



The
**CHEMICKAL
MARRIAGE**

A NOVEL

G.W. DAHLQUIST

THE GLASS BOOKS OF
THE DREAM EATERS



Penguin

G. W. DAHLQUIST

The Chemickal Marriage

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By the same author

The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters
The Dark Volume

Prefatory Note

The Chemickal Marriage finishes a story begun in *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters* and continues in *The Dark Volume*. However much this present book may stand apart as a discrete narrative, a few notes regarding what has come before may prove useful.

Celeste Temple, a plantation heiress from the West Indies of twenty-five sharp years, her engagement to Roger Bascombe summarily terminated without explanation, found herself in the position, some three days later, of shooting him dead in a sinking dirigible. Mr Bascombe had joined a mysterious cabal (funded jointly by the financier Robert Vandaariff and the munitions magnate Henry Xonck) whose control of the nation was scuttled, along with the dirigible, by the very unlikely alliance of Miss Temple, the criminal assassin Cardinal Chang and Captain-Surgeon Svenson of the Macklenburg Navy, a foreign spy.

When these three escaped the wrecked airship, they thought their enemies vanquished: the Comte d'Orkancz, inventor of the blue glass, had been run through with a sabre; Francis Xonck had been shot; Harald Crabbé had been stabbed; and the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza had leapt to her death. Betrayed by these supposed underlings, Henry Xonck and Robert Vandaariff had already fallen prey to the blue glass, their minds wiped clean, their bodies animal husks.

However, the dying Comte had been alchemically preserved, his memories captured in a glass book by a resilient Francis Xonck, who was unaware of how mortality would taint its contents. Xonck and the Contessa, the latter evidently a swimmer, hurried to recover the threads of their plot, even as Temple, Svenson and Chang raced to forestall them. All parties were met by a new cabal, an alliance of former underlings who understood the power of the blue glass, if not the science behind it, and stood determined to defy their former masters. At the Xonck factory in Parchfeldt, all parties convened for the infusion of the Comte's corrupted memories into the body of Robert Vandaariff, seeking at a stroke to command the one man's science and the other's fortune. Once resurrected, however, the pawn overcame his ignorant masters, deliberately provoking an inferno in which, once more, many lives were lost.

That night Miss Temple escaped the burning factory, only to see Cardinal Chang and Doctor Svenson cut down before her eyes. In the woods, Miss Temple met up with Elöise Dujong, the Doctor's love, and Francesca Trapping, the seven-year-old heir to the Xonck fortune. But the Contessa caught them in the dark, stealing the girl and the dark volume, leaving Elöise dead and Miss Temple only half alive, but determined for revenge.

Antagonist

Miss Temple eyed the clock with a characteristic impatience, for she much despised lateness in other people. She pulled the green clutch bag onto her lap, aware that sorting its contents had become a ritual, as if she were some old woman with a set of clacking beads.

A purse of money. A notebook and an all-weather pencil. Matches. A beeswax-candle stub. Two handkerchiefs. A sewn cloth pouch of orange metal rings. Opera glasses. A small black revolver whose recoil did not spoil her aim (she had practised on empty bottles in the hotel cellar and could nearly hit them). Ammunition. Gold.

She had paid Pfaff well. If he did not come, she was betrayed. Or – Miss Temple pursed her lips – Mr Pfaff was dead.

Miss Temple cinched the green bag shut. The clock's silver bell chimed the half-hour. She called to her maid: 'Marie, my travelling jacket.'

Five weeks had passed since her return, five weeks spent wholly on revenge.

It had taken Miss Temple two days to regain the city from the wilds of Parchfeldt Park. The Contessa's metal-bound case had not cracked her skull, and the wound on her forehead had eased its throbbing by the time she reached the canal and slept a few hours in the cover of its reeds. Tentative fingers told her the gash had gummed to a tolerable scab, and she walked for hours, dizzied but no longer sickened, to the Parchfeldt railway head, where she finally boarded a coach to Stopping Station, into the heart of the city.

She had gone back to the Hotel Boniface, for her enemies would find her no matter where she hid – she must visit her banker, she must have clothes, she must hire violent men, all of which would draw the notice of any diligent foe. When she arrived at the hotel's doors, filthy, bloodied and after a fortnight's absence, the staff said nothing apart from a single polite inquiry as to whether she required a doctor before a bath was drawn or whether, preparatory to either, she might prefer a meal.

She huddled naked in the copper tub until the water went tepid. A maid stood deferentially in the dressing-room doorway with fresh towels, nervously glancing between the dull face of the soaking woman and the sharp knife Miss Temple had insisted stay within reach, atop a wooden stool. Dressed enough to have a doctor examine her, Miss Temple had kept the weapon in her lap. The white-whiskered man applied a salve and bandage to her forehead, frowned at the fading weal of a bullet above her ear and left a powder to aid her sleep. Miss Temple ate two slices of buttered bread, stopping at the first flicker of nausea. She dismissed the maid, locked the corridor door and wedged it with a chair, did the same for the door of her chamber and curled into bed, the blade under her pillow like a snake in wait beneath a stone.

She slept for three hours before her fears rose up to wake her. She lay in the dark. Chang. Svenson. Elöise. Their deaths could not be undone.

Her survival felt like a betrayal, and every small comfort arrived with a sting. Yet Miss Temple had withstood such stings all her life. The next morning she made her first list of everything she ought to do and found herself filling two diligent pages. She set down the pen and wiped her nose. In truth it was simpler to keep one's heart a stone. She rang for breakfast and a maid to curl her hair.

She sent to her aunt in Cap-Rouge, requesting the return of Marie (of her own two maids, the one who could read), and then spent the day – making a point to be accompanied by footmen from the Boniface – attending to her most basic needs: bank, clothes, weapons and, most important of all, new

She did not fear for her immediate safety. When her train had arrived, the platforms of Stopping Station were no longer thick with dragoons. Brown-coated constables had been posted to manage the openly hostile crowds of travellers, but their only charge was to maintain order, not search for potential fugitives. Nowhere had she seen posters offering a reward for her capture, or for that of any of her former companions.

She scoured the newspapers, but found only a standard refrain of imminent crises: the Ministries paralysed, the Privy Council in disarray, business at a standstill. For Miss Temple, this was excellent the more the world was hampered, the freer she would be to act. She sallied out, a hotel footman to either side, gratified by the frayed tempers that seemed to catch at every inconsequential jostle.

