



The Dark Volume

GORDON DAHLQUIST

ALSO BY GORDON DAHLQUIST

The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters



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For Morgan and Ali, and for Anne.

PREFACE



The events contained within *The Glass Books of the Dream Eaters* are many and ornate. However much this present volume stands apart as a discrete narrative, where former assurances have fallen to dust, the introduction of these few personages may prove useful.

Celeste Temple, plantation heiress from the West Indies of twenty-five years, her engagement to Roger Bascombe (a rising figure in the Foreign Ministry) summarily terminated by Mr. Bascombe without explanation, found herself in the position, some three days later, of shooting him dead in a sinking dirigible.

Cardinal Chang, a criminal with disfiguring scars across both of his eyes (thus his habit to wear dark glasses at all times), who first made the acquaintance of Miss Temple on a train at 4 A.M.

Doctor Abelard Svenson, a naval surgeon in service to a pleasure-seeking young Prince. Despite the Doctor's efforts both the Prince and his fiancée, Lydia Vandaariff, were viciously slain en route to Macklenburg by the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza.

Robert Vandaariff, recently ennobled financier, perhaps the richest man of the age. In funding the cabal's efforts, Lord Vandaariff believed himself its master, right to the very moment his mind was wiped as clean as a plate licked by a dog.

Henry Xonck, munitions magnate, business rival to Vandaariff, also believed himself to be master of the cabal. The contents of his mind were harvested into a blue glass book and his body left an idiot husk.

Francis Xonck, youngest sibling to the arms magnate, a well-traveled dandy whose disreputable ways concealed a formidable appetite for violence; shot in the chest by Doctor Svenson.

Deputy Foreign Minister Harald Crabbé, a diplomatic *éminence grise* whose manipulations set a legal veneer to the cabal's actions, and put a regiment of dragoons to its command; killed on the dirigible by Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza and dropped into the sea.

Comte d'Orkancz, mysterious aesthete, alchemical genius, the discoverer of indigo clay and the fabricator of the blue glass books, whose unnatural science informed every inch of the cabal's ambition; run through with a saber on the dirigible by Cardinal Chang.

Mrs. Marchmoor, three weeks previously a courtesan known as Margaret Hooke, now the only survivor of the Comte's most audacious experiment, to transform a woman into living glass.

Colonel Arthur Trapping, a middling drone of the cabal, married to Charlotte Trapping—née Charlotte Xonck—an unhappy woman whose two brothers allowed her no role in the family empire.

Elöise Dujong, tutor to the children of Arthur and Charlotte Trapping, fell afoul of the cabal in her efforts to find the murdered Colonel; in the process a portion of her memory was drained from her mind into a glass book.

Caroline Stearne, a protégée of the Contessa, who killed Colonel Trapping as part of her own secret alliance with Roger Bascombe. Caroline was also slain quite savagely by the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza.

Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza, a noblewoman of Italian extraction, who— it must be admitted—possesses a temper.

Prologue

She did not know what time it was, because of the new rule. It had been the girl's habit to creep up the stairs and then, depending on the day and who might be home or what servants watching, slip into her mother's rooms—at the end of the hallway—or into her father's, to the right of the landing. Her mother's bedchamber was filled with the deliberate clicking of a clock made of Chinese porcelain, all creamy white with a flickering of red flowers. If she was careful and again unseen, she could lift it off its stand and put her ear against the brass-ringed face. Her father's rooms were altogether different, seldom occupied, and smelling of tobacco and dust. Here stood the tall, dark pendulum clock, with a glass front through which she could dimly see the swinging metal disk, lurking in its permanent shadow. It was this clock that most satisfyingly rang the hour, and the smaller Chinese clock that more reliably gave out the minutes in between. But it had been three days since the girl had seen her mother, and another three before that since her father had kissed her cheek at breakfast, the stiff collar of his uniform tunic scraping against her chin, then marched out to the street, already lighting his first cheroot of the morning. Mr. Flempton had shut both rooms—telling all the other servants that the three children were forbidden the entire floor. The girl knew there were other timepieces in the house—indeed that her merest question to Cook; or their maid, Amelia; or even the forbidding Mr. Flempton would give her the time in a trice—yet she refused to ask. If she could not go upstairs to find it for herself, she did not care to know.

Her brothers asked all sorts of things, persistent questions— especially Charles—but received no answers at all. This upset her, because she knew there *were* answers—her parents were *someplace*—and she did not understand why people she had trusted would avoid the truth so cruelly. She had retreated instead, for hours every day, to their schoolroom, also empty, since their lessons had been suspended as well (she could not remember when she had last seen their tutor, Elöise—it was almost as if the woman had vanished along with her parents). As Charles hated lessons and Ronald was too young, the room became a place no other occupant of the house had any cause to visit. And so the girl passed her time with books, with picture paints, and with looking out the window to the square, where the coaches came and went as if the world was not profoundly amiss.

What vexed her the most, as she strove ever more diligently to read or draw or arrange the paint pots into a wall and jump the collection of her brother's carved wooden horses over it, like the soldiers in her father's regiment—the black horse always being her father's and always making the highest jump of all—was that those moments, her father at breakfast, her mother kissing her good-bye after supper, would be the last for so long a time. The girl had not fixed her parents into her mind—their smiles, their moods, their final very important words. If she could only get into her mother's clothes closet, she could shut her eyes and lean her face into the line of hanging dresses, breathing in the perfume. Instead she had the smells of servants and well-scrubbed common rooms, and worried whispers from the kitchens that stopped whenever she was seen.

