

THE ELEPHANT MAN

CHRISTINE SPARKS



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THE ELEPHANT MAN

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of millions.

THE ELEPHANT MAN

THE
ELEPHANT MAN

A Novel By
Christine Sparks



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Contents

Cover

Title Page

Copyright

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Epilogue

Dedication

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Chapter 1

“A wicked birth ... monstrous ... evil ...”

The elderly man had come out of the shadows so suddenly that Dr. Frederick Treves had not been aware of him until he heard the shaking voice. He turned abruptly, trying to see the man by the poor light of the smoking oil lamps. He could just make out a ravaged face, the lips trembling, the eyes glazed with horror.

“I beg your pardon?” said Treves politely. “Did you speak to me?”

“Wicked,” the stranger whispered again. “For God’s sake leave this place.” He was sweating, and even in this gloom Treves’ professional eye told him that the man was on the verge of vomiting.

Treves looked back toward the little stage that had previously held his attention. In a large bell jar hung a “baby” that closer inspection revealed to be a china doll, with a large snake growing out of its neck. Labeled “The Deadly Fruit of Original Sin” it was the clumsiest of fakes, and Treves could see nothing in it to have so disturbed his companion. He wondered he’d underestimated the effect of a few obvious tricks and a bit of dim lighting.

“I assure you it’s nothing but a fake,” he informed the elderly man kindly. “If you look closer you can see ...”

“That,” the man interrupted him scornfully. “I can see through *that!* But down there ...” His lips began to shake again so violently that he was forced to clamp them firmly together. From somewhere in the long canvas corridor behind him a commotion was growing.

“Get out of here,” he said. “For pity’s sake get out. Don’t go near that evil thing.”

Abruptly he burst into tears and pushed past Treves into another corridor that led to the exit. Without waiting any longer Treves plunged ahead in the direction from which the man had appeared. An excitement had taken possession of him. For the first time in this dull afternoon he had picked up a sniff of what he had come to the fun-fair to find. He could not have described what he was searching for. He only knew that he would know it when he found it.

That summer of 1889 was a good one for fun-fairs. Show after show had settled on London’s Hampstead Heath, and Treves had allowed his two young daughters to nag him into taking them to every one. Sometimes he would catch his wife’s accusing eye on him, for Annie knew only too well that his daughters’ pleasure was not his main motive. As soon as he decently could, he would dispatch the rest of his family to the swings and merry-go-round while he made directly for the freak tent.

The freak tent today had been just like so many others he had entered that summer, a maze of black canvas corridors, poorly lit by oil lamps, occasionally opening into wider areas where exhibits lined the walls. The lighting on these exhibits was also kept low, the better to disguise their obvious trickery. Treves had seen it all so many times before, and he was bored to tears with fakes. He had begun to despair of ever making that one unique discovery that he was sure was waiting for him somewhere.

Until today ... until this minute. Now hope and anticipation drew him forward like a magnet. That old man had been genuinely appalled by whatever he had seen. There had been

none of the cheerful bravado that audiences at these shows reserved for the freaks that their hearts they knew were false.

As Treves pushed ahead he could hear a growing noise behind him, and without warning he was shoved aside by two policemen who swept down the corridor with a purposeful air. Unseen ahead they apparently encountered some difficulty, for they were shouting "Make way, Make way!"—an injunction to which nobody seemed to be paying heed.

Treves almost collided with a man coming back down the corridor holding a small boy in his arms. The child was clutching his father's neck in terror, while the man muttered to no one in particular.

"This is too much. They should not allow it—they should not allow it."

Treves' excitement quickened. He felt like a hound that has scented the prey, and he realized that he had somehow become the leader of a little crowd all bent on the same ghoulish errand.

At the far end the passage widened to accommodate a stage that was sideways, so that he could not see what it contained. A woman brushed past him, pulling a little girl with a frightened face. Getting closer to the commotion Treves could see four policemen and a well-dressed, official-looking man, whom he guessed was an alderman, arguing with a disreputable individual who wore shabby clothes, four days' growth of beard, and a stove-pipe hat that looked as if someone might once have taken a punch at it. He was paying little heed to the alderman's attempts to remonstrate with him, as his attention was taken by a hysterical woman who was pummeling him about the head and shoulders, crying, "Beast beast ..."

Apart from his presumed occupation as freak exhibitor, there seemed nothing particularly beastly about the man. The horror therefore lay on the stage. But as Treves moved sideways to see if he could get a good view, he found his way blocked by one of the policemen.

"No, that's right out. Sorry sir, no more viewing," the policeman turned and yelled over his shoulder. "Drop that curtain."

As the curtain fell Treves' darting eyes managed to catch a glimpse of baggy trouser cuffs out of which projected two horribly deformed feet—so knotted with veins and lumps, and so covered with scaly skin that at first he took them to be roots. He felt a sense of shock, for even that quick sight had been enough to convince him that this exhibit bore no relation to the frauds he had seen earlier that afternoon. Whatever was behind that curtain was genuinely monstrous.

