The Shaming of Purbeck

Victorian Curiosity Unleashes a Sadistic Female

By
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"THE HOUSE OF PURBECK"

By
Sandrine D' Honfleur

Dedicated to the memory of the great Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894)



REBECCA NORTH

PROLOGUE

There were three of them nursing brandies around the club's roaring fireplace, but only one of them was speaking at that moment, holding court as the others followed his every word with expressions ranging from disbelief to repugnance, unsure as they were whether his tale was fictional or factual in nature.

The warped sexuality at the heart of the tale serving only to heighten their repugnance and distaste.

If not their disbelief.

The club itself was indistinguishable from any number of "Gentlemen's Clubs", from London's Carlton House Terrace in which it resided, to its counterparts throughout the capital itself – though it was unlikely a story of the kind being told would be found in any of the environs belonging to its counterparts.

And would if it were to be found, be a tale spoken in the same hushed tones it was spoken of now; despite the fact it was mid-afternoon and the club was almost deserted but for the three of them and a single retainer required for the serving of drinks.

All of the men were in their late-sixties or headed there and were alike in both learning and temperament; the speaker himself being a man of a sombre and unsmiling countenance as well as – again, just like his listeners before the fireplace - a man who was somewhat backward in both sentiment and imagination.

Judgemental must go without saying, as he was also a man with but the most limited experience of those more physical and metaphysical adventures likely to enliven what would otherwise be a long and drab life – though it must be said, and in spite of his own emotional aridity, that he had been known at times to help rather than punish and reprove those he found in extremis, and be sympathetic rather than allow his natural and judgemental disposition a free rein.

Such was the case now.

At sixty-nine, he was the elder of his two companions by just one year and three respectively; even if the foam of white resting upon the high forehead cresting the dome of his skull was a little more arctic than the snow-capped peaks upon the heads of those whose eyes and ears were trained upon him.

His name was Cedric Winterton and his professional life had been spent

within the various and more elevated branches of academe as, at first, a teacher and, now, lecturing on the less than pulse raising subject of the higher mathematics – though, to listen to him on it, there could surely be no more exciting and worthy way to spend a lifetime than in the study of such a *"perfectly beautiful"* subject.

And yet, for all his personal dryness, Professor Winterton was a modest man and loyal to a fault to those who fell under the limited umbrella of his friendship.

Without family, his friends were mostly those who followed the same dry occupation and interests as himself.

He was well-known and respected for not being given to tittle-tattle or the repeating of unfounded allegations.

Which made his willingness to speak in such a frank and baldly sexual way of a younger friend and one-time pupil in such a… *personal* …way – though he neglected to mention him by name - all the more surprising to the men listening who had known him on at least *"clubbable"* terms for a decade and more; their surprise made a little less complete in the presence of the man's obvious agitation and concern and the realisation he needed to either confide his story to someone or burst – even if their opinion was that the story was indeed fictional and the normally dry professor had been so taken with it he simply had to relate its contents to others.

In this, the two listening men were wrong; but it would be only the passing of time and reportage that would reveal their error to them.

The younger friend in question of whom the listeners were in ignorance, being none other than Dr. Alistair Purbeck, M.D., D.C.L., L.L.D., F.R.S. At one-time a gifted mathematician and, now – though not perhaps for much longer - an even more gifted and respected researcher into the causes of those ailments – physical *and* mental – with which even the healthiest of are afflicted from time to time. A respected researcher who was not in the best of places on either score himself.

After having sworn both to secrecy in respect of what he was about to confide to them – despite the fact he named no names - and feeling vindicated in the sharing of a secret he had thus far kept to himself by the knowledge newspapers and gossip would soon make it common currency, Professor Winterton had waited for their brandy-tumblers to be refilled, ensured they could not be overheard, and began the tale that would end in the

public ignominy, sexual shame, and ultimate downfall of his youngest friend.
“I am not in possession of an end to my story at this time and, when I am, I do not suspect it to prove of a happy kind, but soon, perhaps later this evening, perhaps, myself and the world will know more.”
Having no belief in the truth of the outlandish subject their friend was laying before them and having given no inkling he had the least gift for storytelling, the two listeners were in quite a confusion as to whether what they were hearing was real or imagined.
The professor’s next words not helping them any.
“In the meantime, however, I shall relate to you those events with which I am familiar…”

ONE

It had been with a sombre spirit that Professor Winterton came home to his bachelor house Russell Square on a Wednesday in April in the year of Our Lord 1889; the glorious spring day and its promise of a glorious summer barely registering upon his senses – and certainly not upon his mood.

The dinner provided by Upton, his man – Winterton found the presence and fussiness of women too much to bear at times; even in the form of a servant – was taken without the least relish and, had he been asked to vouch for what fare he had been served five minutes after having placed the plate aside, he would have been unable to provide an answer.

Normally of a Sunday at this time, he would take himself to his study and sit in his study with a glass of the brandy which was one of his few vices and a volume dealing with some dry facet of the subject he taught and loved; reading until the church rang out the hour signifying it was time to retire.

On this night, however, and as soon his repast had been taken, he went into his business-room. There he opened his safe and took from the most private part of it a document.

A document endorsed on the envelope with the name: *"Dr. Alistair Theophrastus Purbeck"*.

Beneath the name, in emboldened capital letters, could be seen:

LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT

It was with a creased brow that he studied the contents to which his friend had insisted he be executor; insistence made despite the discrepancy in their ages and the likelihood the professor would depart the mortal coil long before Purbeck himself was in need of having his will disseminated to those with an interest.

The will itself was hand-written and insisted that, upon the death of Purbeck, all his possessions were to pass into the hands of one *"Rebecca North"*.

That alone had stunned Winterton, and only a highly developed sense of personal decorum had prevented him from questioning the advisability of such a bequest.

That his younger friend was leaving his entire estate to the woman who kept house for him in his Bloomsbury home that was not a mile from Winterton's own, had come as shock enough to the older man – even if, as said, he was

far too much the gentleman to question Purbeck's reasons for such largesse.
But the real shock had come later, after reading the codicil and the way his friend's humiliated eyes could not meet his own as he offered him a pen with which to witness the document, before then having his man enter and do the same that the requisite signatures of two witnesses might be present upon the parchment and render it legal.
Shock that, along with his concern for the handsome doctors paleness and obvious exhaustion, had led Winterton to finally surmount his own reservations regarding proper behaviour and question the will's… *advisability:*
"Really, Alistair," he began; "you have asked me to undertake this responsibility as a friend, and I am glad to be of service, but…"
"Please, Cedric," Purbeck had intervened, divining the coming rebuke, tired eyes almost pleading with his friend and former mentor not to question him too deeply. "I have my reasons for arranging matters in this way."
To underline his mental disturbance in Winterton's eyes further, Purbeck had produced a white handkerchief and mopped at a moist brow before continuing:
"It… It is only right and seemly that Miss… Miss North is provided for by me in such a way when I am the one responsible for…"
The doctor, who Winterton already sensed had voiced the final and unfinished sentence unwillingly, had been unable to continue at that point and simply begged his friend – who now, despite his unworldliness, felt he was in receipt of the state of affairs so troubling his former pupil – to ask no further questions but to sign and witness the will and then have his man do the same.
It was request to which the professor, with many reservations, had consented.
Winterton thought back to that day and reprimanded himself for not having pressed his friend further; seeing his own dismissed offer of assistance as wholly unsatisfactory and nowhere near forceful enough.
"Surely," he had thought at the time; *"he cannot be the first man to have had… relations …with a maid or a housekeeper that has led to such an obvious conclusion?"*
It was both careless as well as stupid and, to the unworldly professor, beyond his ken that a man of Purbeck's character and intelligence could find himself at such a pass.

But to leave all his worldly goods to the serving-woman for whom the above two assets had taken a temporary hibernation was surely far in advance of what the situation required.

Moving back to his study and taking the will with him, Winterton again read through the codicil which, even more than his young friend's determination to leave the housekeeper *everything*, so disturbed him.

There, in his friend's own hand, he read…

"In the event of Dr. Purbeck's "disappearance, imprisonment, or unexplained absence for any period exceeding three calendar months, the said Rebecca North should step into the said Alistair Purbeck's shoes without further delay and free from any burthen or obligation, beyond the payment of a few small sums to those tradesmen and others to whom the doctor is beholden."

This document had long offended Winterton and now it frightened him.

And it was not only the fact he knew so little of this… *"Miss North"* …that disturbed him.

Certainly, he had seen her when visiting his friend, but, and as was the way people of such a class were invisible to their so-called betters, other than the fact she had seemed sturdy of build and possessed of red-hair she kept pushed from her face and tied at the back, he was in complete ignorance of her.

And especially of any… *charms* …likely to have turned his formerly studious and correct friend's head.

"I thought it was a simple matter of overwork and obsession," he said aloud as he took the obnoxious and ominous paper from the study and back to its resting place in his safe. "and now I begin to fear it is disgrace also."

His always straitened imagination seemed to overheat and his eyes went wide with concern:

"And disgrace of the worst and most lasting kind."

With that he had blown out his candle, taken the stairs to his bed, and decided to set forth later the next evening in the direction of Cavendish Square.

The citadel of medicine, where Purbeck's friend, and yet another former mentor, the great Dr. Jacob Aylesbury, had his house and received his patients.

"If anyone knows and can help, it will be Aylesbury," he had thought.

Two

"I suppose, Aylesbury," said Winterton, "that you and I must be Purbeck's two oldest friends?"

Aylesbury had nodded, expression grave, for though he was not amongst the professor's intimates he knew enough of Winterton and his private and rigorously moral nature to suspect his visit to him would not prove… *social*.

"I suppose we are. Though I see very little of him now."

"Indeed?" said Winterton, looking surprised and a little uncomfortable as he sat opposite the great man of medicine who had been gracious enough to accord him time after his surgery had closed and the last of his patients gone. "I thought you had a bond of common interest, given your medical backgrounds and the fact that, along with me, you had been something of a mentor to him during his formative years?"

"We did indeed have such a bond," was the reply from the still handsome and distinguished head behind the desk. "But it is more than three years since Alistair Purbeck became too… *fanciful* …for me."

Winterton waited, knowing his silence would ask the obvious question for him.