It was after Cecile had collected her for afternoon tea, after so many hours of silence the maid's voice echoing up the stairway harsh as a crow's, that the girl found herself, hands washed and dress changed, waiting for Ronald—her younger brother was always troubled by shoes—and staring down the main hall, through the foyer to the closed front door.

The door chime was pulled, then after the briefest interval pulled again. Mr. Flempton rushed past her, tugging at the cuffs of his jacket. Cecile touched the girl's shoulder to guide her away, but she ignored it. Mr. Flempton opened the door wide to reveal three men in long black coats and high black hats. The men to either side held leather portfolios. The coat of the man in the center was draped limply over one shoulder, the arm beneath it wrapped with white plaster.

"May I help you?" asked Mr. Flempton.

"Ministry orders," said the man with the plaster cast. "We'll require your complete cooperation."

Wolves

One of his hands tugged cruelly at her hair as the other squeezed her throat. Miss Temple could not breathe—he was too strong, too angry—and even as part of her mind screamed that she must not, that there must be another way, she ground the revolver into the man’s back and pulled the trigger. It kicked against her wrist with a deafening *crack* and Roger Bascomb was thrown into the cabin wall. The red imprint of his fingers marked her windpipe, but his shocked blue eyes—the fiancé who had cruelly thrown her over—showed only dismay at her betrayal. His gaze punctured her heart like a blade. What had she done? She stumbled, away for the first time that her feet were freezing, that she stood in six inches of icy seawater. The airship had spiraled into the ocean. They were sinking. She would drown.

Dimly, Miss Temple heard her name—*Celeste! Celeste!*—the calls of Doctor Svenson and Chang. Her memory seemed two steps behind ... they had climbed to the roof, with Elöis. She must follow, it was her only chance to survive... but she looked again at Roger, crumpled and wan, and could not move—would they die together after all? But then something nudged Miss Temple’s leg. She cried out, thinking of rats on a ship, and saw it was another body floating with the rising water... the Comte d’Orkancz, alchemist savant who discovered the blue glass, run through with a saber by Cardinal Chang. Miss Temple forced herself to slip past the dead man’s bulk, barely able to feel her legs. Other bodies loomed as she crossed the cabin, each more gruesome than the last... Francis Xonck, with his flaming red hair and elegant silk waistcoat, shot by Doctor Svenson... Lydia Vandaariff, decapitated with a blue glass book... the Prince of Macklenburg, legs broken clean away. Miss Temple crawled up the stairs, the foaming water keeping pace as her fingers clawed the cold metal. The cries above were fainter. With a piercing shock she remembered the one body she had not seen, the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza... had she jumped to her death? Had she somehow hidden and killed the others? Was she even then waiting for Miss Temple?

The cold salt water reached her throat, splashing at her mouth. Her arms became too heavy to lift. Behind lay Roger... her terrible guilt. Above floated the open hatch. She could not move for the ice forming around her legs, locking her joints stiff. She would perish after all just as she deserved...

MISS TEMPLE woke—weak, starving, and riddled with aches—to a sour-smelling room with dark raw-cut beams above her head. A single smeared window framed the feeble light of a heavy cloud-covered sky, the very image of boiled wool. She sat up in the frankly noisome bed, doing her best to shake away the vision of the sinking airship.

“At least it does not reek of fish,” she muttered, and looked about her for any sign of where she was or, for that matter, her clothing. But the room was bare.

She crept gingerly off the bed, feeling the unsoundness of her limbs and the lightness of her

head, and peered under the frame, to find a chipped porcelain chamber pot. As Miss Temple squatted down, she rubbed her eyes, and looked at her hands, which were flecked with half-healed abrasions and cuts. She stood, slid the pot back beneath the bed with her foot, and noticed a small rectangle of glass, no bigger than a page of poetry, hanging from a nail—mirror. She was forced to stand on her toes, but despite the effort, stayed staring into the glass for some minutes, curious and dismayed at the young woman she there met.

Her chestnut curls hung flat and lank, which had the effect of making her face—from certain vantage somewhat round—even rounder. This was only set off by her sunken cheeks, the dark circles of distress beneath each eye, and once more a scattering of livid marks—the searing trace of a bullet above one ear, welts across both cheekbones, and greenish bruises on her throat that perfectly matched a vicious, squeezing palm. All this Miss Temple took in with a sigh, grateful she had not, for instance, lost a tooth—that all could be mended by time, food, and the touch of a skillful maid. What struck her more fully, however—what she found *mysterious*—was what had happened to her eyes. They were still grey, still insistent, impatient, and sharp, but possessed a new quality she could not at first name. A moment later the truth appeared. She was a killer.

Miss Temple sat back on the bed and stared up at the darkening clouds. She had shot Roger Bascombe and left his body to the sea. Certainly the man had betrayed her, betrayed everything, and yet... what had she become in defeating him, in thwarting the powerful figures Roger had chosen to serve, chosen over her love, their marriage ... what had she herself cast away?

Such thoughts were impossible on an empty stomach. She would eat, bathe, dress, locate her friends—still an oddly foreign notion to Miss Temple—and take assurance from the survival, that it had all been necessary.

But when she called to the door, her voice an alarmingly ragged croak, there came no answer. Instead of calling again, Miss Temple lay down and pulled the blankets up over her face.

