his telegraph machine and examined a paper tape being spit out at a furious pace. “I cued it to look for mentions of ‘Martians’ on the wire.” He dropped the paper tape. His face was white. “It appears the Mayor has been abducted.”

“By whom?” asked April.

“The Martians.”

25

IN PLAIN SIGHT

Smith, April and Roosevelt stood at the bottom of the unfinished Park Row building gazing upwards at the skeletal framework in the moon light. Deputy Mayor Chesterfield turned to Roosevelt.

“You think he’s up there?”

“I don’t know. We think there’s something suspicious going on,” said Roosevelt.

Chesterfield looked to the precinct police captain. The short man just shrugged. Behind him stood two-dozen men with billy clubs in hand.

“Are we supposed to climb up there like monkeys?” asked a sergeant.

“We’ll leave that to your mother,” mumbled a man further down the line.

“We’ll all look like monkeys if we go up there and find nothing,” said another.

“Well, Schmitty? How do we get up there?” asked Roosevelt. Inside the fenced off construction yard, there wasn’t a crane or an elevator to be seen.

Smith walked towards the side of the building. “Here. Have a look at the ground. Fresh tire tracks.”

Roosevelt and the captain knelt down to the ground. Roosevelt reached out and sniffed the dirt.

“It’s fresh all right.” He looked up at Chesterfield. “Something is going on here.”

The captain aimed a lantern into the building. Steel girders cast shadows on the concrete foundation. The entire first floor looked like it had been stripped clean of spare tools or buckets after the property went into receivership.

Smith moved towards the center of the building. The metal frame formed a lattice going forty stories tall. Towards the center, something blacked out the sky.

“There’s something above us,” said Smith.

“Just a floor,” said the captain.

“Look closer.”

The captain squinted his eyes. The underside looked like it was grey at first. Portions of it began to move.

“You’re looking at the western sky,” said Smith. “Teddy? Are you superstitious?”

“Only when it counts. Step aside gentlemen.”

Smith and the captain backed up as Roosevelt pulled his revolver from his holster and aimed it upwards. He pulled the trigger then ran backwards a dozen feet.

The shot echoed through the metal girders. There was a pause then silver pieces of glass began to rain down from above and smash into the foundation. For several seconds there was an enormous racket as shards fell from the great height.

“Well, that proves that part of the theory.” Roosevelt put his revolver back in his holster. “Now, how do we get up there?”

“What about this?” April was standing by a metal box bolted to a girder. A thick lock hung from it.

“I think that’s too small to be an elevator, Miss,” said the captain with an air of condescension.

“Perhaps so, captain. But do the builders usually attach something to the electrical mains before they’ve even put in a floor?” She pointed to a thick conduit leading from the box into the foundation.

Smith hurried over to the box. “It looks like this might be a controller of some kind. If I had my tools I could pick it.” He began to search his pockets.

Roosevelt nudged him out of the way.

“No need to shot it, Teddy.”

“Posh, my friend. I don’t solve everything with a gun. Miss Malone? May I bother you for a hairpin from your delicate head?” April handed him a pin. Roosevelt shoved it into the lock and jimmied it for a moment. It came open.

“Very impressive, Mr. Roosevelt,” said April.

“A trick I learned from a trickster at Coney Island. A most clever young fellow.”

Smith pulled open the box. There was a large lever. The captain stepped over and reached a hand out to grab it. Smith swatted his hand away.

“Easy there. It’s likely booby-trapped. Probably the full current going through there.” He pulled a leather glove from his jacket.

The captain pulled his hand away dejected, but his heart still beat at the prospect of coming so close to be electrocuted. Smith gave the handle a tug. An electric motor whirred to life above them. Far above, they coulees see a metal cage descend towards them. It took several minutes to reach the foundation. It made a loud metal noise as it came to a standstill.

Roosevelt, Smith and the captain peered inside the empty cage. There was another switch on the inside wall.

“Deputy Mayor, care to join us?” asked Roosevelt.

“I’ll let you be the vanguard.”

The captain motioned for a half-dozen men to join him inside the lift along with Smith and Roosevelt.

Smith saw the expectant look in April’s eyes. “Next lift?

She nodded and watched as the men ascended in the elevator. Her curiosity at what they would find burned in her chest.

“So, what do we do if we find any Martians?” asked the captain as he pulled his revolver from his holster and checked it.

“Arrest them, I suppose,” said Roosevelt.

Smith and Roosevelt exchanged glances as the elevator climbed upwards. They could see the city through the girders out beyond them. Street lights flickered and windows glowed as people went about their lives that night. Word had spread about the Mayor’s abduction and the city was fully awake.

“Impressive view,” said Roosevelt. “Like gazing down from Mount Olympus.”

“Pulitzer is going to piss himself when he finds out some trespasser has a better view of the city than he does,” said the captain.

The elevator came to a stop at the top floor. A large metal door stood before them. One of the police man reached down and grabbed the handle at the bottom.

“Be ready for anything,” said the captain. His men held their guns at ready.

Roosevelt moved to the front of the lift. “Don’t shoot unless you have no choice. And don’t be distracted by what you see.” He looked back at the men behind him and received some half-committed nods.

The police man pulled the door upwards to reveal the Martian secret base.

26

STELLARIUM

“My god!” exclaimed a policeman as he saw the hideous bodies standing before him.

“Don’t shoot!” shouted Smith, but it was too late.

The four policemen unloaded a barrage of bullets at the forms towering in front of them. Hideous to look at, their muscles and veins were clearly visible. Bulging eyeballs stared back at them.

The circular glass surrounding them shattered and amber fluid pored onto the floor. The bodies fell to the ground in a puddle of broken glass and thick fluid.

“They’re human,” said Smith as he bolted out of the elevator to look down at the fallen forms.

“Human?” said the captain. He’d stepped one foot out, but kept a wary eye on the chamber.

Red and blue veins crisscrossed milky white tissue over red muscle fibers. The men had to pinch their noses at the smell.

“They’re, or rather they were, specimens. Those are skinned humans. Look at the anatomy,” said Smith.

“Ghastly,” said the captain.

“No different than what you’d find at a medical college.” Smith looked up at the rest of the chamber.

“Remarkable,” said Roosevelt. He stood before a giant piece of glass that overlooked the city. All four sides of the room had portals that allowed a full view of the island and the surrounding areas.

In the middle of the room sat a golden thrown, too large for any earth man. A domed ceiling overhead depicted a tellurium with a bright red Mars in the center and a coterie of planets and moons surrounding it.

Smith stepped over to a large telescope in front of the throne. He peered through and could see Central Park vividly in the dark.

“Very impressive optics,” said Smith. “The lenses are among the finest I’ve ever seen.”

“Is one of these the Mayor?” asked the captain. He had a look of disgust on his face.

Smith walked back over to the bodies. He passed by a peculiar control panel and other equipment.

“I don’t think so. It takes quite a while to flay a body this precisely. And I think the Mayor was a little more stout than these men.”

“Who are they?” asked the captain.

“I don’t know.” Smith stepped over the broken glass to look at the rest of the chamber. The overhead lights were made from a tube shaped filament light and gave off a bluish cast.

“Looks like we found the other entrance,” said Roosevelt. He walked towards a spiral staircase almost hidden in the corner. He drew his gun and walked up it. Three policemen followed behind.

Smith glanced down at a control panel. A row of colored lights blinked back at him. Several switches and the strange Martian script filled the center.

Roosevelt walked back down the steps and holstered his revolver. “There’s a mooring hook at the top of the building. No sign of our friends

or the Mayor.”

Smith stroked his chin and took in the chamber. It looked like something from the cover of a dime novel. Alien, yet familiar. The throne in the middle was like a command chair from where some Martian commander could plot the demise of the surrounding city.

“An odd place for a hideout,” said the captain.

“On the contrary,” replied Roosevelt. “It’s perfect.”

“Perfect for what?”

“Perfect for a hunter. This is what we call a high-hide. The highest.”

“Hunting what?” The captain turned back over his shoulder at the three horrifying bodies. “Humans?”

“Research,” said Smith. “Like a bird watcher is more like it. They sit here and watch. Make their notes.” He nodded to the bodies. “And collect their specimens.”

“Smith.” Roosevelt was kneeling by the throne. “The seat is still warm.”

“He must have made his escape when we activated the elevator,” said the captain.

“I think we would have seen the airship,” replied Smith. Something didn’t sit right with him. He knelt down to look at the throne. There was a dark smudge on the side of the cushion. He wiped a finger across it and smelled it. “Oil. Machine oil.”

Behind him a policeman reached out to touch the control panel. Smith caught him out of the corner of his eye, but was too late.

“Don’t touch…” shouted Smith.

Sparks began to fly from the control board.

“Run! To the elevator!” Smith grabbed the nearest policeman by the collar. Roosevelt pushed the other men back to the shaft.

“It’s only a few, OH LORD!” screamed the captain as green fire began to erupt from everywhere.

They piled back into the elevator as the secret base filled with the ghastly flames. Roosevelt slammed the door shut as Smith threw the switch to descend. The motor whined from above. As the cage dropped Smith and Roosevelt exchanged concerned glances. Both were worried what would happen if the flames reached the motor.

Bits of debris landed on the roof. Green flames licked around the metal cage as the entire chamber became an inferno. The metal cable that kept them from plummeting into the foundation below made strained sounds as it was heated. The carriage rocked when a metal girder rattled off the edge.

Roosevelt pulled a cigar from his pocket and lit it.

“How can you smoke at a time like this?” asked the captain. His eyes were aimed upwards at the falling flames.

“Hell, if I’m going to die, it’s going to be doing something I enjoy. And since none of you are of the female persuasion, it’s the cigar.”

“At this point the fall would probably just pulverize our legs. If we could avoid cardiac arrest, we’d live. As invalids of course,” replied Smith.

“Don’t ruin my cigar, Schmitty.”

The elevator reached the foundation and slammed into the concrete. The policeman shoved open the inner gate and ran toward the outside of the building. Smith and Roosevelt hurried after them.

April and the Deputy Mayor were staring up at the green flames on top of the building.

“Are you okay?” she asked as Smith ran to her side.

“Booby trapped.” Smith craned his neck to see the flames engulf the secret lair. What was still left collapsed and plummeted to the bottom of the building like a bright green meteor.

The police captain whispered something into the Deputy Mayor’s ear.

“What did you find?” asked April.

“I don’t know,” replied Smith. “I know what I’m supposed to think. I’m just not sure anymore. I know it’s a charade. But I just can’t tell what kind.”

The captain stepped in front of Smith. “Maybe this will help you decide.” Two of his men grabbed him by the arms and forced handcuffs on his wrists.

“What’s the meaning of this?” demanded Roosevelt in the Deputy Mayor’s face.

“We’re in a state of emergency. Your colleague seems a little bit too clever. A little bit too eager to help. He leads us here just in time to see it destroyed.”

Roosevelt’s hand reached towards his revolver. “You have no authority!”

