

"I was the only one there when he died, I swear."

William, unsure if he heard the words correctly, slowed to a stop and staring at the retreating form of the whore he was following, slammed the palm of his gloved right hand against the building he had paused next to.

"You lied to me." He said. "You said nothing of a dead man."

The slap of his hand against the plaster caused the woman to stumble and she slowly turned around.

"Is there anything else I should know?" he asked.

William could feel the weight of the leather bag he held in his opposite hand and tightened his fingers around the wooden handle.

Elizabeth dropped her eyes and William watched as she tapped the edge of a frozen puddle with the toe of her blue silken shoe. He snorted and wondered silently where she had stolen them. He took a step closer, straddling the small pool of what was unlikely to be water, and she shuffled back a half step raising her eyes in alarm.

"Do you want the information or not?" she said.

An insult died on his lips and he reached up with his one free hand and pulled the narrow brimmed hat down tighter over his eyes. He peered out from under the brim and pushing past her continued to tip toe through the refuse and potholes that littered the street.

William arrived at the door and reaching out to lift the iron latch, paused. He admired the clean back of his new kid glove and then scrutinizing the filth on the door, swiftly returned his hand back to his pocket. He turned to the woman who accompanied him.

"If you would." He said, and motioning with his chin, stood

back to give Elizabeth room to open the door.

William followed her inside, and in the dim light could just make out the shadow of a table standing guard directly in front of him. The room was small and smelled of burnt rosemary, as if someone had assaulted an herb garden. A simple fireplace occupied the wall to William's right and the fire burning on its stone hearth was almost down to bare coals. The light barely reflected off the walls, but it was enough to see the soft pink tones of the plaster.

"The papers. Now." he said and wrinkled his nose. Elizabeth had lumbered over to the fire and squatting down like ape giving birth, had thrust her scrawny arms out, to warm over the fire.

"I said I had a problem first." She called over her shoulder.

"Ah yes," He said, gliding forward. "A body."

Hearing the shuffling of his feet on the dirt floor, Elizabeth stood and, rubbing her hands together, walked over to where he swung his heavy bag back and forth in his fingers.

She smiled, showing her two best teeth, and placing a solitary finger lightly on his breast, slowly let her hand play down the front of his coat. William swatted her hand away as if the touch was infectious and turning back to the table, swung the heavy bag he carried up onto its surface. He raised a gloved hand to his face and carefully rubbed his eyes.

"I am not here to play games. Give me the papers with the information you found and Farnham will never know of your little accident."

"William love, you are so predictable." She said and slithered to the side until her hip bumped the edge of the table. "I know you're not going to tell him." She raised her fingers to her lips in a display of mock silence and William's eyes widened slightly as he saw a folded slip of

paper resting playfully between them.

Before he could speak, she hopped up onto the edge of the table and swinging her feet, reached down and twirled her fingers around the hem of her petticoat. She caught William's eye and purposefully pulled the fabric upward, exposing a trail of mud that wound its way up around the flesh of her bruised calf.

William danced around her outstretched leg and with a hand tugging at the collar of his coat, pressed his body against the hem of her raised dress. "My sweet creature." He said and smiled. "I am a doctor, you forget. I know what cankerous den of festering lilies lie curdling below."

Before she could react, William's hand snaked out and snatched the slip of paper. He quickly grabbed his bag and deciding how best to open the latch without ruin to his gloves, made for the door.

"Mary is with the body and has the rest of the papers." Elizabeth called from behind him.

William stopped and immediately swiveled on his heels. Facing Elizabeth, he rubbed the folded slip of paper between his thumb and forefinger, thinking.

Elizabeth hopped down off the table and stood there, arms folded across her chest like a pair of storm shutters by the dock. William, pinching the brim of his hat, removed the object from his head, and with a sweep of his hand, gestured for the whore to lead the way.

"My lady." He said and wrinkled up his lip in an effort to smile. It seemed he would be examining a dead man after all.