As she lay sniffing the dusty wool, she recalled what she could of her coming ashore. They had been on the roof of the dirigible's cabin, waiting to drown as it dropped into the sea, but instead of sinking they came aground on fortunate rocks, saved. She reached the sand on her hands and knees, half-drowned and cold to the bone, frozen anew by the pitiless wind whose lashing impact curled her to a shivering ball. Chang carried her beyond the narrow ribbon of beach and over a hedge of sharp black rocks, but already she felt her body failing, unable to form words for her chattering teeth. There were black trees, the Doctor banging on a wooden door, racks of drying and salted fish, and then she was bundled in front of a burning hearth. Outside it was morning, but inside the hut the air was close and foul, as if it had been nailed tight against the cold all winter. The dirigible's original destination had been the Duchy of Macklenburg, on the Baltic Sea—how far north had the airship flown? Someone held hot tea for her to drink, then they—Elöise?—took off her clothes and wrapped her in blankets. Miss Temple felt her chills swiftly escalate into fever... and then dreams had swallowed her whole.

Miss Temple sighed heavily, the sound quite muffled beneath the bedding, and slept.

WHEN SHE next awoke the window had gone dark and there were sounds outside the door. Miss Temple crawled from the bed and stood more steadily than before. She plucked at her simple shift, wondering where it had come from, and pushed the hair from her face. How much must have happened while she slept? Yet instead of forming the many questions she ought to have had—about her companions, their location, the very date—Miss Temple found her attention drawn to a lurid flickering—*already*—beneath the surface of her mind, like tiny bubbles in a pot growing to boil. This was the Contessa's blue glass book of memories that Miss Temple had absorbed—and she shuddered to realize that each tiny bubble of memory found an echo in her flesh, each one threatening to expand to prominence in her mind, until the memory blotted out the present altogether. She had peered into the shimmering depths of the blue glass and been changed. How many of its memories had she consumed—experienced in her own body—and thus made her own? How many acts that she had never performed did she now *remember*? The Contessa's book was a catalog of insidious and unmentionable delights—the sensual experience of a thousand souls crammed together. The more Miss Temple thought about it the more insistent the memories became. Her face flushed. Her breath quickened. Her nostrils flared with anger. She would not have it.

She jerked open the door. Before her two women huddled over a large woven basket near an iron stove. At the sound of the door both looked up, faces blank with surprise. They wore plain dresses, soiled aprons, and heavy shoes, with their hair stuffed tightly under woollen caps—a mother and a daughter, sharing a thick nose and a certain flatness about the eyes. Miss Temple smiled primly and noticed that the basket was bundled full of linens quite broadly stained with blood. The younger of the two abruptly upended the pile to obscure the stains and shoved the entire basket from view behind the stove. The older turned to Miss Temple with a dotting smile—which Miss Temple would have been less disposed to despise had it not appeared as so open a distraction from the basket—and rubbed her chapped hands together.

“Good day,” said Miss Temple.

“You are awake!” The woman's voice bore an accent Miss Temple had heard before, from the mouths of sailors.

“Exactly so,” replied Miss Temple. “And though I do not intend any inconvenience, it is true that I require rather many things in a short time. I should like breakfast—I have no sense of the time, so perhaps it is more supper I should ask for—and if possible a bath, and then some clothing, and more than anything, information: where precisely might I be, and where are my companions? And, of course, who are you?” she added, smiling again. “I am sure you have been instrumental to my recovery. I trust I was not a burden. One never enjoys being helped—often one calls out, sometimes brusquely. I have no memory of calling out at all—I have no memory of coming here—so I trust you will accept my open regrets for any... well, for anything *untoward*. I do indeed feel much better. Some tea would be lovely. And toast—toast of any kind. And, yes, something to wear. And news. Indeed, most of all *news*.”

SHE SMILED at them, expectant and, she hoped, the picture of kind gratitude. The women stared at her for perhaps four seconds, when the older suddenly clapped her hands, startling

squeak from the girl as if she had been pinched. At once the poor thing darted from the room pausing only to snatch up the basket as she went.

“Bette will come back with food,” the woman announced, lips pursed, her hands again rubbing together. “Perhaps you will sit by the stove.”

She indicated a rough wooden stool, but before Miss Temple could respond the woman took her arm and guided her to it. Wood chips and cinders beneath her feet, Miss Temple sat—for it was cold outside of her blanket, and much warmer by the stove.

“WHAT IS your name?” asked Miss Temple. “And where are we? I expect you know my name—undoubtedly my companions have spoken of how we came to be here. I should actually be quite curious what they said—”

“I am Lina,” the woman said. “I will make tea.”

The woman brusquely turned away, stepping closer to the stove and placing an iron kettle onto its flat, oily top. Keeping her back to Miss Temple, Lina crossed to a low, humble cupboard for a teapot and metal mug, and a small stoppered jar that held a dusty inch of black tea—each action making clear there was scarce hope of a lemon.

“And where are we exactly?” asked Miss Temple, even in her weakened state not entirely pleased with having to repeat herself.

Lina did not respond, pretending—poorly—not to have heard. Rolling her eyes, Miss Temple stood and without another word walked past the woman to the door through which Bette had disappeared. There was a sharp exhalation from Lina as Miss Temple pulled it open, but a moment later she was through, shutting it behind her and slipping a conveniently placed wooden latch. Lina yanked on the door from the other side. Miss Temple ignored her

BETTE—WHO Miss Temple now saw, as the girl looked up at her with shock—was, if not exactly fat, what one might in charity term *healthy*, with a wide, pale pink neck and heavy arms that shook the entirety of her torso when they worked. At the moment Miss Temple entered Bette had been fully occupied—not with any meal at all, but in scrubbing the blood-soaked bedding in a steaming bucket of water, crimson-tinged soap suds lathering nearly to each elbow.