“I have emergency authority. Take your hand away from your gun or I’ll have you arrested too. And the lady. I don’t care what your President thinks,” said Chesterfield. “For now. We want your friend in custody. Under suspicion of being a Martian spy.”

Six men surrounded Roosevelt and April. Smith shook his head. “We’ll sort this out Teddy.” He was lead away.

“I’ll have you sprung in the hour!” shouted Roosevelt.

“Watch over Miss Malone, please.” The policeman pushed Smith out of sight through the fence and towards a wagon.

April turned to Roosevelt. She lowered her voice so the policemen still blocking them couldn’t hear. “We have to do something.”

“I’m going to march right down to the police station this moment. I’ll raise a ob to spring him if I have to.”

The officers gave Smith a rude shove and he fell into the back of the wagon. His head hit the floor with a crack. “I’m willing to go willingly,” he shouted at them as they closed the door.

“You’re not their problem anymore,” said a gravelly voice from the back of the wagon.

Smith looked up and saw the face of the man in the black overcoat from earlier that evening. Three other men stared down at him with malice in

their eyes.

“You’re our problem now, specimen. Search him for any more tricks.” Said Contral.

Three pairs of hands slapped and punched at Smith as they rifled his pockets and ripped off his clothes.

“I must pro…” he was cut short by a boot heel to his face knocking him unconscious.

27

ROOSEVELT AND MAYOR

Deputy Mayor Chesterfield caught his knees under his desk to prevent his chair from tipping over as Roosevelt jabbed his finger into his chest again. The man's face was inches from his own, the glowing cigar stub threatened to scar his cheek. He tried pleading with the man, but it was like waving a red flag in the face of a bull.

"Please! Please!" shouted Chesterfield between gaps in Roosevelt's tirade when he stopped to blow cigar smoke in his face.

The sound of footsteps came from the stairs as people rushed to find out the cause of the commotion. Chesterfield looked to the door for rescue, only to see Miss Malone slam it shut and slide a bench in front of it – all while looking angelic.

"Police custody?" hollered Roosevelt. "We went to the precinct station and five others. None of them have seen our man. Why?"

"I don't really…"

"You don't really? You don't really know why you're such an incompetent fool? I try to file a missing person's report, but the last known whereabouts was with your men."

Someone knocked at the door.

“He’s busy!” shouted Roosevelt. He clenched a fist and waved it in from of Chesterfield’s face.

“You wouldn’t dare in front of a lady,” the frightened man’s eyes darted over to April.

“You hold him, Mr. Roosevelt and I’ll close my eyes as I pommel him so I won’t have to witness it.” April advanced towards Chesterfield’s desk.

Her green eyes were on fire. She’d never struck someone in anger in her life, but April felt like she’d saved up for that moment. She’d stood quietly while the men hauled Smith away. Guilt forced her into a most unladylike behavior.

She rolled up a sleeve of her blouse and clenched a fist and brought it back to strike the man.

Chesterfield’s heart sank as he realized the woman was prepared to strike her. It was one thing to have tyro Roosevelt in your face, another to see a proper young woman driven to such rage.

“I’ll tell you everything!”

April kept her fist tightly balled. “Hold back and you’ll walk out of here a cripple.”

Roosevelt glanced at the woman from the corner of his eye. There was a trace of admiration and shock.

“Everything! Everything! There’s a man named Ebelin Contral. He’s on some health commission Croker set up. It’s somehow related to the military.”

“Which branch?”

“I don’t know. Or maybe it’s just some military men. A committee or something. Edison’s men too.”

“Those thugs?” asked Roosevelt.

Chesterfield nodded. “Croker called me. Told me to let them take Smith away.”

“Where?”

“I don’t know. Croker doesn’t either. He just said let Contral handle the man.”

“Why?”

Chesterfield shook his head.

“Croker doesn’t know? Yet this man works for him?”

“No. His position was bought.”

“By whom?”

“I don’t know. Ask Croker.”

“I would but his men have him hidden in case of another kidnapping. Otherwise I’d be strangling him right now.” Roosevelt pulled his finger out of his face.

Chesterfield breathed a sigh of relief. April walked over to the side of his desk. He panicked and his knees slipped. He fell over backwards in his chair. Roosevelt and April rushed over to help him up as the door was crashed open by a police lieutenant and a sergeant.

“Are you all right?” asked the lieutenant.

Chesterfield felt Roosevelt’s vice-like grip on his right arm and April’s nails on his left.

“I’m quite fine,” he said in a hoarse voice.

“Just having a bit of a laugh,” said Roosevelt. “Chester, here, folded over.” He guided him back into his chair.

The lieutenant looked down at the bench still blocking the door.

“Help me move this back?” asked April. Her smile making him blush.

The lieutenant and the sergeant pushed the bench back against the wall then left after Chesterfield waved them off.

Roosevelt motioned for April to have a seat, then sat down after her.

“How do I find him?”

“I’ll send word to Croker’s people. That’s the best I can do.”

Roosevelt slammed his fist on the desk. “That’s the least you can do! I want you to put out a bulletin on this Contral.”

“I don’t know if I can…”

“Could you do it if there’s a threat on his life?”

“Are you?”

“I’m saying nothing.” Roosevelt pulled his coat open to reveal the butt of his pistol. “In the morning I can get a writ from the US Marshals and charge you with obstruction.”

Chesterfield was about to protest, but kept his mouth shut. He knew Roosevelt could do that and more.

“I’ll do everything I can. But please understand, these are trying times. Your friend,” he tried to make eye contact with April, “he’s aroused a lot of suspicion. Especially after the mayor was abducted.”

“So you start kidnapping citizens? How is that helpful.”

“We thought he might be connected.” He pushed a telegram on his desk towards Roosevelt. “This came in on all the wires before we went to Park Row. No one is supposed to know.”

Roosevelt read the paper then handed it to April. “What does it mean? All it say is ‘Mars will retaliate for inaction’?”

“It came over every official telegraph. London, Paris. All of them. Every embassy. According to the demands we were supposed to raise the Martian flag by now. That’s…that’s why we had Smith picked up.”

“Damn fool. And where is he now to help shed light on that?”

Chesterfield shook his head. “I’ll make inquiries. I’ll find out.”

Roosevelt jabbed his finger back in his face. “You do that.” He turned to April. “Miss Malone? The hour is late.” April stood up and headed to the door with Roosevelt.

Outside they stood on the sidewalk and looked at the people milling about in front of City Hall.

“I must admit, Miss Malone, I didn’t know you hand the blood of a tigress.”

April said nothing. She was too embarrassed to reveal that she'd actually acted out the scene from a play she'd rehearsed. She'd hoped that Chesterfield had never seen it and realized her bluff.

"We need to find Smith," she said. "Soon."

"I know, Miss Malone. I'm prepared to tear this city apart brick by brick to do so. Unless we can get Croker to talk, which I doubt, I don't know what tact to use. Our man could be sequestered anywhere in this city."

"Yes. But perhaps there's another way," said April.

"How do you mean?"

"This Contral character, I've met men like him before. He's a person that collects oddities. He must have them squirreled away somewhere."

"Yes, but where?"

"Perhaps what we need is bait to lead us to the nest?"

"Make him lead us to him?"

April nodded. "Follow the men in black coats and I think we can find Smith."

28

MARS ATTACKS!

Pasqual Maspons was out for his morning walk when he saw it happen.

He liked to take stroll just as the sun came up and watch the sun glimmer off the Place de la Concorde. He was standing no more than ten feet from where Marie Antoinette and King Louie the XVI lost their heads when he noticed a particularly bright flash of light.

He squinted his eyes and had to use his ears to determine the direction. The sound of stone falling on the pavement came from the direction of the obelisk, the so-called Cleopatra's Needle that stood proudly in the middle of the square.

When he looked up the top of the point was gone. The sound he had heard was the stones being blown apart at the top. His first impulse told him it had been a lightning strike. But there wasn't a cloud in the sky. From every corner of the square people came running to see what had happened.

A gendarme stood over the gold leafed pieces and held his arms out to keep anyone from getting closer. He looked at Pasqual, as if to imply he was somehow responsible. The frenchman shrugged and continued on his walk, not wanting to be bothered by the commotion of the growing crowd.

AT THAT VERY MOMENT, Alfie Chapman, aid to Lord Nigel was walking his master's two terriers along the Victoria Embankment along the river Thames. The sun was still over the horizon and the sky was dark blue with faint stars still twinkling. A barge moved slowly in the channel to his left. The smaller dog began to bark and had to be restrained.

He saw a flash of green light streak down from the sky and hist the top of the Egyptian obelisk that stood along the embankment. There was an explosion and the tip blew apart in a hundred stone fragments. The dogs let out yelps as pebbles pelted them.

The two sphinxes that guard the monument stood still. Bits of broken stone fell to the ground beneath the needle. The top was pulverized.

His immediate thought was to the urgent message Lord Nigel had received in the night. It was something to do with the American Martian nonsense. Some prankster had managed to send a message with out the constant of the Post Office to all of the government offices in London. Simultaneous messages had been received in Paris and New York.

A crowd of curious people were watching from Waterloo Bridge. Several coaches had stopped to look at the calamity.

Alfie remembered the trivial fact that the obelisk was one of three. It had a twin in Paris and one in America. He hurried back to Lord Nigel's house to report to him what just happened. The dogs protested at the foreshortened walk and reluctantly followed on his heels.

ACROSS THE OCEAN it was still dark in New York City, but the city was awake as police and fire men patrolled the streets looking for sign of their missing mayor and newspaper men rushed the morning paper out for delivery.

Several hundred people saw the bright flash of green light over Central Park. Some said the light came from the sky. Others said from the monument. The few physicists tried to explain it was a trivial matter.

All would agree that after the flash there came a loud explosion followed by a shower of sparks in the middle of the park. The first man on the seen was a police lieutenant who'd been standing guard over the Martian obelisk.

When he reached the foot of Cleopatra's Needle, smoking chunks of stone littered the ground. The tip had been blown apart as if it had been smutted.

TELEGRAPH OFFICES around the world were besieged by a signal from no apparent source, just as they had been the night before.

PRESIDENT HARRISON'S butler woke the Commander in Chief with the urgent missive that had been handed to him. Through bleary eyes, the President read the message that had been transmitted to the world:

MARS STRIKES. NO MAN. NO CITY. NO NATION IS SAFE.
SURRENDER NOW.

ALREADY ALARMED by the news of the Mayor's abduction, the strike against all three cities was the breaking point.

"Get the Secretary of War and the Secretary of the Treasury to my office immediately. I need to know how much gold we have on hand."

29

CAPTIVE

When Smith first came to his senses, his nose told him he was in some kind of zoo. There was the smell of exotic animals in the air. Meat eaters and herbivores all under one roof. There was straw underneath him and he could clearly tell he was in a cage. Bars trapped him inside the cell. A gas lamp cast a small glow in the hallway before him. Rocks lined the far wall. It felt damp and dank like a cellar.