"He began to go wrong," Aylesbury continued. "Wrong in mind, was my opinion. Of course, I continued to take an interest in him for old time's sake, as they say, but I was never so closely involved with him again and have seen extremely little of the man."

Again Winterton stayed silent as Aylesbury shook his head with a mixture of wonder and continued incredulity.

"Balderdash!" added the doctor, flushing suddenly purple and shaking his head violently. "Ideas so unscientific they would have offended the flat-earthers."

He gave out a snort of derision and followed it up with a disbelieving laugh quite free of any humour.

"That a man of Purbeck's education and intelligence could believe such nonsense continues to stagger me."

His arms went wide:

"The eradication through science of man's ability to do evil?"

Again he laughed:
Preposterous!
This little burst of temper was, strangely, somewhat of a relief to the professor and he was glad to note – knowing something of Purbeck's scientific preoccupations as he did - that the differences between doctor and former pupil were but those of a professional rather than a personal kind.
"It is nothing other than a difference of professional opinion," he told himself, grateful that the distancing on the part of the doctor was not personal and would not pre-empt him from wishing to help the younger man should Purbeck need or allow it.
Allowing a few seconds to pass for the doctor to regain his composure, Winterton put the question he come to ask:
"I believe young Alistair is in trouble and I need to ask if you ever came across his housekeeper before your professional falling out? A woman by the name of North?"
"North?" repeated Aylesbury, surprised by the enquiry as he gave it some thought.
Then, finally, the doctor with a discreet but well-known eye for the ladies nodded:
"I do recall a woman around thirty or so taking my hat and coat and showing me down to Purbeck's laboratory. Red-hair, as I remember, tied back. Can't recall the face but I do remember thinking she had quite a well-made figure – even if there was a certain and not unbecoming surfeit of sand in the upper portion of the hour-glass, if you take my meaning… Would that be her?"
Colour flashed across the cheeks of the life-long bachelor – a man most considered was probably a virgin still; the prospect of him with a woman, let alone in flagrante delicto, impossible to picture - and indicated the professor's discomfort with talk of such a kind, as well as why he was unable to quite meet the doctor's eyes as he responded in the affirmative.
"What of her, professor?" asked Aylesbury. "Are you telling me Purbeck has involved himself with a serving woman?"
"I believe so. And in ways that lead me to worry for both his social and his professional standing," answered Winterton, like the doctor, as class-conscious as he was well-born and educated; his answer leading Aylesbury to the obvious conclusion.
The medical-man's outrage instant:

“And you think me suitable to perform such a procedure?”
“Procedure?” queried his utterly unworldly and baffled guest as he stared upon the distinguished features that had turned suddenly indignant.
“Really, Winterton. I remain fond of young Purbeck still, but do you truly think I would jeopardise both my reputation and my own sense of moral rectitude by stooping to the level of a backstreet fish-wife wielding a knitting needle?”
The totally incredulous Winterton could make no response for the moment. The man appeared to him to have not only lost his senses but was blathering on as they absented themselves from his possession in a language totally unconnected with the subject to hand.
“The answer is *no*,” said the doctor with some asperity. “And I can only say I am shocked at the low opinion in which I must be held in your regard that you might request such an abomination from me?”
The professor, for he was not without a temper when roused, drew himself up angrily:
“What in devil’s name are you blathering about, Aylesbury?... I came here to ask your opinion of Alistair’s mental condition and to ask your confidential opinion of the last will and testament he has entrusted to me. And instead you spout rubbish at me concerning some *‘procedure’* and an *‘abomination’*. Confound it, man! What on earth are you gibbering on about?”
It was now the medical-man’s turn to be confounded.
“Then…? Then you don’t wish me to abort the foetus?”
“Foetus?... Are you deranged, man?”
Realising on the instant that his rush to outrage had been in haste; a look of contrite mortification banished the clouds from the doctor’s expression.
“My dear, Cedric,” he began, his use of the older man’s first-name itself evidence enough of his remorse, “do forgive me. When you mentioned Purbeck’s housekeeper and the fact he had become involved with her, I naturally thought…”
The sentence required no finishing and now it was Winterton’s turn to look mortified as the halfpenny finally dropped and he realised Aylesbury had simply jumped to the same conclusion he had drawn from a first reading of the will and its codicil.
“Oh!... I see…”
Surprisingly, a few seconds later, both burst out with, for them, intemperate

and loud hilarity.
Then, when both had recovered enough to converse soberly once again; both feeling fonder towards each other than they had before their discussion started:
“So tell me, Cedric, what is it about Purbeck and this Last Will and testament of his that disturbs you so and how can I offer my assistance…?”

THREE

From that time forward, and not entrusting the duty to others less fond or familiar with their friend and less likely to be discreet, either Professor Winterton or Doctor Aylesbury – when the rigors of his practice permitted - began to haunt the exterior of Purbeck's Bloomsbury villa in the hope of learning more of his housekeeper and how she could be held in such regard by their friend that he would make her such an… *odd* …bequest.

In the morning before office hours, at noon when business was plenty and time scarce, or even at night – *especially* at night - under the face of the fogged city moon, either Winterton or Aylesbury could be seen in their chosen places of observation. Places, thankfully, that were varied and plentiful given the high volume of people to be found in the area and the design of the streets themselves, with their many alleys and shop awnings. It would not, the two men agreed, be good were either Miss North or Purbeck himself to find themselves observed in such a way.

Both, if truth be told, took a curious pleasure they were loath to acknowledge even to themselves in a surveillance that was far removed from the relentless predictability of their usual routines, no matter how deep the devotion – obsession in Winterton's case - they felt for their own vocations.

Having both read the will in the other's presence – an abrogation of the trust placed in him the professor allowed with the greatest of misgivings – the two men had drawn the conclusion their friend had been somehow coerced or blackmailed into making his odd bequest.

And sensed the hand of a man – perhaps in league with the woman herself; a relative even – behind it.

All they need do before deciding upon a course of action was to find this man and somehow divine the hold he had over Purbeck before deciding upon a remedy.

And at last, upon a fine dry night, with frost in the air and the streets as clean as a ballroom floor and caressed by only the slightest of Spring breezes, the low and constant growl of London curiously muted for once, their patience was rewarded.

Dr Aylesbury, who had determined to take the evening watch, given the demands of his practice during the day, had been only some minutes at his post, when he was aware of footsteps drawing near.

In the course of his nightly patrols, he had long grown accustomed to the

quaint effect with which the footfalls of a single person resonated as they emerged suddenly from the hum and clatter of the ever alive city.
Yet his attention had never before been so sharply and decisively arrested; and it was with a strong presentiment of success that he withdrew into the entry of the court from where he could observe the front of Purbeck's house itself without placing himself under scrutiny.
Both he and Winterton were aware that being single-handed in their observation would mean that the back entrance to the house must naturally remain unobserved – though they reasoned it not to be a problem as neither the master nor the housekeeper were aware of being under observation and would use only the main door.
The steps drew swiftly nearer, and swelled out suddenly louder as they turned the end of the street and the Doctor, looking forth from the entry to the court, could soon see what manner of man he had to deal with.
Except he was not a man.
The woman he saw about to cross the street to Purbeck's was dressed in sober but expensive clothing Aylesbury assessed as being beyond the means of a mere domestic.
He also, and to his own chagrin, felt a disturbing thrill of something that went beyond recognition of his prey as he took in the hour-glass figure and the surfeit of sand at its upper reaches he had remarked upon to the uncomfortable Winterton in his practice not three evenings before.
But it was the red-hair, unmistakeable even beneath the fine gauze of the veil covering her features, that truly assured him he was in the presence of their prey.
As the woman headed straight for Purbeck's door, drawing a key from her pocket like one approaching home, the doctor stepped out and touched her on the shoulder with a familiarity he would not have adopted towards one of her sex he considered a *"lady"*.
In doing so, his fingers inadvertently made a brushed and fleeting contact with the alabaster skin at the base of her neck and he felt their tips tingle as what seemed like an electrical impulse of some kind flowed into and down the length of his body.
Recovering his equilibrium with no small effort, he spoke:
"Miss. North, I think?"
The woman shrank back with a hissing intake of the breath; but her fear – if it

was fear - was only momentary, and though the eyes beneath the veil were averted, did not look Aylesbury in the face.
“That is my name” she answered, voice readily placing her in his estimation amongst the lower-ranks.
His physical familiarity, in his own mind at least, made of no matter by the realisation of her standing.
“What do you want?”
“I see you are going in,” returned the doctor. “I am an old and dear friend of Dr. Purbeck's. Dr. Aylesbury of Cavendish Square. I was about to call on Alistair when you arrived.”
“You will not find Dr. Purbeck. He is away from home at this time,” replied Miss North, inserting the key; her response to the ears of the doctor seeming both false and a little rehearsed.
And then suddenly, but still without looking up:
“How did you know me?” she asked.
“You had occasion to show me down to Dr. Purbeck’s laboratory when first you took up your position with him,” said Aylesbury.
“That was over three years ago,” she accused, the eyes behind the veil finally turning in his direction, the pure vividity of their green unable to be totally disguised by the garment and again sending tiny shocks the length of his spine.
“And explains, no doubt, why you no longer recognise one of your Master’s friends,” the doctor reprimanded her lightly; registering her flinch at his use of the term ‘Master’ as he did so.
“I expect it does,” she told him as his eyes struggled to remain above the firm and sizable breasts below as they fought against the restraint of what was obviously a bodice, the partly hidden eyes fixed upon his own now as they seemed to acknowledge to themselves his weakness for this particular area of a woman’s anatomy.
The eyes beneath the veil seemed to register his interest and it was only with an effort, as he concentrated upon keeping his eyes from flickering to her chest, that he persuaded himself he was being fanciful in respect of her prescience.
“I see you are in mourning, my good woman,” he offered, though he suspected no such thing and that her choice of such sombre and severely cut clothing was deliberate, disturbed at his own libidinous – though he was

certainly not unused to such reactions – response to being in her close proximity. “I will trouble you no longer, save to ask that you inform your Master…”

Again the word elicited a flinch from the woman Aylesbury could not help but think her anger was for having her employer described in such a way relative to herself.