Her journey that first morning did not stretch to any destination she might deem provocative – that is, she did not venture near the St Royale Hotel, the Foreign Ministry, Stäelmaere House, the Macklenburg diplomatic compound or the Hadrian Square residence of Colonel and Mrs Trapping. At these places might have become bolt-holes for enemies that still lived. When the Contessa's spies found her at the Boniface, all well and good. She would not be so vulnerable.

And if her other great enemy had survived the destruction at the Parchfeldt factory? Miss Temple had last glimpsed Lord Robert Vandaariff face down in a pool of black slime, about to be swarmed by an angry mob ... yet had he lived? It would be a fool who assumed otherwise.

Miss Temple paused (the scarlet-coated footmen halted obligingly with her) at the cobbled road's sudden descent, gazing at a district of the city she had never visited. One footman cleared his throat. 'Shall we turn along the avenue, miss?'

Miss Temple strode ahead, down to the river.

Cardinal Chang had mentioned it once, and the detail – a proper name from his secret life – had taken Miss Temple's mind with the attractive force of a silver buckle to a magpie. When she stood in the street outside the Raton Marine, she was unprepared for the surge of tenderness that filled her heart. The tavern lay in a nest of filthy streets, with the buildings to either side tipping like old drunkards. The people in the street, openly staring at the finely dressed young woman with two liveried servants seemed to Miss Temple like humanity's bilge, beings who could scarcely take two steps without leaving a stain. Yet in this place Cardinal Chang had been *known* – these ruins were his world.

Again the footman cleared his throat.

'Wait here,' said Miss Temple.

A scattering of men sat outside the tavern at small tables – sailors, by the look of them – and Miss Temple passed through to the door without a glance. Inside, she saw the Raton Marine had been fitted out to serve a broad clientele – tables near the windows with light enough to read, and tables in

shadows even the brightest morning would not pierce. A staircase led to a balcony lined with rooms for rent, their open doors draped with an oilcloth curtain. Her nostrils flared in imagining the reek.

Perhaps five men looked up from their drinks as she entered. Miss Temple ignored them and approached the barman, who was polishing a bowlful of silver buttons with a rag, depositing each finished button with a *clink* into another bowl.

‘Good morning,’ said Miss Temple.

The barman did not reply, but met her eyes.

‘I have been directed here by Cardinal Chang,’ she said. ‘I require a competent man not averse to violence – in fact perhaps several – but one to start, as soon as is convenient.’

‘Cardinal Chang?’

‘Cardinal Chang is dead. If he were not, I should not be here.’

The barman looked past her shoulders at the other men, who had obviously overheard.

‘That’s hard news.’

Miss Temple shrugged. The barman’s gaze flicked at the bandage above her eye.

‘You have money, little miss?’

‘And I will not be cheated. This is for your *own* time and attention.’ Miss Temple set a gold coin on the polished wood. The barman did not touch it. Miss Temple set down a second coin. ‘And *this* is for the man *you* would recommend for my business, taking into account that it is Cardinal Chang’s business as well. If you knew him –’

‘I knew him.’

‘Then perhaps you will be happy to see his killer paid in kind. I assure you I am most serious. Have your candidate present this coin at the Hotel Boniface, and ask for Miss Isobel Hastings. If he knows his work, there will be more in its place.’

Miss Temple turned to the door. At one of the tables a man had stood, unshaven, with fingerless gloves.

‘How’d he get it, then? The old Cardinal?’

‘He was stabbed in the back,’ said Miss Temple coldly. ‘Good day to you all.’

Two restive days went by before the coin was returned. In that time Miss Temple’s headaches had gone, her maid had arrived (bearing a querulous letter from her aunt, thrown away unanswered), and she had begun regular practice with a newly purchased pistol.

The newspapers said nothing of the Duke of Stäelmaere’s death, and thus no official appointment of a new head for the Privy Council, though the Council Deputy, a Lord Axewith, had assumed a prominence simply through his regular denials of irregularity. No word of Robert Vandaariff. No word of the Parchfeldt battle. No mention of the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza. No one called round at the Boniface to arrest Miss Temple. It was as if the Cabal’s machinations had never taken place.

Miss Temple had taken another room on a lower floor for business dealings, ignoring the attendant overtones of impropriety. She knew that to the staff of the Hotel Boniface she had become an eccentric, tolerated as long as each breach of decorum was plastered over by cash. Miss Temple did not care. She installed herself on a sofa, the clutch bag on her lap, one hand inside the bag holding her pistol.

A footman knocked to announce a Mr Pfaff. Miss Temple studied the man who entered, and did not offer him a chair.

‘Your name is Pfaff?’

‘Jack Pfaff. Nicholas suggested I call.’

‘Nicholas?’

‘At the Rat.’

‘Ah.’

Jack Pfaff was at most a year older than Miss Temple herself (a ripe, unmarried twenty-five). His clothing had at one time been near to fashion – chequered trousers and an orange woollen coat with square buttons – as if he were a young fop fallen to poor times. Miss Temple knew from his voice that this was not the case, and that the clothes represented an impoverished man’s desire to climb.

‘You can read? Write?’

‘Both, miss, quite tolerably.’

‘What weapons do you possess – what *skills*?’

Pfaff reached behind his back and brought out a slim blade. His other hand slipped to an inner pocket and emerged with a set of brass rings across his fingers.

‘Those are nothing against a sabre or musket.’

‘Am I to fight soldiers, miss?’

‘I should hope not, for your sake. Are you *averse* to killing?’

‘The law does prohibit the practice, miss.’

‘And if a man spat in your face?’

‘O goodness, I would step away like a Christian.’ Pfaff raised his eyebrows affably. ‘Then again, most incidents of face-spitting can be laid to drink. Perhaps it would be more proper to cut a spitting man’s throat, to spite the devil inside.’

Miss Temple did not appreciate trifling. ‘Why does this Nicholas consider you fit for my employ?’

‘I am skilled in opening doors.’

‘I requested no *thief*.’

‘I speak broadly, miss. I am a man who finds *ways*.’

Miss Temple bit back a tart remark. A man like Pfaff, now unavoidable, must be met with intelligence and a smile.

‘Did you know Cardinal Chang?’

‘Everyone knew him – he cut a rare figure.’

‘You were his friend?’

‘He would on occasion allow a fellow to stand him a drink.’

‘Why would you do that?’