He pulled himself against the back wall. Naked except his boxers, he pulled his knees in for warmth.

“Well this is an unfortunate situation,” he said to himself.

“That it is, Monsieur,” came a gravel sounding voice down the hall.

“Hello? Is someone there?” asked Smith.

“Oui. I am a prisoner like you.”

“And what was your crime?”

“Curiosity. I wanted to find out what was at the other end of the bottle. Zen this…this rat catcher and his men captured me.”

“Why?”

“Because of my charm. My wit. My way with the ladies.”

Smith paid close attention to the voice. Besides the accent, he could pick up other details. “You’re a wolf man of sorts, aren’t you?”

“Oui. Have you heard of me?”

“No. It’s just that you have a very high timber for such a low register, it suggests a small diaphragm and esophagus, but your vocal chords are quite dense. The work of Doctor Brown-Séquard has revealed an excess of a hormone known as testosterone could cause this. In your case I would imagine it would make a very hirsute man. Making your stature as a dwarf all the more interesting.”

“Oui, but it is what’s on the inside that counts. I can tell that you are the ‘clever man’ that this maniac has been obsessing about. It would seem he finds you almost as interesting as these Martians.”

“I’ve only seen a small dose of his attention and I don’t care much for it.” Smith stood up and examined the door to the cage. It was padlocked shut with a huge lock. “I have much more serious business to attend to then his games.”

“I’m sure you do, but this man takes his games very seriously. By the smell of things, they can be quite fatal.”

“Well my friend, I don’t plan on you or me staying around long enough to find out.”

“You would help me escape?”

“Of course. We peculiar men must look out for each other.” Smith got to his knees and searched the straw on the floor for anything that could be used as a tool.

“They come, Monsieur.”

The sound of a key in lock echoed down the hallway. Smith sat back down. He heard a loud snort from another cell.

“I’d say bless you, but I don’t believe that was you sneezing,” said Smith.

“No. That was one of the other guests. He’s not as talkative as you.”

“I see,” said Smith.

The door opened and heavy footsteps walked towards his cell. One of Contral's men set a chair down in front of the bars. Contral unbuttoned his coat and sat down. He has a large clipboard in his lap. He uncapped a pen and opened a folder.

"What year were you born?" asked Contral.

"Pardon me?"

"You heard the question."

"It's a personal matter," said Smith.

"It's a mere formality I ask of all our guests."

"I decline."

Contral looked up at his man standing to his right. He wore a black bowler and a heavy black coat. He slapped a billy club in the palm of his hand.

"If you choose not to answer the question, then Mr. Henley will be forced to step inside to assist."

Smith could still feel the bruises from the abduction. "Just Mr. Henley? What about his partners in crime?"

"They're doing other tasks. But I can have them here in a moment," said Contral.

"That might be advisable. Should Mr. Henley step into this cage unassisted I'll conduct my own examination using his club."

Contral shook his head. "I thought you were an intellectual. I doubt you have much capacity for violence."

"What about me would make you think that? Please, send Mr. Henley in now. My odds are much improved right now if it's just you and him." Smith jumped to his feet and ran to the front of the cage.

Contral jumped back. Henley stepped forward and slammed the club at bars where Smith was gripping them. The wooden shaft clanged against the bars as Smith slipped away. He dropped to his knees and punched the brute in the testicles.

Henley let out an moan then collapsed to the floor, his eyes watering. Contral slid his chair backwards as he looked at the fallen man who was no hyperventilating and doubled over clutching his groin.

Smith stood back up. “As you were saying?”

Contral tried to regain his composure. He pretended to check something off on the folder while making certain that he was out of Smith’s reach. He avoided eye contact but looked up when he heard the sound of something hitting metal. Smith had grabbed the club and was now brandishing it inside the cage.

“It’s a pity Henley doesn’t have a keyring on him, or I’d be checking off boxes with your blood,” said Smith.

Contral’s pen hand fell to his lap. He looked up at Smith. For a moment he was uncertain he had the right man. The man he expected was supposed to be some kind of rarified intellectual and not some savage brute who played by dirty rules. He glanced down at his henchman who was still struggling to get to his feet.

“Mr. Smith, you’ll find we have all kinds of measure to get your compliance. The first ones are civility. From there it descends into more physical means. And finally if you can’t tell me the things I want to know, I’ll take them from your body, organ by organ.”

“To what end?” asked Smith.

“The betterment of society, of course. Mr. Henley, once the tears stop streaming down your face, would you be so kind as to fetch one of the tools we use for more difficult specimens.”

The man pulled himself to his feet by leaning against the far wall. He cast a look at Smith. “Gladly.”

“Why are you sitting here when there are alien visitors that are so much more interesting out there? After all, I’m only human.”

“Are you?”

“Quite.”

“So, you believe these Martians are genuine?” Contral seemed genuinely interested in Smith’s thoughts on the matter.

“One-hundred percent. I’ve been to their secret base and have found physical evidence that is utterly convincing. Speaking of secret lairs? Where are we?”

Contral shook his head. “I wish I could believe you. As to your whereabouts, that’s a secret we plan to keep. But I think the location would amuse you.”

Henley came running back down the corridor and whispered something in Contral’s ear. His expression looked shocked.

“We’ll continue this interview later. It seems our Martian visitors have declared war.”

The two men hurried back down the hall. The metal door slammed shut behind them.

“He is not a man that likes to be made a fool of,” said the man in the other cell.

“Pity he’s such a fool.”

“Yes, but he’s a fool that likes to cause pain. I have the surgical scars to show for it.”

“You don’t mean?”

“Oui, he loves to slice things open and look inside. I fear if I don’t get this infection treated soon, I may die,” said the small wolf man.

Felix La Court, otherwise known as the The Ravenous Wolf Boy looked up from his poorly stitched wound when he heard the sound of something cracking echo down the hallway. “Sacrebleu! What was that?”

Smith held the two ends of the billy club he’d broken with his bare hands and regarded the sharp splintered edges. “I think it’s time for sharp sticks.”

30

SURRENDER!

President Harrison looked at the faces of his cabinet as they sat around the table. One looked more grim than the other.

“You want to do what with the gold?” asked Treasury Secretary Charles Foster a second time.

“Use it as bait,” said Harrison.

“You can’t be serious.”

The President had spent the entire morning concocting a plan with his Secretary of War, Stephen Elkins and come to the idea of the ploy.

Elkins spoke up, “It a gambit. Either these Martians are what they say they are and we really do have no choice but to pay tribute and avoid the destruction they threaten us with. Or, they’re not, and we uncover the ruse.”

“But how?” asked Foster. His duty was to safeguard the gold deposits of the United States. The idea of pulling them out of the vaults and just handing them to whoever, was repellent to him. “I mean, we still think this is an elaborate hoax, correct?”

“We don’t know what to believe. But we know we must take action,” said Harrison.

“But the monuments could be sabotage. It seems so flimsy of evidence to turn over our gold deposits.”

“There’s another detail, something we haven’t shared outside this office,” said Harrison. He nodded to Elkins.

Elkins straightened his tie and stood up. “We have in the war office an entire department devoted to mapping foreign terrains and enemy capabilities. It’s one of our most secret divisions. The intelligence there could very well plot the course of a war before it ever starts.”

“I’m aware of this,” said Foster.

“Yes, but what you may not be aware of is the fact that we have our own telegraph system used to send encoded communications. Less than two dozen men in the world know the existence of this system. Nor the location of the transmitters and receivers. At the moment we were getting the ‘Mars Attacks’ transmission, our central telegraph received a series of unusual signals. At first we thought there was some kind of malfunction. They didn’t spell out letters or words. Just dots and dashes. One of the men who works in the office is quite clever and made a realization.” Elkins motioned for two men holding a banner to step forward. “These gentleman, from my office, were able to assemble the message. They took the paper strips that came from the telegraph machine and laid them out in rows. We’ve assembled them for you.” He nodded to the men to unfurl the banner.

The bottom of the canvas touched the floor revealing the image. Made of thousands of dots, the entire image was six foot by foot. It showed an aerial view of the White House.

“For the last two hours we’ve been receiving another image. We suspect it’s one of our strategic Naval bases. Now, taking photographs from balloons is nothing new, we did it in the Civil War, but the quality of these is quite good and appear to be taken from a much higher altitude. And the real point is, I suspect, that given the recent abduction and attacks, is that a power capable of taking this photograph,” he pointed towards the ceiling, “right over our very heads is a serious threat. They could just as well drop bombs as take photos.”

“So we give in?” asked Foster.

“No. We draw them in,” said Harrison.

“We assemble several of out battle cruisers around Manhattan. We place heavy artillery on tops of the buildings. We place the gold in the middle of the city, like they’ve asked. And when they come,” Elkins slammed his fist into his palm. “We either reveal these hoaxers for what they are, or give the Martians a bloody nose.”

“But is that wise? What if they are Martians?”

“Better now to find out the color of their blood,” said Harrison. “We will not yield to them in the long run. We must draw them in and see if we can hurt them.”

“And if they are what they claim? And they strike back?”

“Then god help us all,” said Harrison. “I’ve already spoken to the Prime Minister and the President of France. They’ve indicated that they too have received strategic images like the one before you. The three of us are willing to work together if this threat proves real.”

“Yes, but what about the gold?”

“Safe as anywhere,” said Elkins. “I’ll have every gun and canon on the Eastern seaboard trained upon it. Nothing will get off that island.”

“Elkins, will you see to it that we place the Martian flag?” asked Harrison.

The man nodded.

“It sounds like we’re surrendering,” said Foster.

“I prefer to think of it as throwing the gauntlet down,” replied Elkins.

Foster could tell the man’s confidence was sincere, but the thought nagged at him that the Martians, or whomever, had already thought several steps ahead.

31

SINISTER INTENTIONS

Smith laid back in the straw and stared up at the ceiling. He ignored the itching sensation and the damp and the cold. He tried not to think about the smells and what they informed him of his surroundings for the moment. He was stumped. The Martian Emperor had eluded him. Just when he thought he was about to rip away the curtain and reveal the machinations and find the culprit, he found yet another set piece and stage. The effort the men behind the scheme had surprised him. The secret martian base, high above the city, the three-fingered handprint. It was all planted evidence to challenge his skepticism. His skepticism. Smith thought that over for a moment.

The man masquerading as the Martian Emperor was quite clever. He managed to outwit the world and Smith. But those little clues he'd left behind seemed almost superfluous. Why go through the effort? It wasn't like the head of the police or any of the other government agencies were going to find that hidden base. None of them had even paid attention to April's discovery of the prior airship event in Edison's yard. Why even use an airship and an alien disguise?

Then there were the footprints. The proof in Central Park that the Martians had the fantastic strength the pretended to possess. All of these

details were left behind not to fool the authorities, but to stymie the one man who would look past the charade. A man capable of accepting the fantastical, but not ready to believe it on questionable evidence. This Martian Emperor was taunting him. The plot was some grander scheme, Smith had yet to understand, but the side plots were directed at him.