“…When you next see him, that is,” he added, “that his friend, Dr. Jacob Aylesbury would like to speak with him at his earliest convenience and he is welcome to call upon me at my Cavendish Square practice at any time.”

Not deigning to bother with a verbal reply, the woman simply and rudely unlocked the door and disappeared into the house.

Standing on the step where Miss North had left him, Aylesbury felt a sudden presentiment of dread that was, nonetheless, mixed with a certain and unmistakable… *eroticism*.

Despite only having lightly made contact with her neck and having seen her face only partly, he swore he could feel some kind of… *energy* …pass between them.

An energy, he sensed, that belonged *wholly* to her.

And in no way to him.

As he slowly left the step and made his way from the street to the more populous environs of Holborn, a feeling of great disquietude took a firmer hold of his senses.

Disquietude that was all the more powerful for offering no rational explanation for its onset.

Every five steps or so, he would stop and put his hand to his brow like a man in mental perplexity. Miss North, he confessed – how could he not, given his reaction to her - was comely in form and would, no doubt, make Purbeck a most excellent housekeeper and mistress.

But…?

The fact Alistair would take a mistress at all – let alone one of her class – was beyond all estimation he held on behalf of his former pupil.

She was certainly not without sexual allure, this he confessed – had he not felt it himself? And the eyes beneath the gauze of her veil intimated at possession of a sexual magnetism that went even further than the usual attraction of one sex for the other.

But could such appeal possibly be enough for one as moral and correct as Alistair Purbeck to not only jettison his standing in the community but to leave her *all* his worldly goods?

Doing not only that but going on to add a codicil, set in a tablet-of-stone in parchment form, her right to receive his estate should he be pronounced missing.

It was a conundrum that obsessed him all the way upon his reflective and troubled walk from Holborn to Winterton's residence in Russel Square that he might relate the events of the evening.

A conundrum made no more transparent to him by another certainty…

That certainty being that he knew – and for a stone-cold fact - that, far from his being, *"away from home at this time,"*, Purbeck was at this very moment in occupation of his own domicile.

*****

The sole of the foot dominating his vision was unmistakably feminine as he stared up at the alabaster skin adorning her legs with what he knew to be… longing.

Fine and long toes, nails painted a most vivid blood-red led upwards and over a high-arch, past slender ankles and gradually curved out into exaggerated, but no less exciting for that, calf muscles that in turn ran upwards to naked thighs that were as powerful and smooth as they were captivating.

The whole vision of wanton sexuality shot through with a kind of malignant derision contained on the face above; which, rather than repel him, excited his senses to some perverse pitch of desire he had yet to experience and, in the unlikely event of his having been asked, would have professed himself certain he never would.

"You've been bad, Doctor Aylesbury," her words reached him as he lay prostrate and naked below her, supine and submissive in a way he would once have found unimaginable. Intense and vivid green eyes drank in his subservient pose with a joy he found disturbing and unholy. Though not disturbing enough to wilt or deter the erection curving upwards from between his middle-aged thighs.

"You've been putting that nose into things that weren't your concern," she continued, even the diction betraying her working-class roots adding a sensuality to the arousal his ingrained sense of social exclusion would once

have made it impossible for him to feel.
The smile accompanying her words, as her foot lowered and placed itself upon his chest to keep him pinned to the floor, contained only malice and was entirely absent of warmth – and still his arousal raged at a fever-pitch.
"So…" she went on, "as you're so keen to give that nose of yours some exercise, I thought I'd give you some help…
"Put your tongue out."
Arousal or not, this was an indignity too far for him and explained his utter incredulity when, without being aware it was about to do so, he felt his mouth open and his tongue protrude from the interior to its fullest extent.
Her, "Good boy", serving only to take his perverse response to a higher, and darker, altitude; even as he sensed that he was only at the very beginning of the warped sexual adventure upon which she was taking him .
With that, she raised her foot and fetched it above his face that he might see the creamy and unblemished sole as its toes hovered above his eyes and its arch not one inch from his nose.
"Deep breaths now, Doctor," she ordered. "Show me you can do something useful with that nose and, if you're good…"
She mashed her incredible breasts together with her hands either side and aimed a mocking smile down at him.
"… very good …I might find even more… exciting …work for it."
To his amazement, he obeyed instantly and the salty and earthy aroma of her foot seemed to permeate his whole being and send the erection at his mid-section into a frenzy of the most abject lust.
"Oh, what a good boy you are for your new mistress," he heard, as his humiliation, far from deflating his sexual hunger, made him almost insensible with lust.
Lust triggered by the thoroughly unmanly and ungentlemanly act of sniffing the foot of a woman of the lower classes.
"Now," she began a minute or so later. "I'm pleased with you so far, so I'm going to let you taste the foot you seem to like the smell of so well."
To the self-disgust he could still feel through his ever-growing arousal, he thought he must ejaculate as such an emasculating prospect.
"Yes," her low-born voice teased. "My good boy would like that, wouldn't he? Tell you what, if you'd like to lick your mistress's foot just nod and you can."

He nodded.
No hesitation.
"Good boy. You're learning you're place quicker than I thought you would."
Below her and unmoving still, transfixed by the unsuspected power of his need for what was nothing less than his own shame, he felt the sole of her foot graze his nose and felt her heel upon his protruded tongue as it slowly introduced itself to his waiting taste-buds before inching back that he might become acquainted with the sole itself and then her shapely and intoxicating toes themselves.
"Oh, my," she mused. "Who'd have thought it? The doctor's a natural foot-boy."
The demeaning words registered with him but, ar from provoking him to anger, seemed to tap into some hitherto desire to humble himself to one of her kind and ensured his tongue became even more servile and adoring.
"Oh, yes, my little foot-boy; we're going to have great times together us two."
She removed her foot from his tongue and he actually felt disappointed as she stood with hands upon hips with legs astride his head gazing down upon him.
"In fact," she went on, green-eyes boring into his and taking even more of a sexual stranglehold upon his senses, "your mistress is so pleased with her new chattel she's going to give you and your nasty little tongue something else to taste."
It was not a moment before the arse whose cheeks her hands had prised apart settled upon his face and…

…Aylesbury awoke to sodden sheets and the chastening realisation that…
The evidence at his groin and upon the sheets could not be gainsaid.
For the first time since his early years, the doctor realised he had submitted to a nocturnal ejaculation and felt utter shame at himself.
And something else he found far more shaming.
Something, though he was not to know it, that would have a far more lasting and more abject effect.
Frustration that his dream had ended.

FOUR

"Is Dr. Purbeck at home?" asked the professor the very next morning, manner aloof and superior to the red-headed woman who stood before him and looked exactly as the housekeeper of a respectable professional man should look.

"He is, indeed, Professor Winterton," said the woman, surprising him; though he could not for the life of him think why, given he had visited on a number of occasions and, even if he had been a little vague in his recollection of her prior to Purbeck's will, she would certainly be familiar with him.

Admitting the visitor into Purbeck's large and comfortable hall, warmed after the fashion of a country house by a small and unseasonal, but bright and open fire, and furnished with costly cabinets of oak, she turned to him and favoured him with a small smile from which green eyes were entirely absent

"Either Aylesbury has been beset by a sudden colour blindness," Winterton marvelled, *"or the cobalt blue orbs beneath her smile had undergone a radical transformation overnight."*

"If you wait here by the fire," she offered, smile still visible and seeming to Winterton the model of what a housekeeper should be, "I'll tell the doctor you're here."

After thanking her and having watched her retreat downstairs to Purbeck's laboratory, Winterton leaned upon the tall fender guarding the fireplace and stared about him as if for the first time.

The hall in which he was now left alone was a pet fancy of his young friend and Winterton himself often spoke of it as the most pleasant room in London.

For some reason, however, the welcoming hall was not having its usual and therapeutic effect upon his mood, despite – along with even the housekeeper herself – seeming normal and in order.

Though it was morning and he was neither a fanciful nor a credulous man, he felt a kind of midnight horror such as he had once felt when reading a Poe volume during one of his infrequent dips into subject matter more literary than academic. Morning or not, there was a chill prompted shudder in his blood. The words of Aylesbury from the previous evening as the disturbed man availed himself of Winterton's brandy – three times! – only serving to deepen his disquiet.

And how in heaven's name had his normally precise fellow conspirator managed to mistake blue eyes for green?

And a green, according to the logical to a fault medical-man:
"As compelling – even through a veil – as any I have ever encountered."
"Could it be;" Winterton asked himself as he waited to see his friend, *"that Purbeck's housekeeper has a sister?"*
He shook his head gravely, the new line of thought solving nothing for him and only serving to muddy his clouded and disturbed thinking further.
His thoughts were no less cloudy when the enigma that was Miss North returned and told him his friend was awaiting him in his basement laboratory.

"I have been wanting to speak to you, Alistair," he began when they were alone, relieved to find that, apart from being a little thinner and a little paler of complexion – both easily attributed to his obsessional pursuit of his own interests - his former pupil did not look in extremis.

"I'm sure I can make an educated guess as to why," ventured the doctor, his frank and open features, which stopped short of being distinguished and handsome in the way of… Aylesbury, for instance, expressing an impatience Winterton had seldom seemed aimed his way from his friend.

"Yes, Alistair," he said. "It is about that will of yours and your sarcasm does not endear itself to an old friend who has only your best interests at heart?"