‘You knew him, miss – why would I *not*?’ Pfaff smiled evenly, watching her bag and the hand within it. ‘Perhaps you’ll enlighten me as to the present business.’

‘Sit down, Mr Pfaff. Put those things away.’

Pfaff restored the weapons to their places and stepped to an armchair, flipping out his coat-tails before settling. Miss Temple indicated the silver service on a table.

‘There is tea, if you would have some. I will explain what I require. And then you – with your *door*

– will suggest how best it can be done.’

Miss Temple soaked again that night in the copper tub, auburn hair dragging like dead weeds across the water. Her thoughts were stalled by fatigue, and the sorrow she strove to avoid loomed near.

She had told Mr Pfaff only enough to start his work, but his mercenary trespass of the roles formerly occupied by Chang and Svenson left Miss Temple feeling their absence. Even more troubling, close conversation with Pfaff had awakened, for the first time since leaving Parchfeldt Park, the spark of Miss Temple’s blue glass memories. It was not that Pfaff himself was attractive – on the contrary, she found him repellent, with brown teeth and coarse hair the colour of dung-muddled straw – but the longer he had remained in her physical proximity, the more she felt that dreaded bodily stirring, like a stretch of invisible limbs too long asleep.

In the copper tub, Miss Temple took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, inching herself towards the brink of her fears. In her struggle against the Cabal, she had exposed herself to the contents of two blue glass books. The first had been deliberately compiled by the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza as an opium den of pleasure and violence. Staring into its swirling depths, Miss Temple had experienced the bright, hot memories of innumerable lives – in *her* thoughts and in *her* limbs – and Miss Temple’s literal virtue became a mere scrap of protest before the debauchery she had known. Ever since, this book’s contents had lurked beneath her thoughts, and a glimpse of skin or smell of hair, a mere rustle of cloth, could call forth pleasures sharp enough to drop Miss Temple to her knees.

The second book had contained the memories of but a single man, the Comte d’Orkancz, preserved in blue glass by Francis Xonck aboard the sinking airship in the very moment the Comte’s life bled away. The great man’s mind had been captured, but the contaminating touch of death had corrupted his character, twisting the aesthete’s discrimination into a bitter disdain for life. Miss Temple’s glimpse of this second book had left her gasping, as if her throat had been coated with rancid tar. Ignorant of the tainted nature of these memories, the remaining factions of the Cabal had convened at the Xonck Armaments works at Parchfeldt and agreed between them to infuse the book’s contents into the emptied mind of Robert Vandaariff – hoping at a stroke to regain the Comte’s alchemical knowledge for their use as well as take control of Vandaariff’s fortune, the largest in the land. Resurrected in Vandaariff’s body, the Comte, despite his unbalanced soul, had quickly triumphed over his former servants: Mrs Marchmoor, Francis Xonck, Charlotte Trapping and Alfred Leveret were all dead. Only the Contessa had survived to stand against him ... only the Contessa and Miss Temple.

At Parchfeldt Miss Temple had received her own revelation. As she walked through the factory, she had suddenly *known* the task of each machine. However poisonous, her touch of the Comte’s memories had provided insights into his science. If Robert Vandaariff did still live, it was possible that Miss Temple – throughout her life indifferent to any study – could anticipate the Comte’s dire imagination.

Stunned by grief, both books had lain dormant in Miss Temple’s mind, just long enough for her to hope they might remain so. But now, prompted by the unsightly yet provocative vision of Pfaff’s tongue dabbing at his cup rim for a drop of tea, they had returned. Naked and alone, Miss Temple knew she must make herself mistress of these wells within her, or forever be their slave.

She sank deeper, until the water touched her chin, and extended one leg so her pale foot dangled, dripping. She listened for Marie, heard nothing and settled her hips with a squirm. The fingers of her

right hand grazed the hair between her legs, teasing the skin beneath. Miss Temple shut her eyes, willing her thoughts to a place she had never allowed herself, apart from the one impulsive moment in the darkness of Parchfeldt, the rash action she was sure had been the ruin of them all. She had kissed Cardinal Chang. She had felt his lips on hers, had pressed her tongue into his mouth, had thrilled at his firm grip upon her body. Miss Temple's left hand traced circles across her inner thigh as the fingers of her right slipped further down, stroking her arousal to a glow. She frowned against the press of blue glass memories, pursuing her own private need, the slicking quickness beneath her dipping fingers. A flick of bile from the Comte's memories – she swallowed it back and bit her lip, concentrating. Chang had pushed her away, arching his back as the Contessa's blade struck home – she opened her legs to imagine him between them, pulling his sweet weight onto her body. Her thumb swirled a tight circle and she gasped, ignoring another chorus of lurid incident inside her, cleaving again to Cardinal Chang. He had carried her shivering body from the sea after the sunken airship – she sank two fingers deeper still – he had cradled her, nearly naked, white with cold. She pushed her foot against the tub, holding her desire firm, cutting through the noise in her mind like a ship through the foam on the sea. She knew he was dead, even as the remembered strength of his legs drove her deliciously near the breaking of an almost painful wave. She knew she was alone, even as the crest of pleasure finally spilt, flushing her breast like a bird's – opening her heart as it had never been in life, and thrusting it beyond the living world.

She slept more deeply that night, waking after five hours instead of three. With a determined grunt Miss Temple rolled onto her front, face deep in her pillow, her fingers digging beneath her body. This time it was easier to keep the foreign memories away – perfumed seraglio, church confessional, the back of a jouncing wagon – each banished by a fierce deployment of her memories of Chang. When she again lay spent, the pillow moist with her hot breath, Miss Temple began to sob. She wiped her nose on the edge of her pillowcase. Another hour of fitful dozing and she rose, pushing the hair back from her puffy eyes.

She was still at her writing table in her shift when Marie entered hours later, a box tied with ribbon in her arms.

‘Sent from downstairs, miss – and just in time for your day ...’

At Miss Temple's curt nod, the maid set the box on the bed, pulling apart the paper inside to reveal a new pair of ankle boots, the leather dyed dark green. Her old pair had been placed in the wardrobe, split and scuffed by too many perils to name. She hiked up her shift as Marie fitted both feet in turn. Miss Temple flexed each arch and felt the bite of hard, new leather. She crossed to her pillow and flipped it up, revealing the knife. With a satisfying ease the blade slid into the lean sheath the shoemaker had – under protest – stitched inside her right boot. She dropped the shift and caught Marie's troubled expression.