His current predicament was one more stumbling block thrown in his path. The men in black coats and the deluded Ebelin Contral were rocks and branches thrown on the trail to slow him down. Too focused on the Martian Emperor, Smith had allowed himself to carelessly fall into the clutches of one more man trying to pry his secrets from him. The secret operating room and cruel experiments had all the signs of a man associated with his nemesis the White Apothecarians. Were they connected to the Martian Emperor? Smith wasn't sure.

Contral seemed genuinely fixated on the Martian. Smith read his reactions as being genuine. He was just as baffled and curious as everyone else. It had to be a separate plot. Perhaps something involving the strange men who guided the cause or maybe by someone unconnected but knowledgable of them and their deceits. The one connection Smith was certain of, was the connection to himself. The would-be Martian Emperor knew about Smith. The technologies he possessed could have come straight from his own mind. And perhaps they did.

Smith realized his biggest flaw had been his own arrogance. All of the miracles he'd seen were things he could have accomplished. But Smith had thought no man as clever as himself. He tried to find proof of the hoax, when what he should have done is look for the man behind it. A man a lot like himself.

But Smith feared he was too late. Chasing down acid burn victims and hidden palaces had given this man the time to lay out all the pieces on the board. This was the end game and Smith still didn't know the rules. In days

the Martian Emperor would have his gold and the satisfaction of having cowered the world before him. Worst of all, he would have bested Smith.

“Have you given up my friend?” rumbled Felix’s deep voice from the adjoining cell. “I haven’t heard you toying with that lock in some time.”

“I’ve mostly made splinters of my tools. No, I was thinking. Thinking what a fool I’ve been to get trapped in here. Thinking of my arrogance.”

“Oui, it was my vice that got me here as well. A man such as me had developed a kind of bravado to wear as armor in the world. But at night when no one is around, I find a bottle and release my emotions. That is when I am weak. That was when this miserable man came for me. Had I a clearer head I would have given him a scrape. My friends on the boardwalk may have come to my rescue. Now I am in here. Trapped like the beast people see me for.”

“But you’re not. You’re a man as clever as any other.”

“Perhaps, but we two clever men are trapped like the other animals in this menagerie. To be dissected under the knife. Just as our poor friend in the other cage.”

“About him, is he a rhino?”

“Oui. By what means of deduction have you deduced that?”

“By the smell, clearly a herbivore. By the sound of his toes on the stones, an ungulate. By the echo they make, a large one. By the sound of the bars when his horn strikes them, one horn. Thus my deduction.”

“Very clever. All of that from your other senses. Anything else?”

“Yes. I believe he’s a white rhino of a very particularly ivory colored variety.”

“And you can tell this from those clues?” asked Felix.

“No. I can deduce this from the fact that he’s being held in captivity. Any other rhinoceros wouldn’t likely be worth Mr. Contral’s attention. People like him have a fixation on things that are pure white or possess one horn. They think them magical.”

“I’ve named him Brutus. He’s a quite docile creature. It’s a pity he’s going to meet the same fate as us.”

Smith sat up and pulled at the bars. “There’s still hope.”

“That is what keeps me alive. I pray my friends will find me,” said Felix.

“And mine too.”

32

THE PRINCE OF SATURN

The police sergeant pulled his club from his belt and threaded his way into the the thick crowd. “What’s all this about?” he demanded to a man in a camel hair coat.

“Look, you fool,” said the man as he pointed up.

The sergeant deliberated giving the man a cuff on the ear, but decided that someone who felt comfortable enough to talk down to a sergeant like him, was probably not a man to use force on without real provocation. He followed the line from the man’s finger to the top of the World Building. “Mother of god!”

Police whistles screeched and fire bells clanged for several blocks around. All eyes were on the strange figure climbing up the side of the building. Green skinned, with a large round head, two antenna stuck out on either side. A long silver cape hung from his shoulders. He perched on a ledge and a metallic voice shouted out to the crowd below.

CITIZENS OF THE WORLD! I AM THE PRINCE OF SATURN! I’VE COME TO AID YOU IN THIS TIME OF DESPAIR! FEAR NOT!

The figure reached up to the next ledge and continued climbing the building.

At the top floor, Joseph Pulitzer opened up his window and peered down after his secretary came running into his office to tell him of the commotion.

“Get a photographer down there!” he shouted. “Better yet, get another on the roof. Let’s get some photos the Post won’t be able to match.”

His secretary ran off to tell the city room to get on it.

“Slow news day got you down?” came a female voice from his office door.

“Have you seen this?” Pulitzer was still staring at the man climbing towards his office.

Nellie Bly walked over to the window and look down. “My. Another one?”

“This city appears to be crawling with alien visitors. Maybe we should call over to Blackwell island and see if they’ve opened the doors on the asylum?”

The strange man had reached another ledge.

“What happens when he gets up here?” Nellie asked.

“You interview him of course.”

“No trip to the nuthouse?”

Pulitzer looked away from the window at his prize investigative reporter. “Not until we get our exclusive.” He yelled out to his secretary. “I want a photographer in here.”

“Want a photo of you shaking hands?” asked Nellie.

“Better yet, I want the Saturn Prince curtseying to you as he asks for your hand in marriage before he whisks you off to his planet to be married.”

“I don’t know if that’s a laughing matter anymore. I hear Harrison is going to offer up the gold.”

“Between you me and the wall, Miss Bly, I just had a man from the government here to tell me they’re going to put the Martian flag on the

building. Meanwhile, two Navy men were scoping out the roof. I suspect for a howitzer."

"War with the Martians?" said Nellie. "I still find it all hard to believe." She watched as the Saturn Prince climbed another level. "Just a bigger folly than this acrobat."

"Maybe so. But I hear the powers at be are more frightened than they let on. Unlike the green man below us, these Martians, hoaxers or not, may be a serious threat."

A green gloved hand slipped over the edge of the window. With a flip of a cape the Saturn Prince bounded onto the ledge. Cheers came from the crowd below.

GREETING EARTHLINGS! I AM THE PRINCE OF SATURN!

Pulitzer motioned to a photographer waiting at the doorway. The man ran in with his box camera and snapped a photograph of the green man triumphantly standing in the window.

"So what circus are you from?" asked Nellie. "Do you have a handbill?"

I AM HERE TO BRING A MESSAGE! DO NOT BE FOOLED BY THESE MARTIANS!

"Trust us, nobody here his fooled," replied Pulitzer. He tried to see the face inside the helmet but the visor was too narrow.

I MUST NOW TRANSMIT MYSELF ELSEWHERE.

The Saturn Prince reached a hand up to his chest and twisted a knob. There was a loud bang and a puff of smoke. Pulitzer's first reaction was that a bomb had gone off. He stepped in front of Nellie, but it was over. A dissipating cloud of smoke was where the man had just been standing.

"Oh my! He jumped!" Nellie ran to the window and looked over the edge. Pulitzer leaned next to her. The crowd below looked back up at him.

"Search the roof!" shouted Pulitzer as he craned his neck to see if the Saturn Prince had climbed above them.

A photographer’s head looked over the ledge. “Nobody up here but me and the Navy men.”

Pulitzer pulled himself back into his office. Nellie was leaning on his desk staring at the window frame trying to imagine where the Saturn Prince had gone. The two of them exchanged glances.

“These are strange times, Miss Bly. Strange times.”

Four hundred feet below an excited man in a black bowler and overcoat ran to the nearest telegraph office to send a dispatch downtown.

33

THE ESCAPIST

The police and fire brigade standing in front of city hall had their eyes peeled on the sky around the building, watchful for any attackers from the air. When the explosion went off behind them, half the men threw themselves to the ground.

It wasn't a large explosion. It was more light and smoke than concussion. It was the kind of thing a stage magician would do to direct an audience's attention – which is exactly what it did. As the police and fire men got to their feet, they saw the men and women around the nearby cable car station pointing to the top of city hall.

A green man with two antenna and a silver cape stood on top of the dome, adjusting a dial on his chest. A metallic voice echoed across the streets.

GREETINGS EARTHLINGS! I AM THE SATURN PRINCE AND BRING YOU A MESSAGE OF PEACE!

The arrival of the mysterious figure would have been met with measured skepticism if it hadn't already been for the current Martian panic and the news that only moments ago a figure matching that description had been seen uptown, balancing on the ledge of the tallest building in the

world, only to vanish in a puff of smoke – or ‘transmit’ as reports now coming out of Pulitzer’s own office had said.

Carriages came to a stop. Men and women leaped off moving street cars and pushed themselves towards the sidewalk to get a glance of this new character in the strange drama that was engulfing the city and the world.

DO NOT BE AFRAID OF THESE MARTIANS! STAND TALL! DO NOT BE FOOLED!

Two policemen, already standing guard on the top of the building, rushed to the pedestals at the base of the dome and tried to climb up. The Saturn Prince grabbed the pole above the statue at the top and swung around in an acrobatic arc above their heads.

“It’s like our gravity is nothing to him!” shouted a man to the crowd.

TOGETHER THROUGH VALOR AND REASON WE CAN STAND UP TO THESE MARTIAN TYRANTS!

One of the policeman managed to get a foot over the ledge. He started to pull himself up over the top of the pedestal. The Saturn Prince did another spin then came to his feet. One hand held the flagpole as he leaned to the side. Below him the policeman began to slip. The crowd let out a grasp as their brains calculated the trajectory to the ground below.

A silver gloved hand shot out from the Saturn Prince and he grabbed the policeman by the collar. He helped him onto the ledge. The policeman tried to catch his berate and turned white when he looked over the side and saw how far he almost fell.

The crowd roared their approval. The Saturn Prince held out his arm and took a bow.

LET US STAND TOGETHER!

He reached out to the policeman to help him to his feet. The policeman carefully stood up, grasping the flag pole with his right hand. His left one went to his belt and pulled out a pair of handcuffs. The other policeman tried to grab the Saturn Prince by his ankles.

The crowd booed. The Saturn Prince did a backflip on the narrow dome and landed on the pedestal behind the second man. He tapped him on the shoulder than leaped to the roof of the building before he could turn around. The crowd laughed and let out a cheer.

Twelve firemen came running onto the roof from the other direction. The Saturn Prince jumped to the outer ledge and faced them. His silver cape flapped in the wind. The firemen formed a half circle and stepped closer. They stretched out their arms to grab him. The Saturn Prince held out his hands

I BRING YOU A MESSAGE OF PEACE!

The firemen stepped closer. The crowed screamed as the Saturn Prince leaped into the air and off the ledge. The firemen looked shocked. They stared over the edge at the crowd below.

Laughter erupted when the audience at the street level realized the firemen couldn't see that the Saturn Prince was now holding onto the ledge below the roof, having only feigned his leap of death. He dropped to the next ledge and ran to the opposite side of the building. A man tried to grab him from a window, only to have his hat taken off and tossed to the street by the passing Saturn Prince.