“Hello again,” said Miss Temple. “Lina is making my tea. I have been alone so long that I am quite keen for company. And whatever are you doing?”

Bette shifted on her feet, torn between the urge to hide the blood and to curtsy to a social superior, and succeeded only in losing her balance and sitting down on the floor. The impact caused one black-booted foot to kick the tub, launching a jet of bloody foam into the air.

The latched door rattled again. Miss Temple studied the room, of a piece with where she had slept—dark wooden beams with a wall of inset shelves, all covered with boxes and pots and jars, one half taken up with soaps and oils and the other equally occupied with fishing paraphernalia. There were two more wooden tubs the size of the one Bette presently used, and the width of the room was spread with hanging cords upon which to dry things. Miss

Temple saw these were strung with more bedding, and nothing she might wear.

“That seems a lot of blood,” said Miss Temple. “I am hopeful that it represents a happy outcome—the birth of a child?”

Bette shook her head. Miss Temple nodded seriously.

“I see. Someone has been injured?”

Bette nodded.

“*Killed?*”

Bette nodded again.

“And poor you with the horrid task of washing it out.” Miss Temple continued to ignore the rattling door behind her. She stepped to one of the other tubs, perching herself on its edge. “Do you know what happened?”

Bette glanced past Miss Temple to the door. Miss Temple leaned closer to the girl.

“Between *ourselves*.”

Bette’s hesitant answer was so hushed to be nearly inaudible.

“It was the *storm*...”

She wriggled back onto her toes and sank her hands once more into the tub, as if resuming her work would balance the impulse to gossip.

“What storm?”

“After you came ashore.”

“I remember no *storm*,” said Miss Temple. “But perhaps I was in no state to mark it—gone on.”

“It rained for two days,” whispered the girl. “And when it was over the beaches were different, and trees had come down, and the river had flooded the forest. That was why they said—because of the forest—”

“The *blood*, Bette.” Miss Temple attempted to be patient. “*Blood*, not forests.”

“But they said that was why. No one had called on Jorgens since the storm, because he lived near the river, and the path was washed away. When someone thought to call they found... they found them *dead*. Jorgens *and* his wife. The door opened, dogs gone, their... their *throats*... and *then*—”

Lina banged on the door, frightening the girl to silence. Miss Temple spun around and barked with annoyance, “I will have my tea when I am *ready* for it!”

“Celeste!” cried Elöise Dujong. “You must come out at once— there is no time!”

MISS TEMPLE dashed to the door and shoved the latch aside, just as Elöise yanked it open and took her hand. She felt a rush of pleasure at the sight of her friend and wanted nothing more than to wrap her arms around her and crush Elöise to her body, realizing in the moment how alone she had felt, and how delicate had become her fears. Instead, Elöise called to Lina that Miss Temple would need a bath at once, and then some food to take with them, for they must travel. These orders shouted—and they *were* shouted, Miss Temple heard with surprise, and

they were orders (she had never seen Elöise so in command—but was she not a tutor or governess, and were they not prime whip hands all?)—Elöise yanked Miss Temple into her bedroom and swung the door shut with her other arm, which Miss Temple noticed for the first time was draped with clothing. She led Miss Temple to the bed and they sat together with Miss Temple's bare feet dangling above the floor, Elöise flushed and out of breath, her boots quite caked with mud.

"As I say, my dear, there is no time—it is nearly dawn. I did not know you were awake. I am so sorry not to have been here, I can only wonder what you thought. The fever was prodigious. Abelard—the Doctor—" here Elöise blushed and dropped her eyes "—left on the floor when he was certain the danger had passed. I have remained until you revived."

"The Doctor is *gone*?" asked Miss Temple.

"And Cardinal Chang—there is too much to explain—you must see if any of this fits which they heat water. We really haven't time, but you must be craving a bath after so long—and there is no telling when we may find another."

She thrust the mass of clothing onto Miss Temple's lap and began to sort it into piles—undergarments, shifts, petticoats, a corset or two, stockings, and several actual dresses. Miss Temple watched Elöise's fingers darting about and she struggled to make sense of her new world. Cardinal Chang was gone? And the Doctor?

"But where—"

"Back to the city. My dear, so much has happened. It has been over a week—there was, my goodness, *such* a storm."

"I have been told."

"We are far north, in a fishing village on what is called the Iron Coast—no harbors to speak of, no trains, the only roads washed out by this tempest."

Miss Temple shivered to recall the terrible last minutes on the damaged airship, as she settled onto the freezing waves and began to fill—the dark rush of seawater lifting the bodies of the Prince, of Lydia, of Xonck, and of the Comte, transforming each from a person to a mere object. She shook the thought away.

"But what is so pressing? Our enemies were destroyed!"

"Try these," said Elöise, pointing to a sorted stack of worn white underthings.

"I'm sure they will fit well," replied Miss Temple, already regretting the absence of her silks and suspiciously curious what had become of them, "but I do not understand the *urgency*."

"At least try the dresses," insisted Elöise.

"Where did you get them?" asked Miss Temple, holding up a cotton dress of a faded royal blue—simple but pretty enough in its way, and an admittedly fetching color with her hair.

"A local woman, Mrs. Jorgens—the match in size was fortuitous."

"And she parted with them willingly?"