‘Stand up, Marie,’ she snapped. ‘Tea first, then ask what fruit is fresh.’

Mr Pfaff sent four more men to the Boniface for her scrutiny – ex-soldiers, discharged from colonial duty – jobless men inured to following orders and unafraid to fight. As the men stood towering above her in a line, Miss Temple imagined how the Contessa would serve each a special smile, applying a delicate adhesive of desire to their purchased loyalty. Miss Temple was not ugly – if her face was too

round, her limbs were well formed and she bore a complete set of bright teeth – but she wanted no piece of these men’s desire. She gave them money, her grey eyes coldly fixing theirs as the coins were taken.

With a pang she remembered her pact with the Doctor and the Cardinal. But she did not want to be encumbered – her heart could bear employees, but no longer allies. To Pfaff and his men she was a source of money. They could have no great opinion of her character – and with no ready way to prove herself otherwise, she did her best not to despise them in return.

Three of the new men were sent out of the city to gather news: Mr Ramper to the factory at Parchfeldt, Mr Jaxon to Tarr Manor (whose quarry had provided the Cabal with raw indigo clay) and Mr Ropp to Harschmort House. The fourth and most presentable, Mr Brine – late Corporal Brine, 11th Territorial Fusiliers – Miss Temple kept near her at the Boniface, with the firm proviso that he never enter her private rooms unless requested, nor on any occasion – requested or no – insinuate himself with Marie.

Mr Pfaff himself brought a steady stream of information. The Contessa had not returned to the St Royale. Harald Crabbé’s widow still occupied their home, as Roger Bascombe’s mother remained so resident of her son’s. The homes of Leveret and Aspiche were quite empty apart from servants. Xonck’s rooms had not been touched. Of all the addresses on Miss Temple’s list, only one had received any sort of return. Confirmed by several witnesses, Charles and Ronald Trapping had been delivered home by two uniformed dragoons.

As Pfaff helped himself to a seat, Miss Temple passed him another page from her stack of papers. ‘The Comte’s house in Plum Court – it appears derelict, but the rear garden held a greenhouse where he worked. Also the art dealer that exhibited the Comte’s paintings. And then the Royal Institute. If Vandaariff is alive –’ She sighed. ‘How can there be *no* word whether the richest man on three continents has died?’

‘Soon now,’ Pfaff chuckled indulgently. ‘Once Mr Ropp returns from Harschmort –’

‘The Royal Institute,’ continued Miss Temple. ‘Since every one of the Comte’s laboratories was destroyed, he may have sought other facilities. Also, he will need particular supplies to rebuild – and in such quantities that must reveal the effort.’

‘An excellent stratagem.’

‘It is, actually,’ said Miss Temple.

Pfaff stood with a smile, and called to Mr Brine, who sat impassively on an upholstered stool. ‘Keeping the mistress safe, then, Briney?’

To Miss Temple’s disgust, both of Mr Brine’s cheeks flushed pink.

Cramming her hours with tasks brought welcome exhaustion that served to insulate her grief. In the night she cleaved to Chang, but through her days, passed in a world that so assailed Miss Temple’s senses, he was gone. It was a widening divide she fought to ignore.

Mr Ropp did not return. Pfaff speculated the man had received better work elsewhere, or given himself over to drink with his advance wages. When Mr Jaxon delivered his report from Tarr Manor (the house occupied by Roger Bascombe’s cousin and her young son, the quarry empty and unguarded), Pfaff sent him – at Miss Temple’s insistence – after Ropp to Harschmort, this time with instructions to approach Robert Vandaariff’s mansion cautiously on foot, through the dunes.

The longer she waited the more the Boniface felt like a prison. Without revenge to shape her character, doubt gnawed at Miss Temple's mind. Her efforts had been directed against Robert Vandaariff – since, as master of the blue glass, he represented the greatest threat. Yet the Contessa was Miss Temple's primary enemy – her *nemesis* – and had eluded her altogether. The woman had fled Parchfeldt with the glass book that held the Comte's memories. She had also captured young Francesca Trapping. Heiress to the Xonck Armaments fortune, the child offered the Contessa brutal leverage over Vandaariff.

Miss Temple had promised Francesca safety. Would her present efforts prove any less bankrupt?

Miss Temple emerged from the cellar of the Boniface, her gloved hand smelling of gunpowder, and returned to her rooms by way of a rear staircase, ascending just in time to see Mr Pfaff and Mr Ramper, returned from Parchfeldt, proceed rapidly past.

'Tell me *exactly*,' whispered Pfaff. 'And are you sure he was there, not just some mucker from the train?'

Ramper, taller than Pfaff by a good five inches, stopped where he was and leant very close to Pfaff. Pfaff did not flinch.

'He was in a brown coat,' snarled Ramper, 'looked like he'd been living rough – but no poacher, no woodsman and no farmer. He was watching the gate.'

'How do you know he wasn't some gypsy, sniffing out salvage?'

'Why would a gypsy follow me through the woods? Or take the same train?'

'Then why didn't you damn well take him?'

'I thought if I followed him I could find out who he was.'

'*And?*'

'I told you – once I got past the constables –'

'He was gone. *Superb.*'

'No one would go to that ruin without a reason – the *same* damned reason I had.'

Ramper raised a hand to knock on Miss Temple's door, but Pfaff caught it mid-air.

'Not a word,' Pfaff hissed. 'The factory, yes, but not this ... *figment*. We don't scare the mistress.'

Miss Temple emerged from the stairwell, grinning broadly.

'There you are, Mr Pfaff,' she called. 'And Mr Ramper – how good to see you safely returned.'

Pfaff spun round, his hand darting instinctively behind his coat. He smiled in greeting and stepped aside so Miss Temple might reach her door.

Mr Ramper had not entered the Parchfeldt factory itself. The gate was barred and strongly guarded. The grounds outside were pitted with artillery craters, but he saw no bodies. The white walls were blackened by flame. The machines inside – if they remained – were silent, and the smokestacks on the roof were cold.

Miss Temple asked if he had examined the canal. He had: there was no traffic to be seen. She asked if he entered the woods to the east. Mr Ramper described the shell holes and fallen trees amongst the stone ruins. Without noticeable tightness in her voice, Miss Temple asked if he had found any bodies *there*. Mr Ramper had not.

She poured more tea before turning to Pfaff.