For an irritated moment he contemplated arguing with the policeman who was barring his way, then he abandoned the idea. There would be no getting past that implacably solid face.

The woman who had been attacking the owner had now been pulled away and was sobbing on the shoulder of an embarrassed policeman. The owner brushed himself down and yelled at the alderman. Though husky, his voice had an oddly cultivated accent at variance with his appearance and method of earning a living.

"You can't do that!" he was protesting. "I've got my rights!"

"I have the authority to close you down," the alderman said firmly, "and I'm doing just that."

Treves edged away from the policeman to where he could get a good view of the front of the stage, now covered by the curtain. His sharp eyes had spotted a boy of about ten staring at the curtain with the same ghoulish glee most people reserved for the actual exhibits. When

he got closer Treves could see why.

The creature depicted there could have been possible only in a nightmare. It was a crude painted, life-size portrait of a man turning into an elephant. Palm trees in the background suggested the jungle habitat in which this perverted creature might once have roamed. To Treves the most horrible aspect, as he suspected it was intended to be, was that the transformation was less than half complete. There was still more man than elephant. Through the crude garish strokes the artist had somehow managed to depict the agony of a man undergoing a hideous transformation that he had no power to stop.

The crowd was vanishing now, and there was no one to prevent Treves from edging his way quietly toward the curtain. The alderman and the exhibitor continued to rage at each other.

"This exhibit degrades all who see it, as well as the poor creature himself," insisted the alderman.

"He's a freak!" the other bellowed. "How else is he to live?"

"Freaks are one thing. No one objects to freaks, but this is entirely different. This monstrous and ought not to be allowed. These officers will see to it that you are on your way as soon as possible. Good day!"

He turned sharply and left the tent, leaving the other man to shake his head in disgust and mutter, "Moving again. My treasure."

Treves had reached the canvas by now. His hand stretched out. Another moment and he would lift the edge of that curtain and see ...

"Have a care my friend."

Treves jumped as a large meaty hand came down on his own. Beer fumes were blown in his face, and he found himself looking directly into the piggy eyes of the exhibitor.

"Forgive me...," he murmured, and moved away.

He wasted no more time where obviously nothing further could be learned today. Moving ahead of him toward the exit, he could just see the urchin who had been staring at the painted canvas. Treves quickened his step, anxious not to lose him in the crowd, and caught up with the boy at the exit. A short conversation ensued, businesslike on both sides. A shilling changed hands. By the time Treves went off to find his wife and children, he was sure he and the boy understood each other perfectly.

As soon as he emerged into the cool dusk air, he could see his wife, with their daughter just coming out of another tent. Kate, his younger child, was talking a mile a minute. Treves gave an unconscious smile. It was always Kate who was talking.

He fixed his eyes on his wife. At this distance she looked barely more than the girl of twenty he had married fourteen years before. The beauty that had taken his breath away then was settling now into domestic plumpness, but she was still an extraordinarily pretty woman.

He knew he had worn less well. Long hours and a fanatical absorption in his work had worn premature lines on his face and given his skin an unhealthy pallor. And the neat trimmed beard that covered the lower part of his face only partly obscured the fact that he looked older than his thirty-eight years.

Treves combined the ardent soul of an adventurer with the settled ways of a man who liked neatness and order. Having once fallen in love with Anne, he found it more convenient

to continue loving her. To have ceased to do so would have caused disharmony, annoyance and inconvenience that might have interfered with the exciting part of his life, which was his work as a doctor. It was true that his love for her had also, in its turn, acquired a certain domestic plumpness but, as befitted a man of common sense, he kept it in prosperous condition.

She did not see him now. She was absorbed in the effort of staying calm in the shattering din. She was a small woman, and the waves of shrill music seemed to beat on her, but her face was resolutely set as she put a protective arm round each of her little girls' shoulders.

Treves noted with amusement that neither child seemed to notice, or need, the gesture. They were enchanted by their surroundings, giving up themselves happily to the lights, the violent atmosphere. Their childish callousness contrasted sharply with their mother's flinching vulnerability.

It was Jenny, at ten years old the elder, who saw her father first and ran forward excitedly, calling him. He wished he'd had time to get away from the freak tent before his wife noticed him, but it was too late now.

Treves looked down at his daughters' chocolate-covered faces and smiled. Anne, after one glance at the tent, became absorbed in cleaning the chocolate from Jenny's mouth. Six-year-old Kate bounced excitedly.

"Father, may we go in there?" She swept an arm toward the tent, and Anne's attention swerved sharply to her.