"Please put it *on*, Celeste. I must see about the water. We must hurry."

THROUGH THE door she could hear Elöise speaking to Lina, and then a general buzz of preparation that she knew had nothing to do with baths and everything to do with imminent departure. She stood naked with a dead woman's dress pulled up to her waist, looking at her face and body in the tiny square of mirror. Her skin was pale as milk, a fact that seemed less a part of her than the bruises and shadows traced across it, evidence of another life, just as the ruddy thumb-smears of her lips and at the tip of each breast were signs of an interior hunger that struck her now, slipping her arms into each sleeve and shrugging the dress into place across her chest, as fully at odds with the colder creature she had per force become. She pulled it from her shoulders and then brought it up to her nose. There was no scent of its previous owner, only salt air, dust, and camphor. It must have been her finest dress, worn only but three times a year and scrupulously cleaned.

Miss Temple glanced behind her and saw, laid to the side of the pile of clothing, a tiny white shift and a cotton dress to match it, to fit a girl of five years at the very most. Elöise must have gathered them up along with the rest of Mrs. Jorgens' things. Bette had never mentioned a child... had one been killed as well?

Elöise knocked on the door and opened it enough to say the bath was ready. From beyond the far room, Miss Temple heard the stamping of horses.

AS SHE crouched in the wooden tub, the water none too warm but nevertheless welcome, Miss Temple saw Elöise pass Lina several silver coins dug from one of Miss Temple's sea-battered green boots. How much money had been left in them—and how much had now been spent without her knowledge? Bette poured another bowlful of water over Miss Temple's head, interrupting her calculations, and worked the soap through her hair with thick fingers as Lina packed food into a wrapped bundle. Elöise glanced to Miss Temple and saw that she was being watched.

"We will speak as we travel, Celeste," she said. "But we must travel at once."

"Will not the Doctor or Chang expect to collect us? Will they not be confused when we are gone?"

"They will not."

"Why? What are they doing? Where will we go?"

"Excellent questions—you are yourself once more."

"What has happened to our enemies?"

If Elöise replied Miss Temple did not hear it. Bette emptied another bowl over her head and another after that, pouring slowly to wash out the suds. Miss Temple carefully stepped free of the tub as Bette dabbed at her dripping hair.

"I suppose it is impossible that my hair be curled," she said to Elöise.

"The curls are quite natural to you, are they not?" Elöise carefully replied.

"Of course they are," snapped Miss Temple. "It does not mean they are not better when *managed*."

She raised her arms, the better for Bette to dry her, and nodded at Elöise's hands rather

pointedly.

“Where is my other boot?”

GREEN-SHOD once more, Miss Temple stepped from the wooden house into a pallid light. The trees above were leafless and the path to their wagon—a simple affair drawn by one weathered nag—was still moist from the rains. She smelled the sea and even heard the distant waves somewhere behind the house, tracing the air like a restless rope of wind. Linn and Bette stood in the door, watching them go with, Miss Temple recognized with annoyance, expressions of relief. She turned to Elöise to remark on the fact but saw for the first time the line of men that waited on the far side of the wagon—raw, hard-faced fellows with knives in their belts and staves in their hands.

“Are they coming with us?” she whispered to Elöise.

“Ah, no,” Elöise replied with a tight smile. “They have come to make sure we go.”

Miss Temple looked with more attention—perceiving women and children now peering out behind the line of men—and felt their gazes could not have been more cold had she and Elöise been diseased interlopers with the plague. She opened her mouth to speak, but stopped at the sight of a small girl with a haunted pale face, hands gripped by two grey matrons—no mother or father near her. Her view of the girl was blocked by one of the men with staves who met Miss Temple’s curiosity with a frown. The man sported a new pair of knee-high black leather riding boots, incongruous with his rough wool garments and fisherman’s beard.

Before she could point this out to Elöise, their driver—an aged man whose wrinkled face seemed crushed between an untamed beard and a close-pulled woolen cap—reached down with hard knobbed hands to lift Miss Temple aboard. A moment later Elöise stood beside her and a moment after that they groped for awkward seats on a pallet of straw as the driver snapped the reins without a word. The bitter nameless village and its silent people receded from view.

Miss Temple frowned and hissed sharply to her companion, “I do not know what they think we have done—were they not paid?”

Elöise glanced at the driver’s back. Miss Temple huffed, quite out of patience. “What has happened, Elöise? I quite insist you say!”

“I plan to, but you must know, these people—”

“Yes, yes, the rising river in the forest, I have been told—”

“Indeed—”

“People were *killed*.”

Elöise nodded, and spoke carefully. “The implication is a wolf. Or wolves, actually.”

“Which is no reason to glower at *me*.” Miss Temple looked up at their driver. “How many wolves?” she asked waspishly.

“It depends on how one reads the attacks.”

“Well, how many attacks were there? Bette mentioned the Jorgenses. I saw her washing the bloody linen.”

“Mr. and Mrs. Jorgens died two nights ago—or that is when they were *found*. Without the Doctor no one could specify when in fact they died. But before that a fisherman was found with his boat. And before *that* two grooms at the nearest stable.”

Miss Temple snorted. “What sort of wolf goes in a *boat*?”

Elöise did not reply, as if, the question having no answer, nothing further might be said. Miss Temple felt no such hesitation.

“Where is the Doctor? Where is Chang?”

“I have told you—”

“You have told me nothing at all!”

“They have each gone ahead of us.”

“*Why*?”

