

The Uncommon Bodgewick

By J. Davidson Hero

“...just a common bludger doing an honest day’s work Gov’nor.”

Edwin Bodgewick’s sooty spider-like fingers curled around the money and snatched it from the Doctor’s hand. Doctor Trago stared down at Edwin and the slouched bundle at his feet with visible disgust. Edwin stared back, but couldn’t bring himself to meet the Doctor’s glare. Instead his eyes followed the buttons of the Doctor’s frock coat down and finally settled on the gold chain of his pocket watch... what a beautiful pocket watch, Edwin wondered at its weight.

The Doctor was a nervous man, of melancholic humor, perhaps genius. Prone to vacillation, the Doctor had only recently determined to vet his theories, and to accomplish that goal he needed a man of Edwin’s temperament. It was obvious to Edwin that the Doctor felt it beneath a man of science to associate with a common flue-faker. But the common man capable of the occasional uncommon task was exactly what the good Doctor needed. Necessity does make strange bedfellows after all. Edwin cared little for the Doctor’s ultimate ends, but his means were very... provocative. “Bring her to my operating theatre then.” The Doctor’s voice curdled with derision, and his nostrils flared as he inhaled. This always made Edwin self-conscious of the ever-present smell of soot that lingered about him.

The Doctor strutted to the table as he removed his coat, donned an apron, and pulled on his surgical gloves with taut precision. His hair, grey at the temples, was slicked back except for a few stray strands that dangled madly in front of his face and gave him a disheveled look in spite of his impeccable and proper demeanor. It gave the impression that something was not quite balanced in the Victorian gentleman’s mind. Edwin followed, dropping their commerce on the table with a thud that rattled the Doctor’s delicate instruments. The Doctor immediately opened the pouch revealing a beautiful young body, cold with death.

“She looks young for a prostitute. She’s not dead more than four hours?” the Doctor finally asked shakily, after a moment’s lapse of composure. Edwin nodded. The Doctor ran his hands along her pale cheek. Then turning her head to the side he examined the sooty smudges and bruising all around her neck. Edwin nervously suppressed a giggle, a kinetic spasm, that started in the pit of his paunch and threatened to race up into the back of his throat. He looked down at his soot covered hands and picked at an open gory slice in his thumb, bright crimson through the black. A smile pulled back the corners of his mouth. The Doctor was too preoccupied to notice. Edwin’s tongue worked its way around his snaggletooth until, biting down, he managed to regain control of himself. The gaslight incandesced gloomily.

The Doctor opened the makeshift body bag further and began to nervously unbutton her blouse; his eyes pulsed with scientific fervor. Three times he looked at her maniacally from crown to heel, his hands groping delicately here and there. Edwin watched on lasciviously.

“Where did you find this one?” the Doctor asked as if talking to a stool. His hand fumbled for a scalpel on the metal tray at his side. The grate of metal made Edwin’s eye twitch... or was it the Doctor’s question?

“Dorset Street near Doss House... it’s crawlin’ with dollymops Gov’nor,” he mumbled.

“Is that not where you did the last?” The Doctor’s head was turned to the side as if he was listening. He was bent forward over the girl cutting and connecting wires and tubing from the arcane machinery at his side. A drizzle of blood ran off the edge of the table and began to puddle on the floor.

“Aye,” Edwin began to feel sheepish. The Doctor couldn’t know. Edwin watched as the drizzle of blood increased to a steady stream, the puddle... a pool. The Doctor had only unbuttoned the top few buttons of her blouse, so that he could better expose her neck. Edwin could barely control his lust as he watched the Doctor’s bloodied hands feeling for the glands inside her neck, then vigorously driving thick metal needles in.

“Did we not discuss finding specimens in different locations?”

“Aye,” Edwin felt a moment of relief. That was all this questioning was about. Never on the same street the Doctor had said; best to be discreet. For a moment Edwin thought the Doctor had suspected; the Doctor would not have approved. His mind began to replay the events of the afternoon. He could see the chimney brush in his hands, in front of the fireplace the drop cloth covered with soot. The girl... this girl... was in the next room, sitting at the piano. She had eyed him when he walked in, following her father. He had recognized the wanton look for what it was... or had he? It was all he could think of while he worked.

The Doctor stood up, wiping blood from his hands with a cloth. “I think this time it shall work.” His eyes popped with anticipation. Reaching to the machine he turned a large dial and a clicking static whir began. A pump began to work slowly at first, then faster. Edwin watched. Tubes and wires protruded from her neck. The tubes jumped and jiggled as fluids flowed from her to the machine and back. The devilish vacuum machine made an odd sucking sound on and off. Edwin watched glass jars begin to fill with bile and blood. Then somehow the sound of a death rattle began to swell in the girl’s throat. Edwin recognized it; he had heard it earlier the same day. He couldn’t help but come closer, until he was standing right above her.

And then her eyes opened, and she stared deep into Edwin’s soul, her eyes like shallow pools on a moonlit night. A tear ran down the side of her cheek... and Edwin fought to suppress the urge to strangle his love again.

The End