"All right, your turn," she said, adroitly swiveling Kate so that she could no longer see the tent with its lurid signs. Treves abstractedly watched Anne at work, rubbing so hard in her nervousness that the child's face was pulled and distorted into a hideous grimace. Kate wriggled away, and at once her face settled back into its normal pretty lines.

Jenny had not spoken since they had caught up with him. She was not a chatterbox, but a child who seldom opened her mouth unless she had something definite to say. It was a habit that had gotten her branded as sullen except by her father, who had been exactly the same. Now she stood doggedly by his side and pointed to the freak tent.

"I want to go in there with Father," she said.

"Well you can't," retorted Anne in a sharper voice than Treves had ever heard her use before.

Treves shook his head at Jenny. She was his pet to whom normally he could refuse nothing. But he would refuse her this.

"No, you can't" he agreed. "I've already been in there."

"But why can't we go again?" she persisted.

"Because you'd be frightened," he explained, talking to her seriously.

"Why?"

"Because the people in there are horribly ugly." Treves knew as soon as he'd said this, that it was a mistake. Jenny was not the little girl to be put off by the idea of horrors. On the contrary, she was as ghoulish a child as a medical father had ever produced, and she had inherited his own delight in the rare and strange. Not for the first time Treves wished she was a boy. Already she showed signs of the chilly, hard-bitten mind a scientist needed. What on earth would a woman do with such a mind?

He knew that the sensible course would be to exert his fatherly authority, to tell Jenny

be silent and obey her parents. But as always he yielded to a desire to know what his argumentative powers, which were already considerable, would produce next.

“Are ugly people frightening?” she challenged him.

He bit back a desire to retort, “Of course they are, you cold-blooded little monster. That’s why you want to go in there.” Instead he settled for, “Most people find them so.”

“Then why do they go to see them?” Jenny’s sharp eyes had flickered to the tent’s entrance where a steady stream of people were passing through.

“Because they like being frightened, I suppose,” he said lamely.

“What about you, Father? Do you like being frightened?”

“They don’t frighten me,” he replied, seeing too late where she was leading him.

“Then why do you go to see them?”

Before he could think of an answer, Anne intervened to put an end to what struck her as totally improper conversation. The readiness of her elder daughter to take her father up on any point that came into her head horrified Anne almost as much as Treves’ willingness to let his daughter lead him into these arguments. She flung him a look of reproach.

“It’s getting late,” she said. “I think we’d all better be going home, unless—” She looked at her husband doubtfully, “—unless you have something else to do here?”

“No.” He fell into step beside her. “Let’s go home now. I’ve seen all I want to.”

“Did you find whatever it is you’re looking for?”

He was silent so long that she looked at him. He was walking with his head down, studying the ground intently.

“I don’t know,” he said at last. “But I shall—soon.”

Chapter 2

The London Hospital stood at the eastern end of Whitechapel Road, bordering on the slum and light industrial factories from which it drew many of its patients. It was a massive, ugly and relatively modern building, governed by a committee that was justifiably proud of the hospital's up-to-date equipment and high quality of medicine.

As a surgeon at the London, Treves was more exposed than most to the ravages of industry. It fell to him to operate on the huge sweaty men who were brought in with their bodies gashed open by heedless machines. He hated this part of the business. It was at these moments that his boyhood in Dorset, much of it spent on his grandfather's farm, came back most strongly. There was something human and comprehensible about a kick from a horse even if it broke your neck. Ironwork he regarded as the invention of the devil.

Being no more consistent than any other man, he saw no irony in this attitude and his own reliance on the latest medical hardware provided for him by the hospital, and which he used freely. When an operation was in progress the theater closely resembled the fires of hell. A furnace roared within the cast-iron stove, kept at fever pitch by a pair of bellows constantly pumping air into the open grate beneath it. From the mouth of the stove protruded the handles of several cauterizing irons, their heads embedded in the coals.

Close by stood the operating table where Treves would work, the stove casting a ruddy glow over him, the glistening of his face lit up by the oil lantern he worked by, held up by a nurse whose sole function this was.

The theater was well-furnished with a large sink and a cupboard stocked with dressings and other things a surgeon might need. Always included among these were several sets of manacles. Chloroform was commonly in use for operations, but the exact administering of the right dose was still a rough and ready business. All too frequently patients came round at the wrong moment (that is, if they had not died under an excessive amount), and then the manacles were useful.

Treves did not expect to have to use manacles in the operation he was performing today with the assistance of two fellow doctors, Mr. Fox and Mr. Hill. He had ordered the administering of a large dose to his huge patient, a bull-like laborer who had received a set of gear wheels in his chest that very morning. Fox had protested. Fox was an able doctor and Treves' closest friend among his colleagues. As such he was one of the few of his peers who ventured to criticize him. Treves did not take kindly to criticism.