“The roads, for one—they have been ruined by the weather; and as you were so very ignorant we did not know if you could travel—the last thing one wanted was to be two days out and then stranded without shelter, if *another* storm—”

“That might perhaps convince me for the Doctor, but never Chang.”

“No, indeed, Chang departed earlier.”

“*Why*?”

“Did you see that Lina put together a parcel of food? How kind of her.”

Elöise smiled at Miss Temple, mildly but determined. Miss Temple pursed her lips and grudgingly working for a topic that might be safely overheard.

“This *storm*,” she offered with patently false interest. “One gathers it was *prodigious*.”

“You did well to sleep through the thing,” replied Elöise at once. “In truth we felt—for it was the very night after we’d come ashore—that all the anger of our enemies was being vented through the heavens, as if the waves were the late Comte’s attempts to dash us to pieces, and the lightning bolts sent down from the dead Contessa’s furious eyes.”

Miss Temple said nothing, aware that the other woman would not have mentioned the Contessa lightly. When she finally replied, her own voice had become distressingly small.

“The Contessa is dead, then?”

“Of course she is,” said Elöise.

“I did not know you’d found the body.”

“We did not need to, Celeste. She fell from the airship into the frozen sea. You and I could barely swim in our merest underthings—that woman’s dress would have taken in enough water within one minute to sink her down to hell itself.”

“It is just that... I spoke to her on the roof of the airship—it must have been just before she leapt to the sea... her face... even then so proud, so uncaring. She haunts me still.”

“She is dead, Celeste. I promise you.”

Elöise put her arm around Miss Temple’s shoulders and squeezed. Never one to anticipate affection of any kind, Miss Temple did not know what to do, and so did nothing, looking instead at her salt-cracked boots and the dirty planking. Elöise squeezed again and took her

arm away, a trim smile on her lips, as if she were not entirely sure of the gesture either, but then she reconsidered and reached up to smooth the hair from Miss Temple's face.

"I know you feel better," she said, "but we are traveling while you would still be best in bed. Lean against my shoulder and I will tell you what I know"—her voice dropped to a whisper—"and what has taken the Cardinal and the Doctor from our sides."

"THE FIRST night was spent in a fisherman's hut. I do not exaggerate to say the Doctor was hard-pressed to keep you alive, while tending to Chang—for the icy sea had done nothing kindly to his lungs—and to myself, for I admit to very nearly drowning. That night the heavens erupted in a storm the likes of which I have never seen—a raging sea, the land awash, trees torn from the earth by the winds. In the morning Chang and the Doctor went for help and the afternoon, during the briefest break in the tempest, you were moved to Lina's house. You lay there for six days, quite incoherent. It was only on the fourth day that your fever finally broke and the Doctor saw fit to leave."

"But where was Chang?" Miss Temple burrowed more tightly into the crook of Elöise's arm and allowed her eyes to slip closed.

"The Doctor felt it vital that, once the storm was over, we get a boat and return to the fallen airship, to collect what remained of the glass books, to find any papers that might tell of our enemies' agents in Macklenburg, and to bring ashore what bodies we could for decent burial."

Miss Temple's thoughts went to Roger, imagining with dismay what her fiancé must have looked like after two days in the sea. She had seen a drowned sailor once on a beach and remembered—indeed, could never forget—his swollen and shapeless cast, as if submersion had half transformed him to a fish, with only his unseeing eyes and hanging open mouth showing protest at the horrid injustice done to his body. She imagined Roger's thin, nimble fingers, bobbing bloated and pale in the dark water, already subject to the gnawing of scavenger fish or industrious crabs. She pictured his softening face—

"But the airship was gone," Elöise went on. "Dragged out to sea, no doubt, by the waterlogged balloon. Scraps of canvas washed ashore... but that was all."

"What," Miss Temple forced herself to ask, "of the... bodies?"

"We saw no sign. But they were inside the craft. They would be carried with it, down below."

"And all the glass books?"

"All of them. And all the Comte's machines—everything they had brought to conquer Macklenburg."

Miss Temple exhaled. "Then it is truly finished."

Elöise shifted slightly.

"And *then* the dead grooms were discovered—horses driven from the stable—and then the poor fisherman in his boat. The local folk have little doubt of the killer—the victims' throats were all torn out most savagely, and this is a land where wolves are known. But after this—after Chang and Doctor Svenson had both taken their leave—the Jorgenses were discovered

—”
“But why *did* Chang go?”

Elöise shifted her position to look into Miss Temple’s face.

“You and I have lived in the city. The villagers who took us in became frightened, in the sober light of day, by our strange appearance— you and I dressed as if we’d escaped the seraglio, and the Doctor a foreign soldier... but most of all by the Cardinal—his figure, the scars, the long red coat, the obvious capacity for violence. All of this brought suspicion upon us as these deaths began to appear so suddenly one after another. And of course Chang is the killer. Once the villagers began to whisper amongst themselves—once there were *deaths*—well, Doctor Svenson—”

“And where is *he*? If he went to make sure of the road, why did he not *return*?”

“I do not know.” Elöise’s voice sounded hollow. “The Doctor left the day before yesterday. We... I am ashamed to say we quarreled. I am a fool. In any event, I knew that I must stay with you, and that the two of us must leave as soon as you were fit. That we were to meet them—”

“Where?”

“My family has a cottage, outside the city. It will be safe, and a peaceful place for you to get your strength.”