A close observer might have gathered that the topic was distasteful; but the doctor attempted to defray his discomfort with levity.
"My poor Cedric," said he, "you are indeed unfortunate in your choice of such a friend. I never saw a man so distressed as you were by my will; unless it were that hide-bound pedant, Aylesbury, at what he called my '*scientific heresies'* – along with some less flattering descriptions."
The older man's expression darkened; unused to hearing his former pupil display such disrespect to a man who was both his elder and a luminary of their shared medical profession.
"Forgive me, Cedric. I know Jacob's a good enough fellow and gifted in his own right. You needn't frown so. He is, indeed, an excellent fellow, and I always mean to see more of him…"
He hesitated with what appeared to Winterton regret for what he was about to say.
"That admitted," his tired looking host went on, "it cannot be said otherwise that he is, as I describe, a hide-bound pedant of the most tunnel-visioned kind

and I have never been more disappointed in any man than him."
"Not even me?" asked the professor. "I am not deaf and I know that much the same is said on my behalf when it comes to pedantry."
Purbeck's head shook violently, the turbulence sending a long lock of his uncustomary long brown hair down over one eye.
"Never!" he stated. "Your focused devotion to an entirely different subject is both necessary and right if you are to teach it with effectiveness.
Feeling pleasure in his friend's praise, the professor allowed him to continue:
"You have never pretended to be in the process of extending the scope of mathematical knowledge but devote all your energies to an understanding of what it is currently known of it, that you might disseminate your learning to others and instil within them the same love of the subject you have yourself.
"And, along with me, you DO accept that there is far more to be learned of your subject than you will ever know."
"Just the same…" began a dubious professor, nor entirely won over by his younger friend's flattery.
"Trust me, Cedric, you are both admirable men in your own respective ways. But, when it comes to matters of learning, you and Aylesbury are as unalike as Gladstone to Disraeli… Now, take a glass of this excellent sherry and tell me what troubles you."
"You know what troubles me," Winterton answered as Purbeck poured a beverage he knew it would be far too early in the day for he himself to take – as, indeed, it would once have been do for his friend.
"My will," sighed the doctor a trifle sharply, contradicting the professor's own intention by taking a rather large gulp of the sherry. "You have already told me so - on the last occasion we had cause to mention it, I recall."
"Well, I tell you so again," persevered Winterton, unperturbed by his friend's irritation.
"Really, Cedric, we have been through all this before."
"And I was as satisfied with your response then as I am now."
Purbeck expelled air and took another swallow, knowing as he did that now Winterton had the bit between his teeth he would either continue until he received something he could accept as an explanation or their meeting would result in a falling out between them.
The last being a prospect that pained him to his core, such was his fondness for the narrow but kind man he was proud to call friend.

“I was too stunned by the contents of your will and my own sense of social protocol at the time to protest as fully and succinctly as I might have if forewarned,” the professor went on.
“And now?”
The older man’s expression softened and he lay a hand upon the younger’s shoulder in the way of a father reassuring the son who has disappointed him.
“And now, my dear young friend, my fears for what your unseemly Last Will and Testament might mean lead me beyond my natural inclination in such matters.”
Knowing his former mentor would not be deflected from his purpose, Purbeck raised the sherry-decanter and re-filled his glass.
“I wish to know more of your housekeeper,” Winterton demanded.
“What of her?” Purbeck replied, unable to meet his friend’s eye.
“I should like to know who she is, where she comes from, and the extent of your relationship.”
Purbeck turned then, and Winterton would later swear he had never seen such a look of terror, yearning, and utter self-disgust upon the face of a fellow human-being.
“I… I…”
“Tell me, Alistair. Whatever hold she or her confederates has upon you we shall, with Aylesbury’s help, break it.”
The doctor’s shoulders slumped and, based on Aylesbury’s experience of the previous evening, the professor decided to take an uncharacteristic gamble:
“And what of this sister of hers?”
The drawn and near handsome face of Dr. Purbeck grew pale to the very lips and Winterton suddenly noted the blackness about his eyes that could only have been inspired by a lack of rest and repose for which only overwork or constant terror – perhaps both – could be responsible.
“Please, Cedric,” begged Purbeck’s wearied voice. “As you value our friendship and your esteem of me I in turn feel for you, drop this subject now and return to your lectures and your academic papers. There is nothing to be done and I must reap the dubious rewards reserved for those who fly to close to the sun or attempt to understand those things reserved for only the Godhead to know.”
Hearing this, the protective professor felt a violent and most unaccustomed reaction.

Taking his friend by the shoulders, he shook him so hard the sherry glass dropped from his fingers and shattered upon the floor.
"Look at me, Purbeck," he demanded. "You know me: I am a man to be trusted. Make a clean breast of what troubles you in confidence; and I swear I will do my utmost to make good on your concerns.
Tears flowed from Purbeck's eyes, "My good, my dearest Cedric," he began, sincerity unmistakable. "Your loyalty to a friend in need touches me and is no less than I have a right to accept. Believe me, I cannot find words of a kind worthy enough to thank you."
Winterton looked him direct in the eye and saw his reticence.
"But…?" he asked.
"But this…"
He drew himself up and the professor recognised resolve and obduracy when he saw it.
"This, I am afraid, is a private matter. Between myself and Miss North and shall remain so."
"Yes. But…"
Purbeck took the hands resting upon his shoulders and squeezed them – frenziedly, affectionately, imploringly.
"Please, Cedric, this one thing I ask of you. Allow the subject to drop, absolve yourself of all duty to me, and *never* concern yourself with the subject again."
For a few seconds, they simply stared into each other's eyes and thought their own, and markedly different, thoughts on the subject to be discarded.
Until, drawing himself up and adopting his professional mask, Purbeck shook his friend's hand and became all business:
"Now, professor, if you would not mind, you have caught me in the middle of an important experiment and I really must return to it… I will call the housekeeper to see you to the door…"

*****

It would not be until some three months later, despite Purbeck's pleadings, that the subject would rear its head once again.
And this time, in such a way the pleadings of the most silver-tongued advocate on the continent would not be able to make it go away again…

FIVE

By the time spring had turned into the early summer of 1898, London and its newspaper outlets, soberly factual and luridly fanciful alike, were all of one mind.

An unlikely harmonising that had, in the case of the Times and other respectable disseminators of information, managed to replace the infinitely more incredible and life affirming news of 6 July concerning Marconi's first successful test of a radio telegraph transmission for Lloyd's, between Ballycastle, County Antrim, and Rathlin Island, in Ireland.

The Sir Hemson Carew murder case that was the cause of the above had even been so sensational that the fixation of the more sewer fixated periodicals had turned its less than cerebral attention from an exhaustive investigation of a Piccadilly chorus-girl's liaison with a married, if minor, member of the Royal Family, to the horrific details around the murder of the aforementioned Carew who, though a reprobate when it came to women, was of the charming variety and a man Winterton both knew and grudgingly liked, despite their many and marked differences.

The respite his killing provided in news terms was, however, one for which the ageing Queen Vic, as well as the minor Royal bringing such scandalous attention to her reign, was, no doubt, surely most grateful.

It was indeed, no matter which periodical covered it, a crime of singular ferocity and was rendered all the more notable by the high position – though not so high as the offending Royal - of the victim. The details were few but startling and ensured the feeding frenzy around it only gained fresh impetus with each day that passed without either a culprit or fresh clues being found. What the news outlets did know, however, was enough to ensure and generate much interest from those whose dull lives were in need of enlivening in such a way.

It appeared that a maid servant, living alone in a house not far from the river, had gone up-stairs to bed about eleven and, although a fog eventually rolled over the city in the small hours, the hours from her retiring until one in the morning were cloudless.

The lane the maid's window overlooked was, according to the shocked young woman herself and others still abroad at the late hour, brilliantly lit by the full moon and being a girl of romantic disposition, she sat down upon her trunk which stood immediately under the window and fell into a dream of musing.
Never, she told those who later questioned her, eyes streaming with tears, had she felt more at peace with all men or thought more kindly of the world.
And, as she so sat, transfixed by both her dreams and the moonlit landscape, she became aware of an aged but elegant and – her words - *"very beautiful"* gentleman drawing along the lane beneath and to her left.
It was a few seconds later that, looking down and to her right, that she saw advancing to meet him another person.
When they had come within speaking distance, directly beneath the maid's window, the older man, she recalled, bowed politely but reticently, almost as if he were wary of the newcomer, but, just the same, the maid did not feel as if his words were anything other than courteous and correct.
It was at this point that the moon shone upon his face as he spoke and the girl was pleased to take in its lineaments.
According to her, it seemed to breathe a kind of charming rascality and, had it not been for the seriousness of his expression, she might well have taken the meeting for one with a friend.
Presently though, she roused herself from contemplation of the distinguished older gentleman who was more and more taking her fancy and allowed her eye to wander to the other.
It was with surprise that she noted, and despite the older man's courtesy and impeccable manners, that his fellow-traveller did not utter a word in response but seemed simply to listened with an ill-contained impatience.
Which was when, not seconds later, impatience turned into a great flame of anger and foot stamping causing the older gentleman to take a step back with the air of one very much surprised and, she thought, more than a little fearful.
It would turn out he had cause to be.
The next moment, and the girl knew not from where it came, a heavy cane appeared and, with what the distraught and terrified girl described as an ape-like fury, the distinguished gentleman had been clubbed to the cobbles and was being trampled underfoot under a storm of kicks and blows of such savagery she could hear the poor man's bones being audibly shattered; this as she watched, too horrified to even scream and draw attention to the assault.

Again and again the boots of the assailant thudded into the by now unresisting and insensate body of the older man and it was only when she saw his legs kicked apart and those same boots begin to thud into his manhood – again, and again, and again – that she could bear no more and fainted dead away.
It was two o'clock when she came to herself enough to raise the alarm for the police and the murderer was long gone.
However, the stick which had opened the homicide upon the savaged body of the victim was found and discovered to be of some rare and very tough and durable wood. Durability which had not survived the frenzy and power of the attack but had broken in the middle under the stress of such insensate cruelty.
A part of the stick, it turned out, had splintered in half and rolled into the neighbouring gutter; while the other, so the police maintained, had been carried away by the murderer.
A purse and a gold watch were found upon the victim: but no cards or papers, except a sealed and stamped envelope, which he had been probably carrying with him with the intention of posting it later in the morning, and which bore the name and address of a Professor.
But all of the above, as shocking as it was to both great and not so great, to rich and to poor, to clean and not so clean, was not what gave the crime grisly fascination enough to knock the far more consequential exploits of Signor Marconi and his exploits from the front-pages.
That was reserved for something else the shocked and traumatised maid told the Inspector taking her account of events.
The person carrying out this savage and seemingly arbitrary attack, had been, it turned out…
A woman.