"I say, Freddie," he'd said in his languid voice, "don't you think that's a bit—I mean it's enough to kill him—"

"He can stand it," said Treves briskly, as he tied on the black leather apron he wore for operations. "It's coming round that would kill him with a wound like that."

Hill placed a cotton mask over the man's nose and mouth and applied the chloroform. The patient struggled for a moment, but soon his moans of agony subsided and he slipped into unconsciousness.

Treves examined the wound, which was fearful. The marks of gear wheels grew progressively deeper as they neared a great open gash in the center of the chest.

“How long has this man been here?” he demanded.

“Three-quarters of an hour,” Fox told him.

At the far end of the table two students held onto a rope that was tied to the patient’s leg. They were pulling on it with constant pressure.

“Hodges, Pierce, come closer,” Treves ordered them. “Mr. Hill, take hold of the rope please.” He waited till the exchange was complete before addressing the students again. “It’s a machine accident. I expect you’ll be seeing a good deal of this.”

The two youngsters stared uneasily at the gaping wound, which bubbled bloodily every time the patient took a breath. Together Treves and Fox were doing an expert job of repairing the ripped chest. Treves chatted offhandedly as he worked.

“Abominable things, these machines,” he muttered. “One can’t reason with them.”

“What a mess.” Fox made a face of disgust. There was some part of his stomach that stirred and rose up in outrage at a sight like this and had to be fought down. He felt ashamed of his own weakness. A doctor should learn callousness. Look at Treves, a cold-blooded devil if ever there was one.

Treves glanced up at that moment and noticed the students’ faces, which were ashen.

“Irons please, Mr. Hodges,” he said curtly. There was nothing like forcing a queasy student to take a practical part in an operation to make him forget his own feelings.

As the operation progressed, Fox had to admit that Treves had been right about the chloroform. The man’s massive frame had borne it well. If anything, he was not sufficiently asleep, and as the work drew to a close an occasional groan was wrenched from him. But even Treves was not prepared to risk a larger dose. As he cauterized the wound, the other men were all holding down the patient.

The steam from the cauterizing dispersed, leaving Treves’ face sweaty and satisfied. The work was good. He could see this even now. He stood back and threw down the iron, just as the theater door opened to admit a boy of about ten with a scruffy appearance.

“Excuse me, Mr. Treves sir.”

“Yes?” Treves looked up, a sudden tension in his manner that caught Fox’s eye.

“I found it.”

Treves studied the boy carefully. “Did you see it?”

The urchin shook his head slowly.

“I’ll be with you in a moment.”

The head vanished behind the door.

“I say, Freddie,” said Fox in a low voice. “What was that about?”

“Oh nothing—nothing of any importance.” Treves had begun to roll down his sleeves and to remove his apron. “Nothing of any great importance. All right, you can take this man away.”

He departed quickly before he could be asked any more questions. He found the boy waiting for him in the passage.

“Where?” he said briefly.

“Turners Road. There’s a line of empty shops. One of ’em is called Collys, it used to be a grocery but it’s not used now.”

“I know the place. Are you sure it’s there?”

“Camping out in the cellar. Don’t s’pose they pay no rent. Mr. Bytes ain’t a great man for payin’ rent.”

“Mr. Bytes would be—?”

“The owner.”

“Owner?”

“That’s what he calls ’imself. Says it’s ’is. ’E bought it from the last owner for a good price. ’E complains somethin’ chronic. Says the p’lice keeps movin’ ’im on and ’e ent made a profit yet.”

“Mr. Bytes has been taking you into his confidence, has he?”

“What?”

“Mr. Bytes has been telling you all this?”

“ ’E tells anyone in the boozier ’o’ll listen. ’E’s known for it.”

“How do you know where he lives?”

“Followed ’im ’ome, didn’t I?”

Treves gave the boy a coin, checked his destination again, and almost ran out of the hospital. An excitement was growing within him, similar to the excitement he’d felt when he first read his final medical exam and realized that it was going to give him no problems.

Two days he had waited since he’d been forced to leave the fun-fair empty-handed, two days while the urchin had searched London for the mysterious monster—only to track him down barely half a mile from the hospital. From the little he’d seen before the curtain fell from the uproar the creature’s presence had created, Treves had no doubt that he was on the track of something rare.

The afternoon was cold and wet. The streets glistened blackly with the recent rain and brought a chill to Treves, so recently emerged from the sweltering heat of the operating theater. He looked for a cab but was unable to find one. He shrugged. For half a mile he could manage to walk.

The streets got dirtier the farther south he went. Horse manure and filth of all kinds mingled with the rain, and the air was smoky from peat fires. Once he had to pass through a large butcher yard and was nearly knocked flying by a carcass being heaved up onto a shoulder almost as beefy as the meat itself. He had to stop once and ask the way from a man who was working a machine that belched out steam at an alarming rate without (as far as Treves could see) serving any useful purpose.