Miss Temple was silent. None of this made a bit of sense, from the wolves to the feeble excuses given for her own abandonment. Did Elöise think her so credulous, or was Elöise still speaking for the driver to hear? Surely *she* did not believe such nonsense...

Miss Temple cleared her throat.

“Will you and Doctor Svenson be married?” she asked.

Elöise stiffened beside her. “I beg your pardon?”

“I merely wondered.”

“I—I’m sure I have not given it a thought—we have been too busy seeing to you, haven’t we? And, my goodness, it feels we have not exchanged ten words of friendly conversation.”

“You seemed quite disposed to one another.”

“I barely know him, truly.”

“When you were captured by the Comte, and taken away by Francis Xonck—at Harschmoor House—the Doctor was especially keen that we save you.”

“He is a kindly man.”

“Why did you quarrel?”

“I’m sure I do not remember.”

“Perhaps you prefer Cardinal Chang,” wondered Miss Temple, her voice airy and musically. “He is more... dangerous...”

“I have had enough of danger,” replied Elöise, with a touch of tartness. “Though I owe the Cardinal my life.”

“What do you think of his eyes?” asked Miss Temple.

“It is a terrible thing,” Elöise said, after a careful moment. “Im possibly cruel.”

MISS TEMPLE recalled seeing Chang’s scars for the first time at the Hotel Boniface, when he removed his glasses to look into the blue glass card Doctor Svenson had found. After several strange glimpses of one another, on trains, across the ballroom of Harschmort, in secret tunnels, the three had met unexpectedly at Miss Temple’s own hotel and, in an even more unlikely turn of events, joined forces. Chang had looked into her eyes upon taking off his glasses, a deliberate mocking challenge to what he assumed was her tender, ladylike sensibility. But Miss Temple had seen such scarring before, in fact quite regularly, on the faces of her own plantation. Yet even so, she had never considered disfigurement as a regular part of her life, for it had never afflicted anyone for whom she cared. She wondered if she could have loved Roger if he had been lacking one hand, and knew in all truth she never would have opened her heart to begin with. But that was the queer thing, for she had not purposely opened her heart to Cardinal Chang—nor to the Doctor or Elöise—yet somehow he had entered its confines. It was nothing like what Miss Temple had felt upon choosing Roger Bascombe—that *was* a choice, and for a type of life as much as for the man himself, though she had not fully understood it at the time. Of course, it was impossible to relate men like Chang or Svenson to any reasonable type of life whatsoever.

She looked up again at the trees, aware that a nagging itch had grown between her legs as her thoughts had wandered. If she had been alone in her room she might have allowed her hands beneath her petticoats, but with Elöise so near Miss Temple merely pressed her thighs together with a frown. It was the glass book again, the one she had looked into—been swallowed by—in the Contessa’s rooms at the St. Royale. The book had contained thousands of memories—the lives of courtesans, adventurers, villains of every kind, decadent sensualists, the indulgent and the cruel—together creating a sort of opium den that had trespassed every border of her own identity, and from which she had wrenched herself free only with the most desperate effort. The problem for Miss Temple was the way the glass books captured memories—insidious, delicious, and terrifying. Looking into a book caused the viewer to physically experience the memory from the point of view—the *experientia* point of view—of the original source, whether this was a man or a woman. It was not as if Miss Temple had merely *read* a lurid account of the goings on at the Venetian *Carnivale*—she now remembered performing the same deeds with her own body. Her mind teemed with false memories so vivid they left her breathless.

She had not spoken of the glass book to anyone. Yet a part of her craved a moment of conversation with the only people who would have comprehended the true extent of what she’d undergone—her darkest enemies, the Comte and the Contessa. She felt the warmth of Elöise’s arm around her—for Miss Temple was a woman unused to being touched by any person save a maid doing up her corset—and at even this meager contact unbidden visions began to rise, like smoke from a slow-catching fire, abetted by the jostling cart wheels until every tingling nerve had grown to glowing. She could help it no more and shut her eyes...

Suddenly she was inhabiting a man’s body, with such wonderful strength in her arms, and in her deliciously thrusting hips... then it was the rushing thrill of another girl’s greedy tongue between her legs... her hands caught the girl’s head and raised her up, a smiling ki

and she tasted herself... one after another the visions flowed together—Miss Temple's face flushed as red as if her fever had returned—until another kiss, another liquid tongue, became—she realized quite abruptly with horror—the Contessa di Lacquer-Sforza dragging her tongue across Miss Temple's eye with a knowing, angry, sensuous sneer. Miss Temple gasped aloud. That incident had really taken place, in Harschmort House. What did it mean that Miss Temple's true memories could be entwined so seamlessly with what she remembered from the book, as if such distinction was a boundary for the weak, or no real boundary at all? she could not keep her own life apart from what she had consumed from the lives of others—how could she retain who she was? She sat up at once.

“Celeste?” asked Elöise. “Are you all right? Are you too cold?”

“I am fine,” said Miss Temple. She dabbed a pearling of sweat from her upper lip. “Perhaps there is something to eat?”

LINA HAD packed cold mutton, hard cheese, and some loaves of country bread. Miss Temple unhappily chewed a mouthful of meat while gazing about her. The woods had continued to deepen.

“Where exactly are we?” she asked Elöise.

“Heading south. Beyond that I cannot say—past the forest there are apparently hills. On the other side of *them* we may have hope of a train.”

“The road seems perfectly fine,” Miss Temple observed.

“It does.”

Miss Temple watched Elöise closely until the woman met her gaze. Miss Temple made a point of speaking loudly.