When he reached the far end of the building the firemen all ran back down into the top floor. The Saturn Prince grabbed a balustrade and climbed back onto the roof and ran towards the dome for another assault.

The two policemen ran towards him, as if to tackle him to the ground. They tripped and fell to the tar paper roof when the Saturn Prince did a somersault over their heads. He scrambled back up the dome and took his position by the statue of Lady Justice holding her scales. He gave her a kiss on the cheek.

A police captain standing on the sidewalk had enough. He pulled his revolver from his holster and took aim. The shot struck the statue's scale and sent a cascade of white marble.

The crowd booed the man and overran the barricades to wrestle him to the ground. The Saturn Prince touched a dial on his chest and was gone in an explosion of smoke.

At the back end of the hall three men in black coats and bowlers were trying to figure out how to get to the roof when the Saturn Prince landed on top of their carriage.

TAKE ME TO YOUR LEADER!

The Saturn Prince did a flip and landed on the ground before them. Six hands grabbed him and stopped him from touching the dial on his chest, lest he vanish again. They pulled him into the carriage and ripped the device from his chest. He struggled, but it was to no avail. Boots and fists hit his green body. The sinister men exchanged proud looks as they finally captured an extra-terrestrial.

April Malone pocketed the spyglass she'd been observing the men in black coats with from the second floor of the cable car building.

"Did they capture him?" asked Roosevelt.

"Yes. It look like they're being a bit rough with him."

"He can handle it. Trust me. Let's see if we can find out where they're taking him."

34

ALIEN AUTOPSY

Contral looked down at the Saturn Prince strapped to the gurney. His uniform was made from a thick oilskin canvas-like cloth. His head was concealed by a helmet with two antenna on either side. His assistant, Henley, reached underneath and pulled it off.

The helmet made a hissing noise and the green man gasped for air. His head came off the gurney then collapsed as he passed out in a violent spasm.

Contral panicked. “What did you do?”

“You told me to pull the helmet off!”

“I didn’t tell you to rip off his air supply!” Contral reached a hand down to feel the man’s neck. His pulse was faint.

“But he looks human,” said Henley.

“How many green men have you met?” asked Contral. “Perhaps his skin is some kind of plant-like organ?”

Henley shrugged and examined the hissing helmet. “Should I put this back on him?”

“No. I think he’s still breathing. Our thin atmosphere should keep him unconscious.”

Henley looked down at his own fingertips. They were green. He held them up for Contral to see.

“Our atmosphere is like acid to him. He’s disintegrating.”

“That or it’s paint,” said Henley.

“What are you trying to say?” Contral looked back at the body.

“I think he’s a fake. An escapee from the nut house.”

“A maniac with a teleportation device?” Contral was so delighted with his find, he was still thinking of the possibilities. “Imagine what we could do with that technology.” He had private visions of teleporting in and out of bank vaults with pockets filled with gold.

“If it’s real.”

Contral shook his head. “You have a primitive mind. Our Saturn Prince comes from a race even more advanced then the Martians. He uses teleportation to transmit himself between worlds. While the Martians use crude craft.”

“How do we know it’s not a bunch of Hocus Pocus?”

“Let’s have a look at the contraption then.” Contral felt the pulse of the alien again.

“Leave him here?”

“No. Let’s put him into a cage. Just in case his alien physiology brings him back to consciousness.” Contral felt the fabric of the suit. “Strip him, in case he has anymore devices.”

Henley found a zipper and removed the alien’s outer garb. “You have to admit, that other than being green, he looks very human.”

“Yes, but obviously an advanced race.”

“What makes you say that?” to Henley he just looked like any other man. Young maybe in his early twenties at most. Stocky build, a little on the short side.

“Well, he’s circumcised to begin with,” said Contral.

Henley gave him a funny look. “You’re an odd man boss.”

“Wheel him into a cage.” Contral took the helmet and suit and walked into the other room.

Henley unlocked the door to the menagerie and pushed the gurney through. He had to walk past the body of the Saturn Prince to pull him inside. For a brief moment he thought he felt something touch him. When he turned around the man was still strapped into the gurney. He pushed him into the dank hallway.

“What mad science is zis?” Felix called out to him in his low voice. “Your insane friend plans to dye us like Easter Eggs now?”

“Shut up, beast,” said Henley as he pushed the cart by.

Smith looked up from the back of his cage at the body as it came into vier. “You have to be kidding me. Seriously, that’s a man and not an alien.”

Henley stopped the gurney and walked up to the bars. “Still feeling brave?”

Smith contemplated making another lunge at the man. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the green man on the gurney raise a finger to his lips and wink. Just a quick as it happened, his hand went back to his side and was somehow still fastened into the straps.

“So, do you think this is a fake too? Should we poke around inside him just to find out?” asked Henley. He turned to the green man. “If you’re not the genuine article, maybe there’s no harm in me softening you up a bit?” He raised a billy club to hit the unconscious man.

“AAAAAAAARGH!” screamed Smith. “He’s in my brain!” He leaped towards the corner of his cage and clutched at his hair. “Get out! Get out of my mind!”

Henley lowered his club and looked at Smith confused.

Smith pointed at him and screamed, “He’s the one you want! Violate his mind!”

Henley quickly pushed the gurney into the adjoining cell then locked it shut. He hurried out of the hallway and slammed the door behind him.

“Sorry for almost spoiling the ruse,” said Smith as he sat back down.

The man in the other cage spoke in a Brooklyn accent, “No worries my friend. I could have taken his club at any time. Better this way. Felix? How are you, pal?”

“Magnificent,” growled the hairy dwarf.

“I’ll have us free in no time,” said the green man.

“I’ve tried the locks. They’re a bit more difficult than they look,” said Smith.

“That’s why your friends sent me.”

“And who might you be?” asked Smith.

“He’s a friend of mine from the boardwalk at Coney Island. It sounds like your man Roosevelt and Miss Malone went to him for help,” said Felix.

“How?” Smith looked at the bolted door dejectedly.

“Haven’t you heard of the World Famous Harry Houdini?” asked Felix.

“Er, no,” said Smith.

“Soon the world will know my name,” came the other man’s voice followed by the sound of clanking metal.

Smith looked up from the floor at the defiant young man standing in front of him in a triumphant pose. “Pretty good, kid. Pretty good. So is the green paint part of your gimmick?”

Houdini looked down at his green body. “Um, no. That was Teddy’s idea. I’m still looking for a gimmick. It’s too bad there’s not much entertainment value in opening locks and escaping from things.”

“I wouldn’t say that,” said Smith as he stood up.

“Zat is what I keep telling the kid!” shouted Felix.

35

ESCAPE

Roosevelt looked across 5th avenue at the crowd of men gathered in front of the building. Several of them had the heavy black coats of the mysterious ‘health department’, others looked like hired thugs brought in to protect the building during the Martian panic. “It’s a fortress,” he muttered.

“It’s a zoo,” replied April. They’d followed the black carriage from city hall on foot and watched it go into Central Park, then vanish in the service building behind the zoo. “That building seems small.”

“Most likely it leads to an underground passage to a basement below the park.”

“They’re keeping him hidden underneath a zoo?” April was infuriated by the notion.

“Actually, it’s quite clever. If this Contral figure is in the business of collecting all the strange things he finds in the cities and what comes crawling off the docks, putting them under a zoo makes sense. Who would question the cages and strange noises?”

“It’s inhuman,” said April.

“I think that’s the point.” Roosevelt stomped out his cigar. “Some of those men look like they work for Boss Croker. Of course he’d have a hand in this nasty business.”

“I see a few policemen too,” said April.

“Damn. I don’t know how our Coney Island trickster can help Smith escape that.” He looked down the street. Several police wagons were blocking off the blocks to the north. He checked his watch. “It looks like they’re getting ready to pay the ransom. Any other day I could raise an army to take them on. But today? All the armies are spoken for. I even saw naval men mounting cannon and machine guns on roofs around the park.”

“Miss Malone, I need to think of a plan. In the meantime, we need to make sure that once we get Smith sprung, he stays sprung. I don’t want this health official grabbing Smith again in all the commotion.”

“Dynamite the building? Seal off the fiend’s lair?”

“Your fondness for Smith is quite touching. I was thinking more on the lines of an exposé. If we reveal the secret prison, perhaps that would force Contral into the light. When our Saturn Prince was mugging in Pulitzer’s window, I think I may have seen Nellie Bly looking out. After her undercover work as an inmate at Blackwell Island’s asylum, she’s developed quite the reputation for uncovering this sort of chicanery. There’s a telegraph office two blocks over.”

“I’ll get right on it,” said April. She started down the sidewalk then glanced back at Roosevelt. “Say, this isn’t a ploy to get me out of the way while your charge in?”

“That would be foolhardy, Miss Malone. I’m outnumbered.”

“I’m not sure if that’s a satisfactory denial,” said April.

“It’s the best I can do. Please hurry!”

SMITH PEERED between the gap in the door as Houdini tried to work the lock. Contral and Henley were standing over the teleportation device trying to figure out how it works.

“Looks like Miss Malone was in my junk chest,” said Smith.

“I could use some of it here. I’m having trouble with the lock.” Houdini gave the door a slight shove. “I think there’s a bar on the other side.”

“I don’t see how we can get past that without alerting Contral and his goon.”

“I think there’s a ramp on the other side of the double doors. At the top of that is the building I was lead in through. I heard Contral talking to some men out there,” said Houdini.

“And I bet they’re armed.”

“Maybe we should wait for nightfall?” asked Houdini.

“I don’t know how much time we have. We need to stop the Martian plot, not to mention get our friend Felix to a proper doctor.”

Felix scratched his hairy chin. “I appreciate watching you two working on ze delicate lock. Perhaps finesse is not what is needed? I think I have a solution if you two would oblige me.”

“What are you thinking?” asked Smith.

“You know, before the boardwalk I spent some time in the circus. You could say I have a certain animal magnetism.”

CONTRAL WAS FRUSTRATED by the teleportation device. The switches appeared to do nothing. He was contemplating reviving the green man to ask him how to get it to work. He wanted to uncover its secrets before Croker or the military men asked around about it. Time was of the essence.

Henley stood over the device and regarded it with a skeptical eye. The whole thing smelled fishy to him. He was about to comment that the switches looked like the kind he’d seen in a parts catalog when he heard a scream from the locked menagerie.

“The green man! He’s trying to walk though my wall!” Smith screamed. “He’s stuck!”

Contral’s eyebrow shot to the top of his forehead. He grabbed the keyring off his desk and ran to the door.

“Wait!” shouted Henley. He grabbed a shotgun from the rack. “This could be a trick.”

Contral nodded and waited for the man to point the gun at the door before lifting the barricade. He set it aside and turned the key. “This better not be a ruse, Mr. Smith.”