He came at last to Turners Road and found the shop he was looking for without any trouble. Heedless of danger from the authorities, Mr. Bytes had grown daring and displayed his poster outside for all the world to see. The canvas covered the whole front of the shop except for the door, which was padlocked. It announced that the Elephant Man could be seen for twopence.

Treves made a futile effort to pull the canvas aside, but all he could see were windows made opaque with dirt. He became aware of a small boy on his left, who was watching him intently.

“Do you know where the proprietor is?” he asked, holding out a coin.

The boy nodded, snatched the coin, and vanished round a corner. It took him only a moment to find his quarry, because Mr. Bytes never believed in going far for his refreshment. He was in luck at the first pub. When informed of his errand, the owner hustled his coat back on, grabbed up the riding crop that he never liked to be without, swallowed the remains of his gin, and crammed the last of a sandwich in his mouth. Then he was ready to go.

The boy, whose name was Tony, kept up with him only with difficulty until they reached the corner of Turners Road. There Bytes stopped so suddenly that his companion cannoned into him and received a cuff. The two of them peered round the building to where Treves could be seen studying the poster.

"He's not a peeler...", said Bytes after a moment.

"No, I don't think so...", Tony agreed.

"No ... I don't think so ..."

Together, and cautiously, they began to advance till their footsteps caused Treves to turn and face them. At once he recognized the man in the twisted stovepipe hat that he had seen quarreling with the alderman in the tent.

"Are you the proprietor?" he demanded.

Bytes stood back and regarded him with suspicion but no recognition. "And who might you be, sir?"

"Just one of the curious," said Treves, who had no intention of disclosing his true motive. He had discovered that it had the unfortunate effect of raising the price. "I'd like to see it."

Bytes shook his head with every appearance of sadness. "I don't think so, sir. No sir, we're closed."

Treves wasted no words. He pulled a purse from his coat, extracted a shilling, and held it out.

"I'd pay handsomely for a private showing. Are you the proprietor?"

"Handsomely?" Bytes' eyes gleamed on the shilling, and into his face came the first hint of recognition. He stared at Treves, who was beginning to fall into place as the busybody in the tent. "Who sent you?"

"Pardon me?" said Treves.

Bytes threw caution to the wind and snatched the shilling.

"Never mind. I'm the owner."

From a capacious pocket on the inside of his coat, he produced a key and fumbled at the padlock on the door. It took him some time to unlock it, as drink had seriously impaired his aim. Treves tried not to show his impatience.

At last the padlock clicked open, and the three of them entered the shop. It was almost totally dark inside because of the huge canvas poster that obscured all the windows. Bytes scrambled around in the darkness and managed to light an oil lamp, which cast little light owing to the poor state of the wick and the fact that the glass was thick with dust. When Tony shut the outer door, Treves had to peer hard to make out anything in the gloom.

The shop was empty and gray with dust. Some old tins and a few shriveled potatoes occupied a shelf, and some vague vegetable refuse was piled up against one of the windows. The stench of the place was appalling, and its cold dank atmosphere added to the general air of gloom.

"This way," said Bytes, leading him to a door at the back of the shop.

By keeping the oil lamp in view, Treves managed to follow Bytes down a flight of rickety steps to a lower floor that he took to be the cellar. From what he could see, it looked as if it might have been used as a coal hole. His eyes were now growing more used to the gloom, and he could make out the way the end of the cellar was blocked off by a curtain suspended from a cord by a few rings. As he approached it, Treves became convinced that this was the

true source of the smell that had been growing stronger as he descended, and which was now almost overpowering.

Bytes led the way to the curtain.

“Here we are, sir. My treasure.” He began to recite as though sleepwalking. “Life is full of surprises. Ladies and gentlemen, consider the fate of this creature’s poor mother. In the fourth month of her maternal condition, she was struck down by a wild elephant.” Bytes leered. “Struck down, if you take my meaning, on an uncharted African isle. The result is plain to see, ladies and gentlemen—the *terrible Elephant Man*.”

With a flourish he rattled back the curtain to reveal a bent figure crouching on a stool, its body almost entirely covered by a dirty brown blanket. It seemed to be trying to draw warmth from a large brick that stood on a tripod in front of it, heated from below by a Bunsen burner. The head was turned away toward the far wall so that beyond a general impression of massiveness, Treves could form no clear idea of it. The only part of the creature that he could see well was its left arm, which protruded from the blanket to warm itself over the brick. The arm was perfectly normal.

The thing gave no sign of having heard Bytes’ voice or the rattling of the curtain rings, but remained silent and immobile, with the settled look of one who had been so for many weary hours. To Treves the hunched figure, locked eternally in the freezing solitude of this cell, seemed the embodiment of loneliness. He did not normally consider himself an imaginative man, but there was something about the terrible despairing silence of this creature that made him think of a captive in a cavern, or a wizard, waiting thousands of years for some unholy manifestation. In the street above the air was cool and fresh. Treves could hear a trolley whistled by an errand boy, the companionable hum of traffic in the road, and the footsteps of a world going about its business, unconscious of this dank, smelly cellar and the figure that waited in dreadful isolation.