“This forest... is this where the people were killed?”

“I've no idea,” said Elöise.

“I would think it must be.”

“It is entirely possible.”

“Did you not go there?”

“Of course not, Celeste. The clothing was brought to me—Lina knew what we needed.”

“So no one has seen the Jorgenses' cabin?”

“Of course people have *seen* it—the villagers who *found* them—”

“But that is not the same at all,” cried Miss Temple. She called to the driver in her firmest voice. “Sir, we will require you to take us to the cabin of Mr. and Mrs. Jorgens. It is most urgent.”

The man pulled his horse to a stop and turned. He glanced once at Miss Temple but then settled on Elöise as the person in charge. Miss Temple sighed and spoke in the most patient tone she could muster.

“It is necessary we visit the cabin of Mr. and Mrs. Jorgens. As you can see, I am wearing the poor woman's dress. It is incumbent upon me—for *religious* reasons, you understand—

pay my respects to her memory. If I do not, it is impossible that I shall sleep soundly ever again.”

The man looked again at Elöise. Then he turned and snapped the reins.

Miss Temple took another bite of mutton, for she was extremely hungry still.

IT WAS perhaps twenty more minutes until he stopped the cart and pointed to their left. Through the trees Miss Temple saw a winding path washed away in more than one spot, like a penciled line incompletely marred by the jagged pass of a gum eraser. She scrambled from the cart without assistance and then gave a hand to Elöise, whose expression was far from her own excitement.

“We will not be long,” Elöise called to their driver. “It is just...just along that path?”

He nodded—Miss Temple wondered if the man possessed a tongue—and pointed. Miss Temple took her companion’s hand and pulled her away.

The washed-out sections were moist and required careful steps to avoid thick mud, but a few minutes they were out of sight of the cart, no matter how Elöise kept glancing back.

“He will not leave us,” Miss Temple finally said.

“I’m glad you think so,” answered Elöise.

“Of course he won’t. He has not been fully paid.”

“But he has.”

“You think he has, but *he* surely plans to charge us that much more again once we are stranded with him in the hills.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because I am used to people wanting money—it is the dullest of things. But now we can speak—and *look*, Elöise, there it is!”

THE CABIN was small, and nestled comfortably between the trees on one side and a lush meadow. All around them Miss Temple could see the flotsam left from the flooding rain and its recession. The air was tinged with a certain whiff of corruption, of river mud churned and spread like a stinking condiment amidst the grasses and the trees.

“I’m sure I don’t know what you hope to find,” said Elöise.

“I do not either,” replied Miss Temple, “but I do know I have never seen a wolf in a boat. And now we can speak freely—I mean, honestly, *wolves!*”

“I do not know what you would like me to say.”

Miss Temple snorted. “Elöise, are our enemies dead or not?”

“I have told you. I believe they are dead.”

“Then who has done *this* killing?”

“I do not know. The Doctor and Chang—”

“Where are they? Truthfully now, why did they leave?”

“I have *been* truthful, Celeste.”

Miss Temple stared at her. Elöise said nothing. Miss Temple wavered between dismay, mistrust, and condescension. As this last came most easily to her nature, she allowed herself an inner sneer.

“Still, as we are here, it seems perfectly irresponsible not to investigate.”

Elöise pursed her lips together, and then gestured about them at the ground.

“You see the many bootprints—the village people collecting the bodies. There is no hope of finding the sign of an animal’s paw, nor of disproving any such signs were here.”

“I agree completely,” said Miss Temple, but then she stopped, cocking her head. To the side of the cabin steps, pressed into the soft earth was the print of a horse’s shoe—as if the horse had been tethered near the door. Miss Temple leaned closer, but found no more. What she did find, on the steps themselves, was one muddy footprint followed by a thin trailing line.

“What is that?” she asked Elöise.

Elöise frowned. “It is a horseman’s *spur*.”

FOR ALL her bravado, Miss Temple found herself taking a deep breath when she opened the cabin door—slowly and with as little sound as possible, and wishing she’d some kind of weapon. The interior was as simple as the outside promised—one room with a cold stove, table and workbench, and a bed—plain and small, yet large enough to hold a marriage. Beyond the bed was an aching little cot, and beyond this Miss Temple saw the trunk where her dress had undoubtedly been kept. She felt Elöise behind her, and the two stepped fully into the room, amidst the trappings of dead lives.

“I’m sure the others have... have cleaned,” said Elöise, her voice dropping to a whisper.

Miss Temple turned back to the door, to the hinges and the handle.

“Do you see scratch marks? Or anything that would suggest a forceful entry?”

Elöise shook her head. “Perhaps Mr. Jorgens opened the door himself upon hearing a noise—they apparently had dogs, if there was barking—”

“They were killed in bed—I saw the bedding, quite covered in blood.”

“But that could be only one of them—when the other had opened the door, allowing the animal inside.”

Miss Temple nodded. “Then perhaps there are signs of violence in the door’s *vicinity*...”

“Celeste,” began Elöise, but then stopped, sighed, and started to look as well.

But there was nothing—no scratches, no blood, no sign at all. Miss Temple crossed to the bed—at least someone had been killed *there*.

“Can you search the stove, in case anything untoward has been burned?”

“Such as what?”

“I’m sure I do not *know*, Elöise, but I speak from experience. When the Doctor, Gardiner Chang, and I searched the workroom of the Comte d’Orkancz—we knew the Comte had been keeping a woman there who had been injured by contact with the blue glass—I located

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