*****

It was not until the next morning that Winterton was told he was the recipient of the letter found upon the victim and given his first look at it – or, to be more precise at this point, its sealed envelope.
He had been taking breakfast when the Inspector and a uniformed constable had arrived and, after they had given him an account of the beating and its fatal circumstances he was, understandably, in no fit condition to return to it.
“I shall say nothing till I have seen the body,” said he after being informed of the letter and taken receipt of the unopened missive; having recognised

instantly in its address the hand of Sir Hemson Carew. “Please have the kindness to wait while I dress and allow my man to prepare you some tea… I shall, if it be acceptable to you, leave the contents of the letter until a later time, but you may rest assured I will share with you its contents if it has even the slightest bearing upon the murder.”
It was acceptable with the Inspector and it was with the same grave countenance that Winterton hurried upstairs to his toilet before hastily donning the clothes Upton had laid out for him.
Not thirty minutes later he was at the police station to which the body had been carried.
As soon as he came into the cell where he lay, he nodded, knowing instantly the identity of the corpse in spite of the terrible injuries inflicted upon him.
“I… I recognise him, I am sorry to say,” he told the Inspector.
Then, knowing the Inspector was waiting, he confirmed what he already suspected before entering:
“His name is Sir Hemson Carew.”
The officer nodded.
“We knew as much, but there remained a need for the body to be identified. So, what with the letter found addressed to you in his pocket, we thought you’d be the best to ask.”
The professor nodded his understanding.
“This will certainly make a deal of noise,” offered the Inspector, professional ambition - and what the bringing to book the killer of such a well-known man could do for his career - not entirely absent from his expression.
“I think we can safely say that it will,” Winterton agreed.
“Perhaps then, professor, you can help us to the killer.”
It was at this point that he narrated the maid’s tale more fully and showed the aghast Winterton the broken stick .
And now, as it had been the maid’s the night before, it was the professor’s turn to lose the colour from his cheeks; colour no amount of personal ambition – had he been possessed of any - could possibly replace.
For the half-stick the Inspector, whose name was Bascombe, had placed before him was one he knew well.
A stick that he recognised, broken and battered as it was, as one that he had himself presented many years before to Alistair Purbeck.

Six

It was later that same afternoon when the professor found his way to Dr. Purbeck's door.

It was Purbeck himself who allowed him in and, without any explanation for answering his own door when he had a housekeeper to perform the chore, showed him down into the basement laboratory in which he spent so much of his time.

Purbeck, Winterton knew, had bought the house from the heirs of a celebrated surgeon; and, his own tastes being more chemical and psychological than anatomical, had simply re-designed and re-fitted the place until it was in line with his own requirements.

Of course, and as we know, it was not the first time he had visited his friend here – not by a longshot – but, as he eyed the dingy and windowless research-space it began to strike him for the first time as somehow… *unpleasant*.

A shiver ran through him and his thoughts professed themselves surprised that, despite it being early summer, a fire burned in the grate and a lighted lamp rested upon the chimney shelf.

It was then, under the light of the lamp, that he took in the face of his friend with more… *attention*.

He looked, Winterton could describe it no other way, deadly sick.

"You have heard the news?" asked the professor.

Purbeck's shudder was an answer in itself, but he gave voice to his knowledge anyway.

"The vendors were crying it in the square. I could hear them from them the dining-room."

"Carew may have been a libertine, but he was also a good and solid man in his way," said Winterton. "He was a colleague of sorts, if not my friend in the way I consider you to be of that number. That is why I want you to tell me truly that you are not hiding his killer."

A look of the utmost anxiety shadowed Purbeck's already solemn features and he appeared to exert an inordinate amount of will to draw himself up and taken on an air of what Winterton recognised immediately as false outrage.

"I'm sure I have no idea of what you are talking about, Cedric. Why on earth should I hide the killer of a man for whom I also had no enmity towards whatsoever? And why would you even suggest such a possibility?"

Winterton shrugged after a non-committal fashion and answered the question

with a question of his own:
“Tell me, Alistair,” he began, manner suddenly disarming, as if the matter was a trifle that had only just occurred to him, “do you still have the walking-cane I presented you when first you graduated?”
The effect upon the younger man was galvanic, his eyes staring out of that growingly emaciated face as if they were witnessing the coming of the horned-one himself.
“Wh-Why do you ask?”
“Humour me, Alistair. I should like to see it again.?”
“I… I lost it, I’m afraid. In a store at Christmas-time. I hadn’t the heart to tell you.”
Winterton pointed to the side of the fireplace, “How remarkable then, that I saw it resting in that very spot not three months ago in April, upon my last visit here.”
Purbeck’s eyes rolled in his head as if he must pass out in his frantic attempt to summon an explanation.
“N-No, Cedric. You are mistaken. It was not the same cane.”
The older man shook his head with sadness and disappointment, “Really, Alistair, I thought that I should not live to see the day that lies would fall from your tongue so glibly.”
For a moment, the professor thought Purbeck would continue his subterfuge, until, with a sigh sounding as much like defeat it made no difference, he slumped into the chair at his desk.
It was some moments later that his former pupil slid open a drawer and retrieved a sheet of folded writing-paper.
“Read this,” said the doctor, offering the note.
The brief letter was written in an odd, angled yet precise hand Winterton took to be a woman’s and was unsigned:

“So, Alistair, you not only defy me once again, knowing how easily I can punish your disobedience, but go so far as to threaten me.
And after all your treacherous behaviour has cost me.
I place my intentions in writing that you won’t think my words idle.
You, of all people must know of what I am now capable and can be assured that I am already in the process of taking steps to ensure

my power over you will soon be even greater than it was previously.

The professor's eyes flickered from the note to Purbeck, waiting for him to explain both the meaning of the words and the identity of the one who wrote them.
He was still waiting when he noticed the brief postscript:

"By the way, I do believe you have mislaid a treasured possession.

"Have you the envelope this arrived in?" Winterton asked.

Purbeck, shook his head, "The note was handed to me."
"By whom?"
"By Reb… My housekeeper."
The near slip of the tongue was not lost upon the concerned professor.
"And who did she say delivered it?"
"She did not."
He averted his eyes unable to meet the reproof aimed back at him for the lie both knew he was about to tell.
"It… It had been slipped through the letterbox by hand and was waiting on the mat when she arose to take… to, hmm, prepare, my breakfast."
"So, Alistair;" Winterton began in a voice as non-judgemental and demanding as he could summon at that moment, praying to high heaven that his young friend was not culpable in the brutal murder of a man both had known and respected. "Will you tell me the name of this person who accuses you of treachery and defiance? And more importantly, how one half of the cane I gifted you came to be found in the gutter next to the brutalised body of a good man we both know was beyond harming a living soul? The very same cane that had just been used to beat him to death?"
Purbeck's head shook violently from side-to-side and the movement seemed to instil some vigour into him.
As well as defiance:
"No, Cedric. I have already shown you the letter and that is not only more than enough but something I am sure she will…"
He broke off before he could go any further and there was, Winterton noted, something of abject terror upon his expression for having given even the sex

of his persecutor away..
It was with an obvious summoning of will that the doctor continued:
“Let us say that, by so doing, I have not only placed my own well-being, such as it currently is, in danger but, and far more importantly, yours. And that is simply something my conscience cannot countenance.”
His voice became almost a whisper:
“There is, after all, so much for which I have already to answer.”
Winterton waited.
And waited.
Then, when it was obvious no answer would be forthcoming:
“Then it would be best for both your soul and your mental well-being that you confide your problems your oldest friend. To both unburden yourself and assure that friend his fears on your behalf are not so dire as he suspects.”
Just for a moment, as Purbeck turned desperate and imploring eyes upon his own, the professor thought his friend might do just that.
But it was not to be.
“No, Cedric,” said Purbeck rising from his chair with purpose. “It is a problem of my making and both its resolution and its consequences must remain with me.”
“But…”
Purbeck held out a hand palm raised to prevent further words from him.
“Really, Cedric. I must resolve this nightmare of my own making myself and refuse to involve you any more than you have already been involved. You have proved yourself – along with Aylesbury, so I am assured – the very best of friends and it is something that warms me.”
“But, surely Alistair…?”
“No, Cedric. You have done enough. Simply by holding your tongue before the police upon the subject of the cane you have incriminated yourself and I will have you involved no further.”
“But…?”
“The time your silence has bought me is inestimable and will – I pray most ardently – allow me to destroy forever the avenues down which my ego and curiosity have led me and the abomination of a creature who found a new-birth in their opening.”
Then, to the professor’s surprise, almost as if his young friend were saying a final goodbye, he took his hand in the two of his own and, eyes moist with

emotion, squeezed it with gratitude.
“Suffice it to say,” he went on, “that I have had a lesson in humility and now have a firmer grasps of the boundaries concerning my curious endeavours and the lengths to which true friendship may extend.”
Then, guiding Winterton toward the stairs and the front-door above them:
“Take care, my dear friend, I truly hope to see you again at some time in the future…”

SEVEN

The newsboys, as he made his way to Aylesbury's in Cavendish Square were still crying themselves hoarse along the footways:

"Special edition. Shocking murder of Sir Hemson Carew."

It was the death-notice of a man Winterton had respected – even if he had been too socially frivolous to ever be considered an intimate.

A death-notice all the more chilling for the certainty growing in the professor's mind that it would not be long before yet another friend – and this time a close one – could soon be sharing a similar fate in regard of both his life and his, till now, impeccable and beyond reproach reputation.

All of which, given his knowledge – his fluttering thoughts turning to the letter he had yet to read waiting for him at his Russell Square home – placed him front and centre of a right and royal dilemma.

Even more so now that he had neglected to mention his knowledge of the cane's ownership.

It was with a sense of some small relief that he was shown into Aylesbury's chambers and felt free to unburden himself to the only other man aside from Purbeck who knew almost as much as he regarding the problem.

To say he was shocked by what greeted him was to advocate understatement.

And not just by the great doctor's appearance – though this last was disturbing in itself.

In the few days since he had last seen him, the famous doctor had aged visibly. In fact, this man, who was some two decades the professor's junior, might easily have been described as a contemporary.

"My word, Jacob," Winterton exclaimed, unable to help himself. "Are you ill?"

The pale and sunken cheeks of the once ruddy and hearty man effected an attempt at a smile and succeeded only in alarming the older man further; but it was not so much, these tokens of a swift physical decay that arrested the professor's notice so much as a look in the eye and a quality of manner he had last seen upon the face of…

"Purbeck."

There was in the look of Aylesbury that same look of some deep-seated terror Winterton had seen upon Purbeck's expression earlier that day.