He stepped closer, unpleasantly aware that Bytes was watching his every move and leering at him in a disgusting conspiratorial manner. Suddenly Bytes banged his riding whip against the wall and yelled at the crouched thing as if speaking to a dog.

“*Stand up!*”

“*Stand up!*” shrieked Tony in nervous imitation, dancing about just behind Bytes.

Like a dog, the creature obeyed the tone of command, rising to its feet and letting the blanket fall to the ground as it turned to face Treves.

Accustomed as he was to all kinds of deformities from both disease and mutilation, Treves could not repress an appalled gasp. Nor, for the life of him, could he have prevented himself from stepping backward in an instinctive movement of self-preservation. Never in all his days had he seen anything so hideous, so monstrous, so piteous.

The Elephant Man was naked to the waist, below which he wore a pair of shabby trousers that had been cut from the dress suit of a very fat man. His rootlike, knobby feet were bare. From the picture outside Treves had imagined him to be of gigantic size, but this was a smallish man, of below average height, and made to seem more so by the bowing of his back.

His head was enormous and misshapen, its circumference as big as a man’s waist. From the brow there projected a huge bony mass, almost obscuring the right eye, and the nose was a lump of flesh, recognizable only from its position.

From the upper jaw projected another mass of bone that protruded from the mouth like

stump, turning the upper lip inside out, making the mouth little but a slobbering aperture. was this that had been exaggerated in the painting to make it appear to be a rudimentary trunk.

The head was almost bald, except for a handful of lank, black hair at the top. At the back of the head hung a bag of spongy skin, resembling cauliflower.

His right arm was enormous and shapeless, the hand like a knot of tuberous roots. Indeed it could barely be called a hand; it was more like a fin or a paddle, with the back and palm being exactly alike. The left arm was not only normal, but delicately shaped with fine skin. It was a hand that a woman might have envied.

From the chest hung another bag of flesh, like the dewlap of a lizard, and the whole body gave off a stench that made Treves gag.

Bytes had made some effort to trick his exhibit out. Behind it were two crudely constructed palm trees. As Treves stood there, speechless with horror and disbelief, Bytes rapped the wall again and yelled, "Turn around."

"Turn around, turn around," Tony echoed in malicious glee.

Slowly the Elephant Man turned, revealing other loathsome cauliflower growths on his back, some of which hung down to the middle of his thighs. He came to rest in his original position. His head was turned toward Treves, who found himself unwillingly searching his eyes for the accusation that should have been there. All was blank. The face was devoid of expression and incapable of it. But as Treves gazed on him, the Elephant Man closed his eyes.

The words of the man in the tent came back to Treves. "A wicked birth ... monstrous. More monstrous than the worst nightmare brain could conceive. But even as pity and disgust warred in him, ambition rose up and joined them. This was it, the thing he had been looking for, the spectacular specimen that would turn all heads his way.

"I've seen all I can—" he said to Bytes, "—down here."

The rings rattled, the curtain fell back into place. Doubtless behind it the Elephant Man had reseated himself to wait for the next gawking visitor. Bytes began to lead the way out.

"Down here?" he queried.

"I'm a doctor, Mr. Bytes. I work at the London Hospital, where I also lecture in anatomy. A man like that could be—very interesting to medical science."

"He's not for sale," said Bytes at once.

"I don't want to buy him from you. Just—hire?"

They had reached the shop. Bytes held the lamp closer to Treves' face. "For how long?"

"A few hours. I just want to examine him and make some notes. Later I might want him back again."

"At a good price?"

"Of course," said Treves in disgust.

They settled on a shilling for every visit, and Bytes agreed to have the Elephant Man ready when a cab called the next day.

"Now what can you tell me about him?" said Treves.

Bytes shrugged. "Only what his last owner told me. He's English and his name's John Merrick."

It came as a small shock to discover that the creature had a human name like any other man.

“Any idea how old he is?”

“About twenty-one, I think,” said Bytes. “But how could anyone tell?”

“Is anything known about his parentage? Where in England was he born?”

Bytes shrugged again. “The last bloke said he was born in Leicester, but I don’t know how he knew that. He didn’t seem to know anything else.”

“But his mother and father—were they deformed in any way?”

“Search me. No idea.”

“Well if so little is known about his parents,” said Treves impatiently, “why are you so sure his mother was knocked down by an elephant ‘on an African island’?”

Bytes gave a ginny chuckle and nudged Treves knowingly. “Come, my friend, I don’t have to pretend with you. The public likes a little drama—a little showmanship—with its exhibits.