He swung the door open. The gas lamps had been put out and the entire menagerie was in darkness. Contral took a step back. He wasn’t sure if he should go inside or lock the door and grab a lantern. Henley turned to him for instructions.

A loud snort came from within the corridor. Henley raised the gun but was too late. An ivory horn knocked hit out of his hands. He threw himself to the side as the white rhino burst through the doorway. Contral shrieked and was thrown against the wall as the animal bucked his head into him.

“Take that you filthy cretin!” shouted Felix.

Henley pulled his legs to his chest as the small wolf man rode the rhino into the center of the chamber. The creature thrashed around and knocked over the desk and tables. He looked down at the dropped rifle and reached for it. A green foot kicked him in the jaw.

Smith and Houdini jumped out of the corridor and delivered a barrage of kicks and punches to the men.

“I think he smells the fresh air!” shouted Felix.

Smith ran over to the outer doors and threw the bar blocking them open. The rhino knocked them into splinters then charged up the ramp.

“Here!” Houdini handed Smith a black overcoat.

The two of them chased after Felix and Brutus up the ramp. Using his spike like a fireman’s axe, the rhino ripped open the wooden door a the top of the ramp and sunlight poured in.

“Get zem!” Felix urged the rhino towards the crowd of men that were standing in front of the entrance.

The men scattered at the sight of the furry man astride the magnificent white rhino. Furious, the creature flipped over a carriage and stopped it to splinters. Felix struggled to stay on the animal’s back. Smith and Houdini ran through the gap and stood back while the rhino snorted and charged the men in black coats. Finally all of Contral’s men fled the vicinity.

“I do not think I can stop him! I think he wants water!” Felix shouted over his shoulder as the Rhino ran towards the nearest pond.

ROOSEVELT WATCHED the escape from across the street. Frozen in amusement, his cigar fell to the ground. He turned when he heard the sound of small feet running towards him on the sidewalk.

“I reached Pulitzer himself! They’re sending a staff of photographers and reporters right now to find out what happened to the Saturn Prince.” April looked at the expression on his face. “Did I miss anything?”

36

TRIBUTE

“I assure you I’m quite alright, Miss Malone,” said Smith. She’d been pestering him ever since she realized that he was barefoot and nearly naked under the thick black coat.

Across the street Brutus was grazing on a shrubbery under the protective watch of a fire crew from Brooklyn that Houdini had befriended. Felix sat atop their pump truck and watched the crowds that had gathered.

Rather than stare at him, they were watching the procession of police and soldiers that were guarding the gold bullion that was being brought into Central Park.

“So they’re going along with it?” asked Smith.

“Indeed,” said Roosevelt. He pointed to several rooftops where men were setting up machine guns and canons. “The President thinks he can drop them from the sky?”

“What about the Mayor?” asked April.

“I think he already considers him a casualty of war.”

Smith looked at the setting sun over the buildings across the park. “The Martian Emperor has to know they’d try something like this.” Something didn’t sit right. “I’m all for trying to catch his hand in the cookie jar. I still think his threats are hollow. But…but I have to think he’s anticipated this.”

“The latest instructions were to place the gold bricks in the main fountain. The military has been given instructions to shoot at the craft if they take them. What do you think the Martian trickster has planned?” asked Roosevelt.

“Something clever.”

The procession had filed into the center of the park near the fountain behind the trees. The crowds were being pushed back off the surrounding streets.

A horse mounted battalion of police paraded down the avenue. “Return to your homes! Curfew is in effect!” Fire bells and alarms began to sound off from around the city.

“Do we sit back and let them pay the ransom?” asked Roosevelt.

“No.” Smith took another glance at the mounted artillery on the roof tops. The soldiers were scanning the sky with their binoculars, looking for any sign of the Martian airship.

Roosevelt could see the look in Smith’s eyes. “You want to take the fight to the sky?”

“If we can avoid getting shot at,” said Smith.

“The machinists finished the modifications a few hours ago.”

Smith turned to April. “Miss Malone, I want you to keep an eye out on things here.” He looked over at the fire wagon Felix was sitting on. “See of you can charm a flare gun from the firemen over there. Use it if you see something. We’ll watch for your flare.”

“There does seem to be a lot of pump trucks here,” said April.

“I noticed that too. I hope they’re not expecting a conflagration.”

Roosevelt lost count of the fire crews. “Anybody with a badge is trying to get a front row seat to this boondoggle. Probably hoping the Martians drop a few bars.”

TWENTY MINUTES LATER, Roosevelt looked out the window of the dirigible as it ascended and watched the lot recede. The machinists had cut out a slot on either side of the cabin for him to stick his elephant gun through. He was testing the range of motion he could get with his rifle and how quickly he could reload. Mounted underneath the craft was a belt fed Gatling gun with a firing button on Smith's control stick.

"How low can you keep this contraption?"

"A few dozen feet off the street. Just above the power lines and telegraph cables. Why?" asked Smith.

"I was wondering if it was to our advantage if we masqueraded as a parade float a little lower. I think the citizens of New York won't pay us much bother, but I'm worried about those trigger happy soldiers on the buildings."

Searchlights had already began to scan the skies in a sweeping pattern. Despite the curfew, people were outside and standing on the roofs of their buildings awaiting the arrival of the Martians. Lanterns glowed across the the city.

"You don't think out disguise is enough?" asked Smith.

"Probably a better ruse near ground level. Fewer amateurs will take shots at us too. I hope."

To make the craft as un-Martian as possible, Smith had a seamstress sew a banner on either side advertising, 'Old Miss Malone's Fresh Soap Co.' Roosevelt had an even deeper chuckle when he found out that April had no idea Smith had done that. "I'm sure she'll love the 'Old' title."

"I wanted it to sound like a brand you would trust," said Smith. He thought she'd find the monicker amusing. "I was in a hurry."

"Better hope the Martians see this first," Roosevelt quipped before he climbed into the craft.

Smith guided the craft down 3rd avenue. People looked up from the sidewalks and streets and waved. Smith was amused by how putting an

advertising logo on the craft, even in the middle of a crisis, seemed to make the thing seem like it was no big deal. He'd wished he'd thought of using the ruse earlier. He wondered what other sins he could hide in plain sight behind an advertising slogan.

They reached the intersection of 83rd and 3rd. From there they could see into the park and the searchlights scanning the skies. Below them, a police sergeant guiding traffic and hurrying people home, stood in the middle of the street. He looked up at the dirigible, just ten feet above his head and blew his whistle, trying to direct them on.

Roosevelt leaned out of the window and waved down to the man. "Don't mind us, Sergeant. We're undercover," he shouted down. He then flashed him an ID card. The sergeant nodded and touched his finger to his nose then continued directing traffic. "There you go. All one big happy civil servant family."

Smith pulled the dirigible into a climb.

"What's the matter?" asked Roosevelt. He pulled his lap belt tight.

"Hold on tight, the Martians are here…and they brought friends," said Smith.

37

INVASION FORCE

A dozen green dots glowed in the sky like an emerald constellation hovering over the city. Higher up and further out, more green orbs began to appear. The millions of dollars of gold bricks in the middle of the fountain no longer seemed as interesting. The policemen who'd put them in position retreated behind sand bags set up around the perimeter and looked up at the sky.

April was standing on top of a zoo building. Houdini's fire fighter friends had kindly offered her the use of ladder to get a better view. There had been some arguing before between the different fire crews. One had already connected their pump wagon to a hydrant in the expectation of flames. The Brooklyn crew had argued with them for a few minutes, but the other team stood their ground.

A green disc glowed brighter than the others and grew larger as it descended. A crowd standing on a sidewalk across the street let out a collective gasp as it begin to draw near.

April wasn't sure what to believe. She shared Smith's skepticism, but the sight of all the green dots in the sky was overwhelming. She could tell even the firemen and police were nervous. As they first began to appear several people made the sign of the cross. It had such biblical overtones.

April felt a chill down her own spine. The presence of tall the green discs in the sky was overwhelming. What if Smith had been wrong? What if these really were Martian conquerors?

She looked at the tops of the buildings where she knew men with canons and machine guns lay hidden under blankets. Would one accidental bullet start a war? What would happen if the Martians did to the city what they did to the Statue of Liberty? Would anybody see morning?

The green disc came to a hover several hundred feet over the fountain. A bright beam of light shot out from underneath it and lit up the gold bars in the fountain. The light was dazzling.

The policemen closest to it had to look away from the bright light. The bars began to shimmer in the glow. Smoke started to envelop them.

“They’re melting!” shouted a man.

April looked closer, the bars indeed appeared to be evaporating in the middle of the fountain. It was if the light was dissolving them. Or was it transmitting them like her mythical Saturn Prince? What had seemed like a gag earlier that day when they discussed theatrical magic tricks Houdini could use, the idea of employing some flash pots and trick vanish and calling it ‘transmitting’ seemed a clever enough ruse. Now she wondered if it wasn’t a real technology, commonplace to the Martians?

The stack of bars began to vanish.

SMITH PULLED a pair of spyglasses from under his seat. Even under magnification, the green discs didn’t have any details he could make out.

“My word. Are there any Martians left on Mars?” asked Roosevelt.

“I bet you a nickel that there’s something bogus about them,” said Smith.

“How do you propose we find out?”

Smith craned his head to the side of the cockpit at a glowing disk directly above the dirigible. “How about taking a pop at one with your gun if I bring you high enough?”

“And if they use their death ray to turn us into cindering skeletons? How do I collect?”

Smith yanked the stick back and brought the craft into a climb. The street below them grew smaller as they passed the top of the buildings. The propellors whined as they pulled them higher.

Roosevelt adjusted the sight on his rifle. “I’ll shoot when I’m in range. I’d appreciate it if you took us out of reach as quickly as possible when you hear the gun fire.”

“What if I miss?”

Roosevelt kicked the back of Smith’s seat. “Quiet.”

The disc grew closer but didn’t appear much larger. The dirigible reached an almost level height. Roosevelt squeezed the trigger. The rifle let out a loud retort. The cabin of the dirigible jerked backwards from the force. Smith resisted the urge to look backwards to see if Roosevelt’s arm was still attached to his shoulder. He thrust the dirigible into a downward dive. The propellors howled as they tried to push them back down and away.

A loud thud came from above and the whole craft shook.

“The fiends are firing upon us!” shouted Roosevelt. He slammed another bullet into the breach.

Smith straightened the craft out. “Hold on. I think we’re fine. I think that was debris.”

Smith gave the stick a small shake. Something slid across the top of the air sack then fell in front of the front window. A large ruptured balloon with a green lantern attached to it plummeted to the ground below.

Roosevelt watched as it smashed into the intersection they’d been hovering over just a few minutes before. “A decoy. Those fakers.”

“I’m going to take us to street level and get a better look at the park.”
“What about soldiers?” asked Roosevelt.
“I think they’re still looking up. At least I hope so.”

38

SAUCERS ATTACK

Smith slowly drove the dirigible down 68th street. Roosevelt peered past his shoulder with a set of spyglasses. He could see the flying craft hovering over the fountain in the middle of the park.