As it turned out, the professor did not need to press his friend and co-conspirator to learn what was troubling him.
The effort hardly necessary when Aylesbury volunteered the information himself.
“I have, as you can plainly see, had something of a shock to the system over these past few weeks,” he said. “A shock from which I fear my pride and the manhood I once valued so highly shall never recover.”
“Purbeck is… *disturbed* …too,” observed Winterton, shocked himself from both the doctor’s condition and the words with which he described it. “I have just come from him.”
Aylesbury's face drooped further and he held up a trembling hand:
“It is thanks to our young friend, Purbeck, that you see me under such circumstances.”
“I… I don’t understand. Are you saying he is responsible for the condition in which you find yourself?”
Aylesbury nodded, looking nothing but a pale imitation of the confident and vibrant man Winterton had seen not days before.
“Both directly and indirectly, Aylesbury told him. “The indirect cause related to you as well as him.”
The professor was both hurt and aghast:
“You…? You blame me for your indisposition?”
“Indirectly? And with all the unconditional absolution such a description confers?” asked Aylesbury in a voice barely resembling the hearty bass-tenor the professor was used to hearing from him. “Yes. I do. Had you not brought your concerns to me, I should not be as you find me now.”
And Purbeck? Whatever ails you, you absolve him also?”
The doctor needed to give it thought.
Then:
“Yes… Though not so unconditionally.”
Winterton nodded, marshalling all his intellectual force, and the diligence and discipline of years that went with it, to not let his distress at finding his co-conspirator in such a state of physical and mental anguish reveal itself in its entirety - though it was impossible and pointless trying to conceal it completely.
“Then perhaps,” he began, “your absolution having been given, you will now see fit to throw light upon my ignorance in regard of your plight?”

“You would be better asking Purbeck and his infernal housekeeper,” Aylesbury answered, real venom surfacing in his emaciated features as his thoughts took in the woman in question – if he has mind and will enough to speak in her presence.”

“I have just come from him and he assures me he will say nothing further on the matter,” said the professor, thoughts returning to the letter written in a woman’s hand that had threatened the younger doctor with some undefined punishment for having had the gall to… *defy* …her.

“I am not surprised at that,” was the reply. “Someday, Winterton, after I am dead, you may perhaps come to learn the right and wrong of this shameful affair. But I cannot be the man to tell you. As much as I wish to and strain to do so at this very moment.”

“But what constrains you? There is nobody but the two of us here and you have my word I will not repeat what you say, should, that is, you require me not to do so,”

The doctor’s face became a grotesque rictus of effort and concentration of a sudden and the professor knew he was attempting to do just as he had asked him, enlarged eyes fairly popping from his emaciated visage as he tried to form the words he required.

“She…”

“She, what?... For heaven’s sakes, man! Tell me what ails you that I may lend my assistance.”

Aylesbury attempted to begin again, sucking great gulps of air into his wheezing lungs:

“She… She…”

So great was his distress as he attempted to provide the necessary words, Winterton was on the verge of telling him to desist, so great was the pain etched into those formerly handsome and distinguished features.

Kindly advice he was prevented from delivering when the doctor saved him the trouble and simply passed out.

EIGHT

As soon as he got home, unable to even contemplate the supper his man had left out for him, so great was his agitation and concern for the stricken Aylesbury - who himself was now sleeping in his bed and attended by his own servant after the man had called for one of his fellow physicians - Winterton sat down, wrote to Purbeck, and had his man deliver it to his Bloomsbury address that very night.

To his surprise, not expecting his friend to even receive it if his *"infernal housekeeper"*, as Aylesbury had described her, had her way, the very next morning a response waited upon the mat in his hall that made the professor suspect it could only have been hand-delivered by Purbeck himself.

It was somewhat pathetically worded, self-pitying and recriminatory in drift, and also, darkly mysterious:

"To my great friend,

Dear, Cedric, your description of Dr. Aylesbury fills me with a sympathy and remorse no words of mine can adequately describe. More so, as he is a complete innocent whose only desire – in common with your own - was to perform a service for a friend. In his case, a friend with whom he had been estranged these past four years or so.

I can only tell you that his condition, as is my own, is directly attributable to that boundless and egotistical curiosity both the doctor and yourself assured me many times would end in ways I could not predict and might not find to my liking.

Had I only listened and taken heed of my two friends whose wisdom and prescience so far outstripped my own.

As we know, I chose in my folly not to be swayed by either of you and we are now in a position that is not only affecting me – how I wish justice were served and that were the case – but has had and is having the most abominable effect upon those innocent and undeserving of the fate that has befallen them.

Consequently, I do not blame our old friend for not wishing, as you say, to have anything further to do with me, and I share his view that we must never meet again.

Trust me when I tell you that, from henceforth, his complete exclusion from my home and all those who currently reside within it, is his only hope

of ever finding himself returned to something resembling the vibrant and admirable man we know him to be.
Perhaps, if you would accept a suggestion from one so culpable for his current condition, you might propose to him that he take a spell away, perhaps abroad, from a neighbourhood and a city I fear will only fetch him more suffering.
My fondest wish is that you would accompany him and remove yourself also from this miasma of foulness in which my confounded egotism has seen us enveloped.
As for me, I mean from henceforth to lead a life of extreme seclusion.
Even to you.
No!
ESPECIALLY TO YOU.
You must not doubt either my gratitude or my friendship when you find my door is shut to you on a permanent basis from this point on, but must suffer me to go my own dark way. I have brought on myself and others a punishment and a danger that I cannot name. For if I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also. My pain is too immense to describe when I think of the humiliation I have inflicted upon those close to me who could in no way whatsoever be said to be deserving of such treatment.
Alas, I cannot say the same for myself.
If you can extend one last act of kindness towards me, my dear friend, I would ask that you forget I continue to exist and extend the same courtesy to the woman whose name is Rebecca North and one you know as my housekeeper.
I beseech you, and as you value your very sanity and masculinity, to avoid this woman as you would the Black Death itself. To be sure, it is my own meddling that has helped fashion the creature she now is. But that moulding – unintentional upon my part - could not have been achieved without some deep-seated and undetectable putridity of character lurking in her all too amenable and unthreatening daily manner.
Please, my friend, as you value the memories of me in better placed days, forget my existence and continue on with your own, and wholly exemplary, life.
Your true and ever loyal friend,
Alistair Purbeck.

It was only then, placing down the letter and knowing sleep would prove impossible to a mind overflowing with dark questions and even grimmer concerns, that the professor recalled the other letter awaiting his attention.
The letter addressed to him upon the gruesomely murdered body of Hemson Carew.
The same letter he had promised the Inspector he would read and then present to him.
If that is, its contents were relevant to the murder in any way.
It was with a feeling of utter weariness and a presentiment of oncoming doom that Winterton's flagging body took itself to his safe and retrieved the missive its owner felt sure would do just that.
Fortifying himself with a generous measure of the brandy he had been consuming in greater volume recently, the tired and foreboding eyes of the professor recognised the hand of the deceased immediately:

Dear Winterton,

I shan't bother with the usual preamble under the circumstances, but will get to the purpose of this letter immediately.

That its contents will serve to confirm you in your opinion of me as an irresponsible libertine is neither here nor there as you well know how impervious I am to such comments in regard of me. Those same contents I realise will shock your sober and correct mind – even where I am concerned - to its foundations. Unfortunately, it is not my reputation, well known as it is, that troubles me and will. I have no trace of doubt, worry your loyal soul beyond measure.

Dr. Alistair Purbeck is in difficulties of the most pressing, debasing, and life-threatening kind.

Yes. You read my words correctly. Your most esteemed friend, he of the moral rectitude approaching your own – be he so much younger –

finds himself in a trap of his own making and with each day that passes yet another slab of granite add itself to the prison-cell he has fashioned for himself and becomes more impregnable.

How do I know this?

Allow me to explain.

Two nights ago, I could be found in my usual, shall we say, hostelry. It is where I enjoy my taste for women of, again shall we say, a less than wholesome nature.

I know as a stone-cold fact that you will have no wish to hear full and vivid descriptions of what goes on between myself and these women, but it cannot be helped.

I am afraid if you wish to know something of young Purbeck's predicament and extend him your assistance then you will be forced to read words that, while not in the least flattering to their writer, are the least I can do for the young doctor and keep my conscience clear.

You will understand more when I tell you that the woman of whom I am about to speak is none other than Purbeck's own housekeeper who goes by the name of Rebecca North.

I once, a year or two ago, had occasion to visit Purbeck at his home. I was admitted by a rather handsome woman to my tastes who happened to be Purbeck's housekeeper. She appeared to be a tall and well-built hour-glass figure I took to be in the latter part of her third decade or the early part of the fourth.

Well, my dear Cedric, you know as well as I my weakness for examples of a more, let us say, buxom womanhood.

I was soon doing my best to charm this woman whose name I learned

was Rebecca North. There was no wedding-band upon her finger – you know how uncharacteristically moral I am about such things – and nothing to indicate one had ever been placed upon it. Which, as you also know, Purbeck's housekeeper or not, made her fair game to me.

You may recall of the period in question that I was indulging in an and immature experiment with, let us say, "Damage limitation".

Do you recall the somewhat thick and handsome beard I sported at the time?

And do you also recalls that, in my vanity, I had taken to disguising the onset of age visible in the ever increasing number of grey hairs by colouring both the hair upon my scalp as well as the aforementioned beard?

Yes, it was pathetic and I looked ludicrous.

I confess this and, if you remember, I soon desisted from the practice.

However, it was in this condition that I met the woman we both know as Rebecca North.

To the surprise of a vanity you know to be ultimately harmless – possibly because of these ludicrous attempts to appear younger on my behalf – she remained somewhat aloof from my normally successful attempts to seduce the female of the lower orders and simply went to inform Purbeck I waited upon him.

This before showing me to the downstairs laboratory from which wild horses in tandem with the 7th Hussars have trouble dragging him.

It was when she showed me in, and I noticed the look of yearning plastered across her features as Purbeck approached in welcome, that I understood her imperviousness to my own, well-oiled and practiced, charms.

For the look I saw aimed towards him was nothing less than the purest and most piteous longing.

It was as obvious as day.

There.

I have set the scene for what I need to tell you, and what passed between myself and Purbeck after she left us together is of supreme unimportance — assuming I could recall it at all after the intervening passage of time.