“Then I can assume that this elephant story is a total invention?”

“It’s as good a story as any,” said Bytes. “Look at that bit of bone coming out of his mouth like a trunk. He *looks* like an elephant.”

Treves grunted, satisfied. He had never placed any reliance on the too-convenient story of an elephant charge, and it was useful to know that Bytes had no evidence for it. The trunklike protuberance of bone on the face was sufficient explanation of how the story had started.

They had reached the street by now, and as soon as they stepped outside Treves began to drink in the fresh air. It was like wine after the atmosphere of the cellar. He tried frantically to clear his brain. As soon as he produced his purse, Bytes thrust out his hand for the coin. Treves dropped into them.

“There’s the shilling in advance for tomorrow. I’ll send a cab at 10 A.M.”

“He’ll be ready.”

“Here is my card.”

Bytes pocketed the card, then seized Treves’ hand in a greasy shake.

“Now we’ve got a deal. We understand each other—my friend. We understand each other completely.”

He gave him the look of a conspirator that made Treves long to wrench himself away. Instead he bid a polite goodbye and turned down the street.

The afternoon had passed silently into dusk while he had been in the shop. The ale houses were open, spilling their light onto the glistening streets outside. Treves found one that he knew to be more salubrious than most and entered. He was pleased to find it still almost empty. He wanted a quiet moment alone.

He took his drink and settled in a dark corner where he was unlikely to be disturbed. His brain was reeling with the triumph of discovery. If he had been a superstitious man, he would have pinched himself to make sure the afternoon’s events had not been a dream.

He had it—the thing he had been searching for; the thing that would make his name. It had happened as he had always known it would, if he looked long enough and hard enough. He had the subject for a lecture that would create a sensation.

It was a hard business to make a name for yourself when London was thronged with young doctors all trying to do the same. It was not enough to be a good doctor; you also had to be something of a showman, and your show had to be stranger and more startling than anyone else’s.

The staff at the London Hospital was constantly alert for the new intake of patients that

might prove to contain “the one”—the one who might have that rare disease that they alone could diagnose and cure, that unknown condition by which they could cast new light on this hitherto obscure area. Members of the governing committee—Ebenezer Broadneck for one—had been known to remark that it was a scandal the way wretched patients were descended on by throngs of ambitious surgeons and physicians, to be pulled and pummeled and examined hopefully, and then discarded when their conditions revealed nothing that was not already common knowledge.

Other doctors, equally scandalous in Broadneck’s oft-voiced opinion, did not wait for Mohammed to come to the mountain. They went out searching for him like the man in the Bible who scoured the highways and byways to provide guests for the feast. Treves was one of the latter kind.

He knew the arguments against what he was doing, and he could counter every one of them with an argument in favor.

“How does Broadneck expect medical science to progress if we’re only able to investigate what has been investigated before?” he had demanded one evening of Fox, whom he had taken to his own home for dinner. Fox had made no answer, rightly divining that his role in this instance was to listen while Treves got it off his chest. But he had glanced at Anne and received an understanding smile. Anne too knew her role as a sounding board.

“Anatomy has always progressed in the teeth of orthodox opinion,” Treves went on. “And if it hadn’t continually flouted that opinion, we’d still be living in the days of Hippocrates. Leonardo da Vinci used to descend into crypts at dead of night to dissect cadavers.”

“Good Lord, Freddie,” said Fox, revolted. “I believe you’d have bought bodies from Burk and Hare.”

Treves’ eyes flashed humorously. “The name of the doctor who did that was Fox, wasn’t it?” he enquired, all innocence.

Fox scowled. “It was Knox and you know it, Freddie.”

Fortunately Anne had intervened at that moment and restored the atmosphere by serving Fox a large glass of brandy.

Sitting in the ale house now, Treves remembered his discussion with Fox and silently repeated to himself that no doctor made progress if he were too delicate to soil his hands. It meant going to stinking holes like the one he had visited today. It meant dealing with crawling insects like Bytes.

He tried to put Bytes out of his mind, but the “owner” would not be so easily dismissed. He stood there, dirty, ginny, leering at the man who had come to do business with him. In memory Treves could still see his face, and it made him shudder. Behind the incongruous cultured voice and the slimy bonhomie, Bytes was a mean and pitiless man. Half an hour of acquaintance had been enough to tell Treves that.

He felt a sense of revulsion at the thought of doing business with such a creature, at giving Bytes the right to address him as though the two of them were on an equal level. But for good or ill, it was done now. He had saddled himself with Bytes for as long as he needed the Elephant Man. There was nothing to do but put up with the situation, keep Bytes at arm’s length, and do his best to persuade the man to treat Merrick with more humanity.

A small voice at the back of his mind whispered that it wasn’t going to be that easy. But impatiently he forced the voice to be silent. There was no point in looking for trouble.

especially now, when his ambitions were so nearly within his grasp. He would deal with the problems when they arose.