“It appears like the gold bars are evaporating.”

“Evaporating?” Smith was confused. In his mind the craft would land on top or near the fountain and Martians would load the bars inside then take off again. Everything they’d done so far fit with in his idea of what was possible – a mixture of advanced technology and trickery. But evaporating? He had no idea how to actually transmit solid matter like that. It was so far beyond even his imagination.

“Some for of electrolysis?” asked Roosevelt. He was also trying to make sense of what was taking place.

“I don’t know. Up until now I’ve thought these were just clever tricksters.”

“The beam just turned off. The gold is gone,” said Roosevelt.

The green glowing craft hovered in place then shot up into the sky at an incredible rate. Machine guns and canon began to fire from the rooftops. Trace bullets tried to follow the craft, then it vanished.

“It’s gone!” said Roosevelt.

“No. I think they just turned out the lights.” Smith pulled the stick back and sent the dirigible into a steep climb. “I’m sure it’s up there.”

The city fell away beneath them. Roosevelt peered over the edge of the window to see if they were going to be fired upon by the men on the rooftops.

Smith aimed them towards the middle of the park where he estimated the craft would be by now. A searchlight illuminated the cabin.

“That’s not good,” muttered Roosevelt.

A rifle followed by a Gatling gun fired.

“How bullet-proof is this damn thing?”

“It only took you one shot to bring me down,” said Smith.

“Then good thing I’m not shooting at us.”

More searchlights scanned the sky around them. For a brief moment a large saucer shaped craft appeared to be illuminated in front of them.

“There they are!” shout Roosevelt.

“Let me try to force them down,” said Smith.

He aimed his craft toward the top of the other. A dark shape grew larger. Smith pulled back at the last moment and brought his dirigible over the top of the other ship. The bottom of the cabin scraped over it.

“Hah! It’s cloth like ours! Cleverly disguised to look like a metal craft. But no different. I imagine the propellors are enclosed and air ducts control its flight.”

“Let’s have a technical discussion later on, Schmitty.”

“Right, of course.” Smith slammed the stick forward and pushed his craft down, on top of the other ship. “I think we took the by surprise!” He turned to grin.

There was a loud pop as bullet shot a hole in the floor of the cabin.

“Damnation!” Roosevelt swung open the window and aimed at the bulk of the ship under them. “Enough of the light petting. I’m bringing this marauder down!”

He squeezed the trigger and his gun roared. A hole ripped into the top of the other ship. He waited for it to rip all the way apart and fall away beneath them.

“It’s not sinking!” said Roosevelt.

“I think they have more chambers.”

“You mean they built a better craft than you?” Roosevelt pulled back the rifle chamber and ejected the spent cartridge. He leaned out the window again and aimed at a different part of the craft and fired. A new tear appeared int he skin. The disc began to drop.

Smith jerked his head to the right. A Martian popped out of a hole in the center of the disc and fired a pistol at them. Smith and Roosevelt ducked as the windshield shattered. The Martian lifted a grappling hook from inside the craft and threw it over the arm of Smith’s right propeller. Their dirigible shook as they were pulled down by the rapidly descending Martian craft.

The Martian ducked back down. On an impulse, Smith leaped through the broken window and onto the top of the Martian craft. The skin gave way to his feet and he felt himself sinking then sliding. His fingers grabbed the material to try to stop his fall.

“You damn fool!” Roosevelt climbed into Smith’s chair and watched.

Smith ignored him and tried to pull himself up. The slick smooth surface made it difficult to grasp. He dug his fingernails in and pulled as hard as he could. His head and chest slid over the edge of the entrance to the center of the craft. He dove inside and fell to the floor.

The Martian had the front of his helmet pressed onto a periscope. He didn’t notice Smith over the sound of his own roaring engine.

The cabin wasn’t much larger than Smith’s. The controls were quite similar to his own. In fact he realized, they could have been copies. There was no gold to be found. The craft had lifted too fast before to have it onboard. None of it added up.

He pulled himself to his feet and looked for a weapon. He assumed the pistol was still tucked into the Martian’s belt. The Martian turned around and faced Smith. The two of them froze.

The Martian was Smith’s height, he knew right away this was just a costume. The other man reached for the pistol. Smith kicked at the man’s wrist and sent him backwards. The helmet cracked against the periscope and stunned the man inside.

The Martian pulled his gun free and pointed it towards Smith. He ripped off the shattered helmet and revealed a very human face. A face Smith recognized.

“I know you!” said Smith.

The man was silent. He pulled back the hammer on the gun.

“You knew me Smith. You knew me.”

39

PUMP TRUCK

April had watched the green craft shoot into the sky. Somewhere in the back of her mind a connection clicked. She looked over at the fire crew that had hooked up their hose to the hydrant. A motor sputtered as it turned a pump. Two firemen stood close guard. They all had thick mustaches and looked indistinguishable. A third sat on the bench on the front with reins in hand as if he was ready command the horses to race off.

What were they pumping? In a flash she realized that the acids Smith had said could be used to produce the hydrogen gas for the Martian dirigibles could also be used to make a special mixture known as Aqua Regia – an acid used to dissolve gold. The firemen were pumping the gold away!

Somehow the so-called Martian Emperor had rigged the fountain to fill with acid before hand. The firemen themselves could have done it weeks before disguised as a work crew. She looked at the hundreds of policemen and soldiers standing around the fountain. How better to get the gold away then to pump it away beneath their feet through lead pipes?

The fake firemen put on thick rubber gloves and detached the fire hose from the large tank. They then poured a bucket of liquid over the nozzle

then tossed it to the ground. Both of them hopped onto the pump wagon. They were about to get away!

April ran from the roof to the ladder and climbed down. She could hear the fireman call to the horses and start driving them away from the park. The crowd gasped as they saw the two craft falling from the sky.

Search lights on top of the surrounding buildings illuminated them as they descended. April forgot about the pump truck as she looked up. Smith and Roosevelt were falling!

THE CABIN SHOOK VIOLENTLY as it crashed into the park below. Smith was thrown into the Martian Emperor and smashed the side of his own head on wall of the cabin. The lights went out for a moment and he could feel the other man shove past him. Something struck him on the side of the head and he blacked out for what felt like a brief moment.

There was a loud crash as his own dirigible fell on top of the other craft. Smith tried to find his way out of the cabin in the dark. Somewhere he could hear Roosevelt cursing.

He saw a faint light coming from a small tube. Smith climbed into it and pulled him self vertically along a series of rungs. He fell onto the half deflated airbag of the fake Martian aircraft and slid down into the grass of the park. A crowd of policemen and citizens had gathered around to gawk at the crashed vehicles.

Smith pulled himself to his feet. “Where is he?” He looked at the faces of the people. They didn’t understand who he meant. Smith realized that without his helmet, the Martian Emperor could have escaped right among them. His suit would have looked like a fireman’s overalls in the commotion.

There was a loud thud as Roosevelt jumped from the cabin above and landed on the airbag behind Smith. “Did you get the fiend?”

Smith surveyed the faces of the crowd. “He’s out there, somewhere.”

A panting man pushed his way to the front of the bystanders. “Where’s the gold?” He turned to Roosevelt. “Where’s the gold?”

“It’s not here,” said Smith. He motioned to the craft. “Look for yourself.” He turned his eyes to the sky. The green dots were beginning to drift away in the wind. He shook his head.

“Smith!” came a female shout from the crowd.

Smith pushed his way through the policemen and officials. Some of them half-heartedly tried to grab him to ask questions. He swatted away their hands and tried to find April.

He saw her silky dark hair and pushed a man out of the way. He pulled her into his arms.

“You fools,” she said. “Of all the stupid things.”

“We lost the gold.” His voice was defeated.

April pulled herself away and shook her head. “No. They took it into a fire truck. They’re trying to make it down 5th right now!”

Smith turned to the path that lead to the street. He called over his shoulder as he broke out into a run, “Teddy! We can still get them!”

Roosevelt slid to the grass and chased after Smith. He held his rifle over the crowd and shouted at them to keep clear. The moved aside and let him past. Over by a shrub he saw Felix and Houdini watching Brutus as he devoured the greenery. “I’m commandeering your rhinoceros!”

Smith ran into the street and saw the pump truck racing away. He tried to catch up with them, but wasn’t fast enough. He looked for a horse but there was none to be found. He was about to curse himself when he heard the sound of galloping thunder behind him. Smith did a double take.

“Get on!” shouted Roosevelt from atop his mount.

40

BATTLE BEASTS

Smith tried to hold on to Roosevelt as he charged the rhino towards the pump wagon. “Couldn’t you find something a little more domestic?”

“What’s the matter with Brutus?”

Smith struggled to keep his balance. The animal was building momentum as it headed down 5th avenue. It seemed to be drawn by the sound of the bell on the fire wagon and understood where it was supposed to go.

People ran to the sidewalks as they saw the enormous beast charging down the middle of the street. Carriages came to a stop. A frightened horse jumped into a flower bed.

Smith could see the Martin Emperor on the back of the wagon looking back at them. His face was so familiar, yet he couldn’t quite place it. The man turned and moved to the front of the wagon.

He shouted to Roosevelt, “That’s the Martian Emperor.”

“Which one?”

A fireman climbed to the back of the wagon and stared them down.

Roosevelt aimed his rifle over the rhino’s bucking snout. “I got the shot.”

“No!” shouted Smith. “Don’t kill him. And if you hit the tank we’ll all be covered in acid!”

“I don’t know how much longer Brutus can hold out.”

Almost as if he sensed the challenge, the rhinoceros let out a burst of speed and brought them near the back of the wagon. When they were just a few feet away the fireman pulled an axe from a hook and swung it at the beast’s head. The blade grazed over the top horn. The animal sensed the blow and tossed its massive head into the back side of the wagon sending off its left wheels momentarily.

The motion tossed Smith into the air. He slid down the back of the creature. He squeezed his thighs around the waist and was bucked forwards. He collided with Roosevelt.

“Mind yourself!”

The fireman reached the axe back to swing again. Roosevelt twisted his rifle around and swung the stock at the other man. It collided with the axe.

The wagon driver pulled the reins to right and drove them over a sidewalk and down another road. Brutus tried to follow but had to dodge out of the way of a lamp post. His momentum carried him across the street.

“Watch out!” Roosevelt saw they were headed for a fenced up alley.

The rhinoceros burst through the planks. A heavy beam just above the animal’s head slammed into Roosevelt. He flew backwards into Smith. The two men collapsed onto the ground in a pile on top of the splintered wood.

Brutus came to a stop in the narrow alley and stomped open a crate filled with produce. He started to chomp several heads of lettuce.

Smith and Roosevelt climbed to their feet. Sore and bruised, neither one had broken any bones. They looked down the street but the fire wagon was gone.

“Did you see his face?” asked Smith.

“The Martian Emperor?” I don’t think so.