‘After a reasonable period of refreshment, of course – I will have Marie fetch brandy – Mr Ramper will direct his efforts to these *machines*. If they have been moved, then surely someone with knowledge of the canals can confirm it. If they have been repaired, then an inquiry to the Xonck Armaments works at Raaxfall may help us, for it is there the Comte’s devices were made.’

‘The works at Raaxfall are shut down,’ said Pfaff. ‘Hundreds of men without a wage.’

‘Mr Ramper – the men guarding the factory, did they wear green uniforms?’

Ramper looked at Pfaff before responding. ‘No, miss. Local men for hire, it seemed.’

‘The Xonck factory had its own small army,’ Miss Temple explained. ‘Perhaps they have accompanied the machines.’

Pfaff considered this, then nodded to Ramper, who stood.

‘Do wait for your brandy, Mr Ramper. Mr Pfaff, what of the Royal Institute?’

Pfaff smiled, and rubbed his hands in a gesture Miss Temple was sure he’d copied from the stage. ‘No one’s let it spill, but there’s money in the air. I’ve found a glassworks by the river, apparently turning away work – I’m off tonight to see why.’

‘Then let us speak this evening, when you have returned.’

‘I will not return until quite late.’

‘No matter.’

‘The hotel staff will not admit me.’

‘Mr Brine will wait in the lobby – it is the simplest thing.’ She turned brightly. ‘Mr Ramper, perhaps you will finish this plate of biscuits – one dislikes their persistence in a room. And, Mr Brine, if you would come with me – I believe Marie has explained there is a fault with the lock on my window.’

Mr Brine obligingly followed Miss Temple to her chamber, pointedly averting his eyes from her bed as he advanced to the window. He turned, his face quite wilfully blank, at the sound of her closing the door behind them.

‘There is little time, Mr Brine,’ she whispered. ‘When Mr Ramper leaves the hotel, I want you to follow him.’ Brine opened his mouth to speak, but Miss Temple waved him to silence. ‘I am not interested in Mr Ramper. My fear is that his brown-coated man did not lose him at all, but has followed him *here*, and will follow him away. Say nothing to *anyone*. Exit through the rear of the hotel – I will send you on an errand. If Mr Ramper is under scrutiny, follow this brown-coated person as best you can. Is that clear?’

Brine hesitated.

‘Silence is a provocation, Mr Brine.’

‘Yes, miss. But what if the fellow wants you? If I’m gone, you’ll be alone.’

‘Not to worry.’ Miss Temple patted her clutch bag with a smile. ‘I have only to imagine the man and a brown glass bottle and I will pot him square!’

She did not have to fashion an excuse for Mr Brine to leave after all, for when they reappeared Pfaff himself sent Ramper and Brine on their way, expressing a desire to speak to ‘the mistress’ alone. Once the door closed, Pfaff reached into an inner pocket and removed a green cheroot, wrapped tight as a pencil. He bit off the tip and spat it into his teacup.

‘I trust you do not object?’

‘As long as you do not foul the floor.’

Pfaff lit the cheroot, puffing until the tip glowed red.

‘We have not spoken of Cardinal Chang.’

‘Nor will we,’ replied Miss Temple.

‘If I do not know what he did in your employ, I cannot succeed where he failed –’

‘He did not *fail* in my *employ*.’

‘However you paint it. The Cardinal’s dead. I do not care to join him. If my questions intrude on delicate matters –’

‘You overreach yourself, Mr Pfaff.’

‘Do I? The Cardinal, this doctor – how many others? You are perilous company, miss, and the less you make it plain, the more I am inclined to *nerves*.’

‘You have spent your time investigating *me*,’ said Miss Temple with a start, knowing it was true.

‘And learnt enough to wonder why a sugar-rich spinster took up with foreigners and killers and disappeared for a fortnight.’

‘*Spinster?*’

Pfaff rolled ash onto a white saucer. ‘If a woman can look past the Cardinal’s scars, what business is that of mine? We all shut our eyes in the dark.’

Miss Temple’s voice dropped to an icy snarl. ‘I will *tell* you your business, Mr Pfaff – and if I choose to straddle twenty sailors in succession in St Isobel’s Square at noon, it is nothing you need note. I have paid you good money. If you think to defy me, or if you think I care a whit about your leers or the threat of scandal, you have made a very grave mistake.’

Only then did Pfaff realize that Miss Temple’s hand was in her bag and the bag now tight against his abdomen. Very slowly, he raised both hands and met her eyes. He grinned.

‘It seems you’ve answered me after all, miss. Forgive my presumption – a fellow acquires worries I understand you now quite well.’

Miss Temple did not shift her bag. ‘Then you are for the glassworks?’

‘And will send word, however late the hour.’

‘I am obliged to you, Mr Pfaff.’

In a show of bravado she dropped her bag onto the side table and snatched the last tea biscuit, snapping it between her teeth. Pfaff took his leave. When she heard the door close, Miss Temple sighed heavily. Her mouth was dry. She spat the biscuit back onto the plate.

Miss Temple looked up at the clock. She still had time. She found Marie in the maid’s little room, mending buttons, and explained what to tell Mr Pfaff on the unlikely chance that Miss Temple did not return. When Marie protested this idea, Miss Temple observed that the thread Marie was using did not exactly match the garment. After Marie had promised for the third time to relock and bar the door behind her, Miss Temple tersely allowed that the girl might avail herself of a glass of wine with supper.

The corridor was empty, and Miss Temple met no other guest on her way to the kitchen. Ignoring the looks of the slop boys and tradesmen, she walked to the corner, peered into the street, saw no obvious spy and hurried from the hotel, keeping her head low. At the avenue Miss Temple hailed a

carriage. The driver hopped down to help her to her seat and asked her destination.

‘The Library.’

Miss Temple had never been in the grand Library before – it held no more natural attraction than a barrelworks – and in its stiff majesty she saw a monument to a high-minded struggle interminably waged by others. She approached a wide wooden counter, behind which stood waxy, bespectacled men whose dark coats were dappled with grey finger-swipes of dust.

‘Excuse me,’ Miss Temple said. ‘I require information.’

A younger archivist stepped to serve her, eyes dipping down the front of her dress. The counter drew a line just below her breasts, making it appear, to Miss Temple’s chagrin, that she had juttred herself forward.

‘What information is that, my dear?’

‘I am searching for a piece of property.’

‘Property?’ The archivist chuckled. ‘You’ll want a house agent.’

On his upper lip swelled a pale-tipped pimple. Miss Temple wondered if he would pop it before next shaving, or leave the work to his razor.