Which fetches me nicely to the events of two nights ago.

In a tavern not far from the river's edge — a tavern there is no requirement to name as it plays no part other than as host to the events I am about to relate - I saw Purbeck's smitten housekeeper once again.

Though it was not until she approached me, ignorant of having ever met me, thanks to the absent beard and the fact both scalp and facial hair had been allowed to return to its natural condition, that I suddenly found her familiar.

Familiar and yet... disquietingly different.

It was not until I freely introduced myself by my Christian-name — notoriety having long ago lost any fear it might once have held for me in regard of both the press and polite society — and she offered up her own name, that I recalled our meeting those years before.

What made me hold my tongue regarding our previous acquaintance I cannot say, save for the fact she appeared so entirely different from the reserved and smitten domestic I had met back then.

That, Cedric, and the eyes I had noted at that time to be a rather attractive blue had transformed themselves into a vivid and disturbingly compelling... green!

She was dressed in far more expensive clothing than on the occasion of our previous meeting – though they were not such as a true lady might choose for herself – and there was something overpoweringly sensual about her.

So sensual, in fact, I truly believe it was only my surfeit of experiences of a carnal kind that allowed me to keep my defences raised against her.

For it was not just her impossibly altered eyes that had my senses in a condition of alarm.

Call me fanciful if you will -but some metaphysical divining told me I was in the presence of pure evil; or, if not that, then malice at such an advanced and malevolent level as makes no difference.

Man or no man, my first inclination was to simply bid her good-night and take myself off to my chambers – so disturbed was I.

Any previous intention I may have had in – forgive me once again – acquainting my flesh with her own had been vanished as if it were no more than a leaf in the face of a cyclone.

But I was also curious as to whether she was in the service of our mutual friend still and felt he should be told what kind of a woman he had in his employ.

A few pints of porter and some extremely rough sherry on our respective parts later, and I had my answer.

Tucked away in a relatively secluded corner of the packed and fume-filled hostelry, her tongue grew loose and she began to tell me... No... To boast to me... of the handsome doctor for whom people thought she worked.

That is right, Cedric... "Thought" she worked.

According to her, he obeyed her and accepted her authority over him as if he were the most weak and needy of puppy's and she his female owner.

I hesitate for Purbeck's sake to relate to your innocent ears the duties HE performed for HER, but there is nothing for it.

Our mutual friend, Winterton, is no more the master of his own home when it is just the two of them.

Not in any sense we would regard as right and normal.

When the door is closed behind them and he is alone with this woman, it is he who becomes the domestic and she who rules the house.

And with a rod of iron she is not in the least reticent to use upon our friend and her, so-called "Master".

Yes, Cedric, the last was intended to be literal and Miss North assures me that if you were to see Purbeck in a state of undress you would see the weals of her punishments across not only his shoulders bu the back of his legs and... imagine her coquettish laugh as she informed this last to me... his arse itself.

You may only imagine the anger and revulsion upon hearing these

descriptions fall from her — admittedly sensuous — lips.
Outrage that was a much for my own account as Alistair's.
Did she truly take me for such a scoundrel I could be both amused and attracted to such… atrocities?
She went on to tell me, in fact, that she enjoys nothing more than to keep him naked about the house when they are alone and unobserved, and that he is powerless to prevent her from ordering him to present himself before her in such a way.
Should this all prove true, Cedric, and I fear that it will, it is bad enough; but there is worse to come.
For not only, according to her, is she the mistress of the house in domestic matters but has also become his queen when it comes to those sexual matters to which you are so indifferent and I am so addicted. And theirs, sexually as well as domestically, I assure you, is no equal partnership.
Plied with more sherry, she went on to imply — and seemed proud to do so - that, through his own arrogance and disregard of her, he had become addicted to both her control and the body with which she reinforced it.
It would appear that, though she insists she has denied him the pleasure of "placing his filthy cock in her hungry pussy", that his tongue has not only found a taste for her bare or stockinged feet but — forgive me, Cedric — her hungry pussy itself, and even the arse residing at its rear.
You will now understand why I prefer to impart these things to you in a letter rather than see the look of horror upon your face were I to

speak of them in your presence.

The only consolation I received from my acquaintance with this foul woman was the look upon her face when, considering myself in receipt of all she had to say of note, I rose to my feet, told her my full-name, and assured her that I not only knew her employer and where he lived but had met her before.

I also assured her that I would be visiting Purbeck at my earliest convenience to inform him of her slander against his person.

Looking back, I cannot say if the malevolence of her expression outweighed her shock as she tried to place me in her memory, but I assure you both were present.

I wrote this letter this evening, Cedric, and I shall post it later - perhaps after I have visited an altogether more salubrious establishment than the one in which I met this perfidious woman.

I find myself, you see, in need of a few libations of something stronger than either porter or sherry myself after having thought further upon her words.

I end, though, with what I found the most troubling of her assertions in young Alistair's regard.

This was the assertion that he has named her the sole beneficiary of his estate and all his chattels in the event of his death.

I am sure you, as I, will wish to verify such outrageous claims and will, should they prove true, rush to extend Purbeck all the help he needs to extricate himself from a situation I fear already has him in its toils.

I await your reply and stand ready to assist you in any way you see

fit.

Your friend,

Sir Hemson Carew

The professor slumped in his seat and again reached for the brandy as an image of his friend with his mouth pressed to the most intimate and proscribed part of a woman's…

With an effort of will, he strangled the repugnant thought off and again bemoaned to himself how his young friend could possibly have placed himself in such a situation; the questions surrounding that situation coming at him speedily and numerously.

For a start:

"Did he actually believe all that he had been told and seen for himself?"

"Yes," he cried aloud to the walls of the empty study.

Even Carew's claims in the last letter he wrote before being savaged?

To his astonishment, his unrivalled belief in logic reserving no place for those claims made by the fanciful on behalf of the metaphysical; the answer was again in the affirmative.

And now, armed only with Carew's suspicions and the words of a housekeeper – albeit a strange example of the breed - he knew that his word given to the Inspector in regard of the letter being in any way related to Carew's murder had to be honoured.

Except, thought this most rigorous and trustworthy of men, his word had not been given upon the time when the contents of that letter would be delivered…

Nine

It was the following day that he made the walk to Cavendish Square to check upon Aylesbury.

Only to find another doctor and a trusted colleague had taken over his practice and that Aylesbury himself – and as sick as he had seemed – had said he was taking himself off to France that very morning.

No forwarding address had been left and Aylesbury had left with only his clothes and his servant.

But his biggest shock had arrived later in the evening as day succumbed to twilight and the professor took his way home from the reading room at the British Library, where he had used the orderly quiet to calm and order his thoughts.

Whether he had consciously or subconsciously taken a route that took him past Purbeck's villa he could not say but, as he passed with it to his left, he saw Purbeck upon a bench on the green at the square's centre.

Being only human and having thought long and hard enough about his friend's problems for what seemed like an eternity, the professor was of a mind to simply pass on and find the sanctuary of his own home and have some respite the worries assailing him; but the sight of his friend, sitting motionless upon the bench and taking the air with slumped shoulders and a look of infinite sadness, drew him towards the scene.

"Alistair," he called when he was within a few paces. "What are you doing?"

"Cedric!" he exclaimed with evident pleasure at seeing him there despite having warned him to stay away. "This is a most welcome surprise; though I had not expected to see you again after our last meeting."

"Would you like to talk?" asked the professor, hoping that he might, finally, find the answer to what was ailing his friend and praying it was not as the letter of Sir Hemson Carew indicated.

"I should like to very much. But… No, it… it is quite impossible; I dare not. The house is really not fit at the moment, what with one thing and another."

"No matter," smiled the professor. "it is a pleasant evening and we can speak here."

"That… That would be nice," returned the doctor with a smile of his own.

"Did you know," Winterton began, that Aylesbury took your advice and, even as we speak, is making his way towards the continent?"

To his credit, the professor saw relief upon the face of his former pupil.

“I… I am relieved to hear it,” breathed the younger man; the words barely uttered, before the relief was struck out of his face and succeeded by an expression of such abject terror and despair, as froze Winterton’s very blood.
Drawn in the direction of Purbeck’s gaze, the professor’s own eyes were quick enough to catch just a glimpse of a female form gesturing towards the doctor from a lighted first-floor window of his own villa.
This before the window was instantly thrust down and the light extinguished.
“I… I must go, Cedric. I… I am required inside.”
“Yes,” the professor replied, usual thoughtful equanimity giving way to a rare burst of anger, “you must not keep your master waiting.”
He was not sure which startled Purbeck more: his anger or the use of the word *“Master”*, but the look on the doctor’s face was one of both anguish and shame.
“That is right, Alistair. You heard me correctly.”
Purbeck’s attempt at deflection was half-hearted and puerile.
“I… I really have no idea what you are talking about, my dear…”
“Really, Winterton interjected crossly. “Has your base obsession with this woman lowered your intellectual capacity along with your sense of decency?”
Purbeck could not meet his eyes.
“A man, a colleague and a friend of ours, has been beaten to death so savagely he was barely recognised. His… His genitals stomped into nothingness by the boots of a fiend in female form whose identity we both know. Yet still you prevaricate.”
“Please, Cedric. I have explained as much as I am able. There is nothing more to be done for me. No doubt you will now tell the police it was my cane found in half at Carew’s side and the gallows will release me from this hell upon earth to which my actions have sentenced me. But, I assure you, no court in the land will ever believe what it is that has brought me to such a pass.”
“And you do not think you owe it to me and the memory of poor Carew and the torment of Aylesbury to at least enlighten me on the subject?”
“Cedric, I…” His eyes flickered up to the now darkened window on the upstairs landing of the house to which his… *‘Master’* …had just summoned him.
“Here, read this,” said Winterton, taking out the letter from Carew he carried

in his jacket and offering it to the suffering Purbeck.
The doctor did as he was bade and it was not long before tears flowed freely down his pale cheeks.
“I am so ashamed, Cedric; that my arrogance and hunger to explore fresh field could have resulted in such suffering.”
Winterton lay a hand upon his arm, “I know you as well as I know anyone, my boy, and I have no doubt what has happened was not your intention.”
“It was not,” Purbeck agreed in a beaten voice. “I wished only to locate the source of good and evil in a person; that by signposting these two human capacities we might eradicate the one while preserving the other.”
“And you failed, of course,” stated the professor as a matter of fact.
Purbeck’s look was almost sympathetic, as if for one who has understood nothing.
“That, Cedric, is my shame. For not only did I not fail but I succeeded in a way I fear could prove disastrous for all and sundry were my findings to find themselves in the wrong hands.”
“You mean to say…?”
“Yes, Cedric. I developed a compound capable of separating our core morality one from the other.”
“And you…?”
The distraught doctor nodded.
“And tested it upon my housekeeper after finding the compound had no effect upon me whatsoever after having tested it on a particularly ill-natured chimpanzee and seen it become instantly calm and remain in that condition.”
He paused.
“That I chose Miss North as my first human test-subject after myself was my greatest regret of them all, Cedric; for I did so believing the effects would be of tiny duration and neglected to secure Miss North’s permission. I could not know that, for all her outward niceness, there lurked in her soul so profound an evil awaiting the means of its freedom.”
“Oh, my!”
“You are no more ashamed of me than I am of myself, Cedric. But worse was to follow. For not only did my compound separate her good and evil impulses as I intended, but the impulse it chose to eradicate was not the one of my choosing.”
“And the duration proved to be not so inconsiderable as you thought?”