Roosevelt kicked a wooden plank. “We’ve lost them now. In minutes they could anywhere.”

“But they’re not headed just anywhere. The took the gold they way they did because they knew their real airship wouldn’t be able to maneuver with that much weight. They’re headed towards their hideout.”

“We’ve searched the factories and buildings for a dynamo or any place the could launch their craft and make their chemicals. Nothing. It’s as if its invisible like their fortress.”

Smith’s eyes lit up. “Wait! We’ve been so stupid. I know where they’re headed! I know where their dynamo is and all the rest. Of all the stupid things. It’s so obvious.”

“What?” asked Roosevelt. “What’s so obvious?”

“They’re headed to Phobos!”

Roosevelt shook his head. “Have you gone mad from all the bumps?”

“No. Those men who were burned by the acid. The men on the fire truck. There’s a reason nobody around here knows anything about them. There’s a reason we haven’t found their lair. We’ve had the city checked?”

“Even the outer cities and New Jersey. Nothing.”

“But we were looking for a factory or a big building?” asked Smith.

“Yes?”

“But we didn’t look for one that moved! Phobos is the name of their ship! Maybe not the name its registered under. But I’m sure that’s what they meant. Those men are foreign sailors. The Martian Emperors real secret whereabouts is a ship docked somewhere on Manhattan!”

“I’ve got to notify the Navy immediately and form some kind of blockade!”

Smith nodded and Roosevelt ran off to find the military officials so they could semaphore the ships in the harbor.

Brutus broke open another crate and started eating some sprouts. Smith wasn’t sure if he should try using the rhinoceros as a steed. The animal

seemed content to stay in the alley and devour the produce.

April brought the carriage to a stop in the street behind them. “They’re heading to the docks!”

Smith climbed aboard. “Yes. How did you know? But which one?”

She cracked the reins and sent the horses into a gallup. “I have a hunch.”

41

GODDESS OF WAR

Smith had barely sat down on the bench next to April before she sent the carriage racing down 5th avenue. They passed the intersection he'd seen the pump truck turn into.

"They went that way!" said Smith.

"Only to lose you." She steered the horses down the middle of the avenue.

Oncoming traffic veered towards the far side of the street to avoid them. Men shouted angry insults.

Smith eyed the carriage they were in. "Do I want to ask?"

"We made a polite request," said Felix from the back boot.

Smith turned around and saw the hairy dwarf and Harry holding on for dear life. Harry had managed to wipe most of the green dye off, but his ears were still green.

April charged through an intersection. A police sergeant blew an angry whistle at them. He did a double take when he saw the two riders clinging to the back.

"Does anybody have a weapon?" Smith asked.

Harry shouted over the sound of the horses hooves hitting the pavement, "Only our wits!"

“In a word, no,” said Felix.

April pushed his umbrella towards him. He grabbed it and checked the amount of rocket fuel still left then sat back down and held on. He wasn’t sure which was worse, Brutus the Rhino’s bucking or April’s mad woman weaving through traffic. She turned the onto 34th street and he almost fell off the bench.

“Where are we headed?”

“Pier 43,” she said.

“Why?”

“I asked one of the naval men what the largest ship in port was that didn’t belong to them. He mentioned a hospital ship.”

“A hospital ship?”

“The Adrestria. It’s supposed to be a German hospital ship,” said April.

“Adrestria? As in the Greek goddess?”

“A goddess of war. Sister of Phobos,” said April.

“They must have rechristened the ship that! Of course. The man in the opium den was too confused to remember the cover name. Miss Malone, you’re brilliant!”

Tall masts were visible over the roof tops ahead. April turned south on 12th. They past rows of old warehouses that lined the Hudson river. Smith was certain they’d been searched. The irony was the ship was right behind them, out in the open. The airship could have been launched from the decks in the still of the night and nobody would have noticed. Especially if they had their smokestack spewing. Smith cursed himself for not having thought of that.

“There!” April pointed to a white ship pulling away from the wharf.

“Take us onto the pier!” The ship was already a hundred feet away from the dock. Smith had no idea what he could do to stop it.

The carriage raced down the wooden pier. Sailors and longshoremen shouted at them to slow down. April ignored them and took them all the

way to the end.

“Isn’t that the mayor?” shouted Houdini.

They looked to the side and saw a scruffy man with his wrists tied walking across the dock in a confused state. Houdini jumped off the back to help him.

Smith hopped down and stood at the edge of the dock and tried to figure out what to do about the fleeing boat. He glanced down at his umbrella. There was enough fuel for him to make it. But then what? There had to be at least twenty crewmen onboard.

White smoke billowed out of the smokestack as the ships boilers pushed the steam engine to top speed. Smith could also hear the low-pitched sound of a dynamo. The Martian Emperor had likely made some kind of hybrid power plant. Smith suspected it would be able to outrun any blockade.

Smith lifted the umbrella and pointed to it over the ship. He turned the handle and it sprung open.

“No!” shouted April.

“I don’t have a choice. He’s going to get away and it’s my fault.”

Flames shot out of the umbrella and Smith began to lift off the ground. Something heavy jumped on to his back.

“I can’t let you go alone,” said Felix.

They were too far off the ground for Smith to protest.

They flew across the Hudson like an obnoxious firework. The sparks and the smoke from the rockets lit up the night around them. Smith arced the umbrella towards the ship.

“Ze men. They are jumping!” said Felix.

“What?” Smith was too focused on making sure they landed on the deck and not the river. Between the flames of his umbrella he saw several men diving into the water. They must have thought the rocket propelled umbrella was some kind of missile. But the men seemed even more afraid. Smith

realized they must have been in a hurry to pull out of port. There had to have been an accident.

“Felix, can you swim?”

“Oui?”

“Jump!”

The wolf man dove into the water. Smith accelerated towards the ship. He let go of the umbrella. The flaming rocket shot towards the ship and ignited the leaking hydrogen. The last thing he saw before he blacked out was a bright ball of fire.

HOSPITAL

When Smith came to he was laying on a hospital bed. He panicked for a moment when he couldn't feel his feet. He looked down and saw that April had fallen asleep on them as she sat in a chair.

"They tried to remove her. They won't make that mistake again." Roosevelt pulled up a chair and sat next to Smith's bed. "I know you have intermittent amnesia. How much do you recall?"

"Everything until the explosion. Felix?"

"Back at Coney Island. Houdini as well. It was he who pulled you out of the water. Extra-ordinary young man."

"What about the Martian Emperor?"

"We captured several of his men. They said he died in the explosion. A likely story. They said he's actually the Viscount Von Marcus. Our European allies say that's probably a dubious alias. We're trying to track down his operations over there to find out more. The sailors only seem to know a little. They didn't have much grasp of what he was up to. Typical Hessian obedience. The government got its gold back and the Navy found some interesting things to look at on that ship. I didn't point out to them that they looked a lot like some of your gadgets…"

Smith bit his lip. “This man, he looked familiar. But I don’t know why. It’s as if he managed to copy many of my ideas. I’ve used lots of different machinists to help build my toys, but I always try to separate the work so no one person has the whole picture.”

“We’ve found a number of devices he used to corrupt the telegraph system. A disturbing number. Of anything, this man had a gift for espionage. The men from the Navy are very interested in that. It’s embarrassing how easily it was done.” He eyed Smith. “Makes you wonder who else might have done such a thing.”

“I’m sure they had good reason.” Smith paused for a moment, “But I suspect the Martian Emperor felt the same way. This Von Marcus, despite the theatrics. He managed to do quite a lot without firing a shot. I think he may have been after more than just the gold.”

“Such as?”

“He’s a man whose read too much Jules Verne, for certain. But he reminds me of a younger version of myself. I too had dreams of unifying the world,” said Smith.

“What happened?”

“I realized that you can’t do that by force. Men have to work together as individuals. Not at the point of a gun. Sadly I fear this is an ideal that is being forgotten. I think we’re in for dark times as more men try to force others into their vision of peace and unity. This Martian Emperor was just the beginning. And I worry what he’ll do next time.” Smith stared out the window. A memory came back to him. “I started a society once, a salon of sort, the goal was the scientific unity of man. It sounded like a grandiose idea. But I made a mistake. Thomas tried to explain it to me. But I wouldn’t listen. I was so headstrong and arrogant back then. I believed that a just society could be created by using force to make men act justly. But that’s a delusion as old as the pharaohs. Thomas tried to make me understand that a just society is one that allows men to act justly. The first fails by coercion.

Just look in any prison. The second succeeds by understanding that most men want to live in a just society." Smith waved at the window and the buildings outside. "Most of those people out there want to live in a city free of corruption and crime. Give them that and the world will really prosper. You don't elevate the society by putting a different set of crooks in charge to steal and put their boots on our necks. You elevate society by not putting the crooks in charge. You keep the ones out of power that would sell their votes or betray their office by handing out jobs and using public debt to buy favor. I'm sorry. You know all this. I forgot who I was talking too."

Roosevelt nodded. "I see progress. Fleeting at times. But it's there. Back to the Viscount. You have no recollection of who he is?"

Smith shook his head.

"Not a lost relative?"

"I have none other than my little sister."

Roosevelt tilted his head towards April. "Does she know why you take your long sleeps?"

"No. I don't want to burden her with it. It's too much for me to bare at times."

"Sometimes in not letting people know our burdens we burden them even more by forcing them to carry us as well," said Roosevelt."

"I know. I know."

"She thinks the world of you."

"I'm quote fond of her." Smith tried to avoid looking down at her sleeping form.

"Fond? There's a funny word, Schmitty. When I see you two look at each other, 'fond' isn't exactly the word I'd use. It's the word someone uses to hide a deeper feeling."

Smith said nothing.

"That look is rare, Smith. You're both two exceptional individuals."

"I'm a little too old for her. Don't you think?"

“You’re a little too old for Methuselah’s mother. I don’t think she would care.”

“There’s just too much to deal with. Now is not the right time.”

“Unlike you, she can’t wait forever. She might try, but in the end she’s like the rest of us. It would be cruel for you to make her do so.”

“I know. I know. I think I…I mean I know…I know I love her. I knew it the moment I stepped out of my chamber. I knew it before I knew her name. I knew it even in the deepest bought of amnesia.” Smith lowered his voice. “I knew it when I slept. I dreamed about her. Even though I never dream when I take those long sleeps.” Smith stared up at the ceiling. “I need a nap. Then I need to get back to my train.”

“I’ll leave you be.” Roosevelt patted Smith on the head then shut the door behind him.

Smith traced patterns in the ceiling and tried to make sense of things. His eyes drifted down to April. He wanted to say something to wake her. He wanted to see her brilliant green eyes gaze back at him. He wanted to tell her what he just told Roosevelt. Instead, he closed his eyes.

At the foot of his bed, April pretended to sleep while a tear rolled down her cheek.

THANK YOU!

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PS

David Dixon will return very soon!

Best,
Andrew Mayne
@AndrewMayne