‘Do you keep property records?’

‘By law we collect all manner of records.’

‘Including property?’

‘Well, depending on what exactly you want to learn –’

‘Ownership. Of *property*.’

The archivist grazed her bosom one last time with his eyes and sniffed diffidently.

‘Third floor.’

The third-floor clerk was on a ladder when Miss Temple found him, and she pitched her question loud enough to hurry him down in haste to lower her voice. He marched her to a wide case of black leather volumes.

‘Here you are. Property registers.’ He turned at once to go.

‘What am I to do with these?’ Miss Temple gave the bookcase an indignant wave. ‘There must be hundreds.’

The soft dome of the clerk’s head was bare, black hair dense around each ear in vain compensation. His fingers shook – did she smell gin?

‘There does happen to be a great *deal* of property, miss. In the world.’

‘I do not care for the *world*.’

The clerk bit back a reply. ‘Every time property changes hands, there must be a record. They are arranged by district ...’ He looked over his shoulder, longingly, to the ladder.

‘Why don’t you have properties arranged by the owner’s name?’

‘You didn’t ask for that.’

‘I’m asking now.’

‘*Those* records are organized for taxation and inheritance.’

She raised an eyebrow. He led the way to another case of black-bound books.

‘The letter *p*,’ she said, before he could leave.

‘The letter *p* encompasses five volumes.’ He pointed to the top shelf, high above them both.

‘You’ll need a ladder,’ observed Miss Temple.

It had been the Doctor that spurred her thought. Her last vision of Svenson had been in Parchfeldt forest with Mr Phelps, corrupt attaché of the Privy Council, peeling back the Doctor’s gashed tunic and attempting to staunch the blood with his own coat. Like everyone else at the Ministry, Phelps had been under the sway of Mrs Marchmoor, her mental predations eroding his health and sanity. At the end he had been set free by Svenson’s suicidal duel with Captain Tackham. Phelps had not returned to the Ministry, yet who knew what secrets he possessed? She opened the first of the five volumes and sniffed at the dust. Phelps could also tell her about the Doctor’s final moments, when she herself had fled. She thrust the image from her mind and licked her finger. The fragile page caught, leaving a damp mark, and Miss Temple began to work.

After twenty minutes she sat back, noting with displeasure the grime on her fingertips. The sole address for any ‘Phelps’ was a tannery on the south side of the river. This could not be where a Ministry official *lived*. It had been a fool’s errand anyway – how many in the city took rooms, like she herself, at some hotel or block of flats, without leaving any record of ownership? She would delegate the task of finding Phelps to Pfaff. She stood and looked at the scatter of black books, wondering if she was expected to reshelve them, before deciding that was ridiculous.

But then Miss Temple hurried to the ladder and shoved it loudly to the volumes marked *r*. It took her two trips to get them to the table, but only five minutes to find what she wanted. Andrew Rawsbarthe had been Roger Bascombe’s direct assistant. Another drone sacrificed by Mrs Marchmoor, Rawsbarthe had perished in Harschmort House. Through Roger, Miss Temple knew that Rawsbarthe was the last of his family, living alone in an inherited house. If Phelps sought a place to hide, there would be few better than the abandoned home of an unmissed subordinate. Miss Temple scribbled the address in her notebook.

The pleasure of her discovery bled easily into confidence and Miss Temple decided to return on foot. Her path kept to avenues lined with banks, trading houses and insurance firms, yet Miss Temple was not large, and the crowded walkways became a gauntlet of bumps and jostles, with never an apology and often an oath. This was the discontent she had seen in the Circus Garden, but further inflamed. She turned at a knot of men storming out of the Grain Trust, shouting insults over their shoulders, and was nearly flattened by two constables swerving towards them, cudgels ready. Chastened, Miss Temple veered to the tea shops of St Vincent’s Lane, where one could always find a carriage. The city felt unmoored, a reactive writhing that brought to mind only unpleasant visions of beheaded poultry.

As she crossed the lobby, the desk clerk caught her eye and raised an envelope of whorled red paper.

‘Not ten minutes ago,’ he said.

‘Who is it from?’ The envelope bore no writing she could see. ‘Who brought it?’

The clerk smiled. ‘A little girl. “This is for Miss Celeste Temple,” she said, and so directly! Her hair was near your colour – brighter, though, quite nearly crimson, and such fair skin. Is she a niece?’

Miss Temple spun behind her, the sudden movement attracting the attention of other guests.

‘She is gone.’ The clerk was now hesitant. ‘Climbed into a handsome black brougham. Do you not know her?’

‘Yes – of course – I did not expect her to arrive so soon. Thank you.’

It had to have been Francesca Trapping. But how could the Contessa be so confident as to send the child in by herself – was she not afraid the girl would run? What had been done to her?

Miss Temple walked calmly to the rear stairs, beyond any eyes. She took out her revolver and began to climb.

The door to her rooms swung silently open at her push before stopping against the broken leg of the chair Marie had propped against the knob. Miss Temple glanced at the extra bolt: sheared away.

She eased into the foyer, not daring to breathe, her eyes – and the pistol barrel – darting at every piece of furniture. The maid’s room door was open. Marie was not there.

To her own bedchamber door a second red envelope had been affixed with a knife. Miss Temple tugged it free. At the sound, a cry of fear echoed from within.

‘Marie?’ Miss Temple called. ‘Are you hurt?’

‘Mistress? O my heavens! Mistress –’

‘Are you *hurt*, Marie?’

‘No, mistress – but the noise –’

‘Marie, you may come out now. They are gone. You will be safe.’

Miss Temple pushed the front door closed, no longer bothering with the chair. She turned to the sound of her own bolt sliding back and Marie’s pale face peeking out.

‘We will call for supper,’ Miss Temple said. ‘And a man to repair our lock. Corporal Brine will be back directly, and I promise, Marie, you will not be left alone again.’

Marie nodded, still not prepared to step into the parlour. Miss Temple followed her maid’s gaze to the two red envelopes in her hand.

‘What are those?’ Marie whispered.

‘Someone’s mistake.’