Precisely. But worse was to follow.2
Winterton waited.
“There was a side-effect to my compound, you see. One that ensured contact with her flesh against another somehow triggered a chemical reaction which supplied her with power over this other person.”
Purbeck paused once more.
Then:
“Power that was not likely to be used benevolently; given her more compassionate and sensitive side had been eradicated in favour of her more vindictive and sadistic impulses.”
“My God!” Winterton exclaimed.
“Indeed, Cedric. And it would be bad enough if it ended there.”
“You mean there…? There’s more?”
Purbeck nodded dispiritedly and with shame.
“There is something that happens to the one she touches that… that makes them crave her ill-treatment of them… I can only imagine that poor Carew’s flesh did not touch her own and was the reason his own masculinity was impervious to her. Though this was not the case for either myself or Aylesbury and god alone knows how many other poor wretches…
“Why is it, do you think, that Aylesbury was unable to convey to you his knowledge of her and of what she is capable?”
Winterton shook his head, at a loss.
“He was unable to do so, Cedric, for the simple reason she *commanded* him *not* to do so.”
The full meaning of his friend’s words threw the professor into a condition as near to hysteria as his temperament would allow him to approach.
“We must do something, Alistair, before this becomes a contagion,” cried the professor as the full import of where his friend’s scientific meddling, well-meant as it might have been, crashed with full force upon his senses.
“There is but one thing I – not you – can do. And I intend to do it this evening.”
Winterton was instantly alarmed:
“Tell me you are not thinking of doing what I think you are intending to do,” he implored.
“There is no other way, my friend – that is if I can bring myself to do it.”
“But surely, with the help of the proper authorities…?”

“The police will be useless against her, Cedric. She has but to make contact with the flesh of a constable, and inspector, or even a commissioner, for them to become her obedient chattels.”
Purbeck stood suddenly and offered a hand to his friend.
“And do you really think they would believe my *‘outlandish’* explanations?”
Winterton acknowledged this last truth with sagging shoulders.
“No, Cedric, it must be done soon. Very soon. Before she realises the full-extent of her powers and it becomes too late…
His eyes became misty with nostalgia and fondness:
“Take my hand and bid me a fond farewell, my friend, for I would not drag you down any further into this cess-pool of my own making. I will not have you tainted by a disgrace I have brought upon myself and so thoroughly deserve.”
Winterton’s hand was in his friend’s without his being aware of having lifted it, his thoughts full of conflicting messages his cloistered life had ill-equipped him to contend with.
“What will you do, Alistair?” he asked in a helpless voice. “When by your own admission you can do nothing but obey her will?”
Purbeck gave out a rueful laugh.
“I have the means, my friend.”
“Which is?”
Again, Alistair Purbeck’s smile was rueful, with just a hint of the arrogance and trust in his own powers the professor recalled from more pleasant and hopeful times:
“A means delivered to me by the consumption of the alcohol with which I would once have so little part.”
And then, before the professor had time to either form words likely to prevent him; his former pupil turned and strode off the green before disappearing through his own door.

EPILOGUE

It was mid-September in Le Touquet, but an Indian summer had ensured there were no fewer tourists and locals seeking the cooling air of its seafront and the charm of its pavement cafes - together with the coffees, absinthe and pastis, they served.

Dr. Jacob Aylesbury had read of the fire that had taken the life of Dr. Alistair Purbeck and that of his housekeeper, a Miss Rebecca North, back in August. This after his, necessarily, behind the news copy of the Times had been delivered to him to his comfortable lodging upon the beach from whose windows he could see the dunes at the north of the beacon and the English Channel spread out before him.

The news, as sad as he had been to hear of Purbeck's fate, was no less than a tonic to him as his thoughts again relived the grotesque humiliations he had experienced at the hands and feet of that abomination of a woman.

Abominations he had barely found the strength to remove himself from with the aid of his faithful manservant, Hopkiss.

Of course, he had learned more from a letter of Winterton's the colleague who had taken over his practice - and been sworn to secrecy in regard of his whereabouts - had forwarded to him in his Gallic exile.

It appeared the house had been set ablaze by a person or persons unknown and the ashes of what was thought to be the bodies of master and housekeeper found in the remains of the bedroom - though they were so charred as to make a certain identification impossible.

A bedroom, according to the professor, that been locked and its key not found.

No mention had been made by Winterton to the police of either the broken cane or the letter he had received from Carew, and he was content to have saved the reputation of a friend he considered to have gone wrong only in his noble desire to do right.

It was, he had written, a withholding he was glad to make now that the woman who was the root of all their problems was no longer a member of the mortal coil.

Though he assured Aylesbury he would understand if he felt differently towards Purbeck, in light of his own… *experiences*.

The professor had signed off with his most fond desire that, wherever Aylesbury was, he hoped his letter would ease his mind in regard of the

woman and that both his body and his mind were in the process of healing that he might again make his acquaintance at some time in the near future.
Aylesbury had indeed put the letter aside with a mixture of relief, but there had been with its discarding a lingering and sour aftertaste.
As if at some forthcoming disaster.
Just the same, he was healing and had toyed with the idea of returning to his former home and the lucrative practice he had entrusted to another.
But the memories he knew awaited his arrival continued to make the prospect impossible for him just yet.
In fact, even as sat upon the café's terrace and sipped at his coffee before glancing at the two-days-old edition of The Times Hopkiss had only just delivered to him, memories of what that foul woman had inflicted upon him – and his craven and supine acceptance of them - chilled his skin to the bone despite the unseasonal warmth of the sun in which he was bathed.
Again he relived the complete eclipse of his own will before her own, his sexual subjugation playing itself out against the back of the eyes he had closed that he might run no risk of a perceptive observer reading his shame in them.
Once more, he relived the sight of her powerful thighs astride his head and the malevolent smile aimed down at him from mesmeric green eyes as she prepared to lower her alabaster arse to his waiting face.
Again, he smelt the earthy smell of her most private orifice as it wriggled upon the unwilling nose she had wriggled into her crack and, worse, recalled the shaming sexual excitement he had taken from her usage of him – excitement he still felt if the stirring in his thankfully loose trouser spoke truly.
Even dead, he could still sense the smell of her arousal as she used a finger to massage her clitoris while aiming all kinds of foul and undeserved imprecations at his beaten head – this before commanding him to use her tongue to bathe and titillate that which no man's tongue was designed to serve.
No humiliation for him was enough for quench her sadistic appetite and no part of her body was so sacred that he could not be ordered to use his tongue to attend it.
The creamy soles of her feet and the slender toes with their painted nails; the slit of her womanhood beneath the lush vegetation of a bush as red as her

flaming hair; the full and incredible breasts above.
Even her navel and armpits, had all known the attentions of his slavish tongue.
And he had allowed it.
Not *only* allowed it but wallowed in his base worship of this female abomination.
“Votre pain-au-chocolat, Monsieur,” a waiter cut into his thoughts with welcome intrusion, placing his breakfast treat before him and leaving Aylesbury grateful for the interruption that took him from such base and painful thoughts.
Grateful for the cooling breeze coming in off the Channel, he again turned his attention to his newspaper and the delicious pastry for which he had developed such a taste.
Only then, after enjoying a mouthful of the pastry that had become something of a weakness during his sojourn across the channel, did the doctor turn to his Times and begin to take in the news from his homeland; thoughts of his female tormentor gradually diminishing as the familiar names, places, and faces of home brought a reassuring calm.
Until that is, he reached page two.

“Foul-Play Suspected in Death of Professor”

For a moment, he prayed that his first fear was unwarranted and his imagination was being over-fertile.
Until he saw the picture.
There, staring out at him, was a picture of the benign old Winterton, above a few scant details of what the authorities were becoming increasingly sure was his murder.
Aylesbury was still reading of the death of his old friend when he heard the scraping of a chair at his side and someone settling down alongside him.
“Happy to see me, Jacob?” said a low-born voice he knew all too well as he stared, lost and helpless, into a pair of the most vivid and most evil of green eyes.
The paper fell to his lap and he stared about him as if for help.
“Yes,” she continued, “I knew you would be pleased.”
“I… I…” he tried to protest.

“Hush now, Jacob. I am here to take care of you from now on,” she told him, her hand reaching out to stroke his thigh and fetching from him a reaction from his netheregions he would far rather have not made.
Her smile beneath the flaming red-hair she had pushed from her face and tied at the back was positively beatific.
“The first thing we must do, though, is to send your interfering servant back to England.”
“But…? But…?”
A slim finger placed upon his lips quelled any further interruptions.
“After all,” she continued; “what use is a servant to me when I have you to see to my… *needs*.”
Aylesbury looked on with terror and utter impotence as she reached across to tear off a piece of the pain-au-chocolate he had been enjoying and which no longer existed for him.
“Then,” she went on, “we can take up again from where we were so rudely interrupted by your interfering old, and now, thanks to me, deceased, friend…”

THE END