The lock had been replaced and Miss Temple’s inevitably frank talk with the manager, Mr Stamp, concluded. Stamp’s mortification that his hotel had been so effortlessly penetrated by criminals was exactly balanced by his resentment of Miss Temple for having attracted said criminals in the first place, and it had taken all of her tact – never amply on supply – to settle the matter, for she knew his truest wish, finance notwithstanding, was to turn her out. Mr Brine appeared in the door some minutes later, out of breath, for the tale of the attack had reached him in the lobby and he had run all the way up the stairs. After Brine had asked to see for himself that Marie was well – which Miss Temple allowed only on the hope that such attention might persuade the maid that much sooner to effective service – she received his own report, a tale that eased her mind not at all.

He had indeed found the brown-coated man, who had not only eluded Ramper at Stopping, but had looped around and followed Ramper to the Boniface. Upon Ramper’s departure, the man had trailed him to Worthing Circle, where Ramper had hired a carriage. The brown-coated man hired a carriage of his own, but Mr Brine had not been able to engage a third carriage in time and had lost his quarry. With a shake of his head – the square nature of which made the gesture more like the swivelling of a wooden block – he described the man as ‘weedy and queer’, with a large moustache. The brown coat was out of fashion and too large for its wearer.

At this point Mr Brine burst into another apology, but Miss Temple abruptly stood, forcing Brine to

stop speaking and rise with her.

‘The fault is mine alone, Mr Brine. You warned me. If you would let me know when Mr Pfaff sends a word.’

She sat on her bed with the two red squares upon her lap, turning each in her hands for any hint of what they might contain. That the envelopes came from the Contessa seemed clear: the first to trumpet her command of Francesca Trapping, the second to make plain Miss Temple’s mortal weakness. Neither fact could be gainsaid. She plucked the knife from her boot and sliced open the first envelope. The red paper was stiffer than it appeared. Inside was only a snip of newsprint, by the typeface recognizably from the *Herald*.

—grettable Canvases from Paris, whose *Rococo* Opulence languishes in a mire of degenerate Imagination. The largest, abstrusely entitled *The Chemickal Marriage*, happily eschews the odious, irreligious Satire of Mr Veilandt’s recent *Annunciation*, but the only Union on display is that of Arrogance and Debauchery. The Composition’s Bride, if one can bear to thus describe a Figure so painstakingly degraded

Miss Temple had seen the artist’s work and did not dispute the assessment, though she did not know this particular piece. That the decadent artist Oskar Veilandt and the Comte d’Orkancz were one and the same was not widely known, for Veilandt was supposed to have died in Paris some years before. If she could acquire the entire article from the *Herald*, she would certainly learn more.

Miss Temple took up the second envelope, heavier than the first, and cut along its seam. She peeked inside and felt her breath catch. With delicate care she drew the blade around the next two sides, peeling it open as fearfully as if it were a box that held a beating heart.

The envelope had been pinned to the door quite deliberately to avoid damaging the small square of glass it held – no thicker than a wasp’s wing, and the colour of indigo ink pooled across white porcelain. She glanced at the door. This had come from the Contessa. The glass might hold anything degrading, deranging, unthinkable – and to look inside would be as irrevocable as leaping from a rooftop. Her parched throat tasted of black ash ... the Comte’s memories told her that the thinness of the glass allowed only the simplest inscription, that the memory must be brief.

The skin on the back of her neck tingled. Miss Temple forced her eyes around the room, as if cataloguing its reality might give her strength. She looked into the glass.

Two minutes later – she glanced at once to the clock – Miss Temple had pulled her eyes free. Her face was flushed, yet her transit of the glass fragment had not been difficult: the captured memory was clear but the viewing of a roll of parchment ... the architectural plan of a building she did not know.

The Contessa had wasted her strategic advantage to acquaint Miss Temple, an *enemy*, with an unhelpful newspaper clipping and an equally pointless map. Obviously each *might* be useful, if she knew what they meant ... but why would the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza desire Miss Temple to become even *more* entangled in her business?

Taking into account the curiosity of maids, Miss Temple hid the clipping and glass square beneath a feathered hat she never wore. The red envelopes were left in plain sight on her desktop, each now containing arbitrary swatches of newsprint.

The night brought only a terse note from Mr Pfaff: ‘Glassworks engaged, following on.’ Because Ramper and Jaxon passed messages through Pfaff, she heard nothing from either man, and Pfaff

himself sent no further word that morning nor the next entire day. Miss Temple strode through the hotel, to her meals, to the cellar, even once on a whim to the rooftop in hopes of spying the brown-coated man in the street. She saw nothing, and clumped back to the red-flocked corridor of the topmost floor, where Mr Brine stood waiting.

At her chambers the evening editions had arrived and lay on the sideboard. Miss Temple took the pile in both hands and retreated to her writing desk, holding the papers on her lap without looking at them.

The journey to Harschmort House was a matter of hours by train, somewhat more by coach, and perhaps as much as an entire day on foot. Mr Jaxon had been gone five days, and Mr Ropp above a fortnight. That both had vanished into the mystery of Harschmort confirmed that Robert Vandaariff *had* survived. If the brown-coated man served Vandaariff, did it not mean, upon his trailing Ramper, that Ramper would disappear as well?

The Contessa had found her. She was wasting time. Her enemies were moving.

Miss Temple shoved the papers onto the floor. The sun was setting. She sorted through her bag. She could wait no more.

‘Marie, my travelling jacket.’

The maid had been safely installed in the room Miss Temple kept for business, the hotel’s footmen within earshot of the door. Miss Temple again left through the kitchens, Mr Brine at her side. With no idea whether they were being watched, she had to assume they were.

The art salon where the Comte’s paintings had been shown was locked and its windows dark.

‘I don’t suppose you can open the door?’

‘Not without breaking the glass, miss.’

Miss Temple cupped both hands around her face and pressed her forehead to the cold surface. The gallery walls were bare. She sighed. From her previous visit she knew there was no room for a very large canvas in any case. *The Chemickal Marriage* must be at Harschmort.

She whispered for Brine to look as well. When his face was nearer she spoke evenly and low. ‘Behind the gallery agent’s desk is a mirror. In that mirror – do not turn, Mr Brine – is a figure crouching in the shadow of that dray-cart. Would that be your brown-coated man?’

Brine sucked breath through his teeth in a hiss.

‘Excellent,’ said Miss Temple. ‘We will walk away without a care. I doubt the man’s alone, and until we locate his confederates, we cannot act.’

They kept to well-lit avenues. At the next intersection Mr Brine leant close to whisper: ‘If he’s got fellows, they haven’t shown. If you’ll allow me, miss, perhaps we can trap him.’

Brine took her elbow in his massive hand and guided her to a smaller lane of darkened markets, the cobbles strewn with broken boxes, paper and straw. Once around the corner, Brine skilfully folded his own bulk behind three empty barrels. She walked ahead, pulling the pistol from her bag and then making a show of waving into the glass door of a shop, hoping it would appear as if Mr Brine had gone inside and left her waiting.

Silhouetted against the brighter avenue, a figure crept into view ... head darting to either side like a snake. Miss Temple continued her performance with impatience. The shadow came closer, straight past the barrels ...

Mr Brine rose, but the brown-coated man was warned by his shadow and avoided the swinging cudgel, fleeing back into the crowds. Miss Temple dashed towards them both, pistol raised, but it was no use. Their quarry had been flushed, and they would not trap him so easily again.

Mr Brine blamed himself bitterly, well past Miss Temple's patience, and she was driven to change the subject, making conversation when she would have preferred to think. They had engaged a carriage and every time the man peered out of the window he was reminded of his failure and began to mutter

'I say *again*, Mr Brine, it does not signify – indeed, I am happy to be rid of the man, for now we may engage in our true business of the evening.'

Brine kept looking out, his large head mocked by the lace curtains bunched against each ear. Miss Temple cleared her throat. 'Our true business, Mr Brine. Do attend.'

'Beg pardon, miss.'

'There will be ample opportunity to demonstrate your skills. Albermap Crescent, No. 32. As its occupant has died, I shall rely on you to make our entry – preferably nothing to attract the neighbours.'

They left the coach and waited for the sound of hoof beats to fade. No. 32 lay in the centre of the Crescent's arch, and entirely dark.

'I expect there is a servant's entrance,' Miss Temple whispered. 'Less on *view*.'

Mr Brine clutched her arm. The topmost windows had been covered with bare planks, but from one of No. 32's three brick chimneys rose a wisp of curling smoke.

They hurried to the side door. The stones around it were smeared with a grainy paste, like mortar, and Miss Temple looked to see if the house next door was being repaired.

Mr Brine squared one shoulder near the lock and drove the whole of his weight against the door with a resounding crack. Miss Temple shut her eyes and sighed. She followed Mr Brine in and shoved the broken door shut. In the silence of Andrew Rawsbarthe's pantry they waited ... but no answer came.

She slipped the wax stub from her bag, struck a match and led them to the kitchen proper, the grit on her shoes rasping against the floorboards.

'Do you smell ... cabbage?' she whispered.

Brine shook his head. Perhaps the ghostly trace lingered from Rawsbarthe's final meal. She motioned Brine on with a nod. They must find the third chimney.

The hearth in the main room was cold, and Mr Brine's index finger drew a line of dust across the sideboard. The front door was locked and barred. The staircase was steep, the wood reflecting the candle like a dark mirror. The old steps creaked, thin complaints at their intrusion. When Miss Temple reached the empty landing, she pointed to the ceiling with her revolver. Brine nodded, his cudgel ready. But the staircase did not continue up. If Mr Phelps was using the house to hide, it must be in an attic ...

Far below them, quite unmistakably, came the creak of the pantry door. Miss Temple blew out the candle. At once her heart sank. Behind them shone a double line of smeared footprints, glowing pale with the moon. She looked down at her boots and saw them rimed with the mortar from the doorstep – some phosphorescent paste? It had been a snare. Their location would be plotted for the man

downstairs as neatly as a map. She desperately scuffed her boots across Rawsbarthe's carpet, then pulled Brine's head to her ear.

'Guard the stairs,' she hissed. 'Surprise him. I will find the way up!'

In Rawsbarthe's wardrobe she pawed through hanging clothes, hoping a ladder might be tucked behind them. Her foot caught on an open trunk and she stumbled full upon it, wrinkling her nose at the iron tang of blood. The trunk held jumbled clothing – impossible to see more without light – but her fingers confirmed, by the amount of stiffened fabric, how very much blood there had been.

She groped across the bedchamber. Her luminous footprints muddled the floor. Between the basin and the bookcase lay three feet of open wall. Miss Temple felt along it until one blind finger found a hole ringed with painted iron. She hooked the ring and pulled. The wall panel popped free on newly oiled hinges.

She dashed back, skidding to a stop in the doorway. Mr Brine lay flat on his face, a pistol barrel hard against the base of his skull. Glaring at Miss Temple was a man whose brown coat was buttoned tight up to his neck.

She heard a breath to her left, in the shadows. She dodged back, just ahead of hands attempting to seize her, and bolted through the opened panel, fumbling for a latch to hold it shut. The first kicks were already cracking the wood as she flung herself up a ladder, climbing with both hands and feet. At the top she bulled through a hanging flap of canvas and sprawled into the sudden brightness of an attic room. By its iron stove stood a tall, thin figure in his stockinged feet, wearing steel-blue uniform trousers and a seaman's woollen jumper. He had not shaved. His right hand gripped a long-barrelled Navy pistol and his left – fingers shaking and skeletal – held an unlit cigarette. Miss Temple screamed.

Doctor Svenson sank to his knees, setting the pistol to the floor and extending both pale hands, speaking gently.

'Celeste ... my goodness – O my dear girl –'

At the final splintering of the panel below Svenson sharply pitched his voice to her pursuers: 'Stay where you are! It is Celeste Temple! There is no concern, I say – wait there!' He nodded to her, his blue eyes bright. 'Celeste, how have you come here?'

Miss Temple's voice was harsh, her throat choked equally with surprise and rage.

'How have *I* come here? *I*? How are you *alive*? How – without a single *word* – without –' She jabbed her pistol at his own. 'We might have shot one another! I *ought* to have shot you!' Her eyes brimmed hot. 'And just imagine how I would have wept to find you dead *again*!'

Mr Phelps had given her cocoa in a metal mug, but Miss Temple did not intend to drink it. She sat on a wooden chair next to the stove, Svenson – having put on his boots – near her with his own mug. The abashed Mr Brine perched on what was obviously the Doctor's bed, the frame sagging with his weight. On either side of Brine stood Mr Phelps – balding, his watery eyes haunted, yet no longer so openly ill-looking – and a sallow-eyed man introduced as Mr Cunsher, whose voluminous brown coat had been hung on a hook. Without it Cunsher looked like a trim woodland creature, with a woollen waistcoat and patched trousers, all – in contrast to the Doctor – scrupulously clean.

'Celeste,' offered Svenson, after yet another full minute of silence, 'you must believe I wanted

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