As he went out into the cool evening air, he was telling himself that they might never arise.

Chapter 3

Mrs. Mothershead was the London Hospital. An inflexible woman in her early fifties with a hard, powerful face, she had been the Hospital's Head Matron for fifteen years, which was no longer in a position of authority than could be claimed by anyone else—including Mr. Carr-Gomm, the head of the Hospital Administrative Committee. As such she commanded respect. Carr-Gomm himself addressed her with careful courtesy. Young doctors avoided her. Established doctors said "Please."

Mr. Mothershead had always been a shadowy figure. One doctor, who had been a medical student fifteen years ago, and remained on the staff ever since, maintained stoutly that the husband had no existence, and that Miss Mothershead had slipped gradually into Mrs. about the time of her elevation to the highest nursing post. This was widely accepted as accurate and natural. Somehow authority sat more easily on a married woman, even if the title was only one of courtesy.

Of her background only one thing was known for certain, and that was that she was one of the new breed of nurses that had emerged in the sixties under the influence of Miss Nightingale. Prior to that nurses had been drunks, prostitutes, women of whom so little more standing was expected that it was actually preferred for them to have had an illegitimate child. Above all they received no training. To be female and squalid was considered enough.

Miss Nightingale altered all that. After returning from her great work in the Crimea, she set up the very first English training school for nurses, attached to St. Thomas's Hospital. In June 1860 it took in its first batch of students, one of whom was Mrs. (or possibly Miss) Mothershead.

The school was designed to do two things, to provide future nurses with a whole year of training and to establish nursing as a profession for decent women. No student was taken without a certificate of good conduct, and if her standard of personal behavior did not remain impeccably high she was thrown out. The students lived in a nurses home, their outings were scrutinized, and reports about their characters and actions flew back and forth at speed.

It was a revolution, and like all revolutions it produced its fanatics—such as Mrs. Mothershead, who had been told so often in her student days that the whole future of nursing depended on her and women like her that she had never been able to forget it; a woman who still made daily entries in her diary, just as she had done in those long ago days at St. Thomas's, knowing that at the end of the month what she had written would be studied by Miss Nightingale herself in a frantic attempt to get into her students' minds and prize out any thoughts that might threaten the success of the experiment.

Mrs. Mothershead watched her own students with the same suspicious eyes that had once been cast on her, demanded that they live like nuns and nurse like saints, froze them with her contempt when they displeased her, but warmed them with her generous praise when she felt they deserved it. She was capable of huge kindness, but she was even more capable of ignoring human emotions in the service of "her" profession.

These days ordinary nursing duties took up less and less of her time. Mostly her life was spent teaching or sitting at the long desk at the end of the Receiving Room. From her position

of advantage in this bare, grey-painted hall she made entries, issued certificates, checked details. The hardest part of this job was shutting out the disturbing noise of frightened people as they entered the hospital and crowded onto the long rows of benches in the hall. Children wailed, men with injuries moaned, and amid it all Mrs. Mothershead tried to get her paperwork right and wished the noise would go away.

On this particular morning she had succeeded in reducing the racket to background noise so successfully that its sudden cessation affected her like a thunderclap. She looked up to see what had caused the silence and saw two figures walking down the length of the room to her desk.

One was a man of middle age dressed in outdoor clothes and heavily muffled against the chilly day. Mrs. Mothershead recognized him as a cabman who had several times brought patients to the hospital. It was what was walking behind him that drew her astonished eyes.

She could not tell whether it was male or female, as the left hand was the only part visible. This and the fact that it was walking upright were all that identified it as human. The figure was enveloped in a black cloak so long that it swept the floor. In the left side a slit had been cut, and the hand that protruded from this clutched a crude walking stick, with which the creature helped itself to make slow, painful progress.

On its head was a very large black hat with a wide brim, and sewn round the edge of the brim was a grey flannel curtain that dropped down into the collar of the cloak. A small hole had been cut into this about where the left eye would be. As the creature approached Mrs. Mothershead carried with it the most appalling smell. All Mrs. Mothershead's years of training had to rise up and do battle to prevent her from retreating.

The cabman reached her first and handed her a card that bore the name of Treves.

"I'm looking for Mr. Frederick Treves, please, ma'am."

Mrs. Mothershead stared at the approaching swathed figure, then toward the cabman, her eyebrows raised in a demand for an explanation. But he only shrugged.

"Very well," she said. "If you'll wait here, I'll send for him."

From further down the room a young male voice called, "Cor, what a stink!" and other voices were immediately raised in agreement and protest. The figure in the black cloak gave no sign of having heard.

To Mrs. Mothershead's relief Treves himself appeared at that moment. He looked a little startled, though whether it was his visitor or his visitor's weird clothes that surprised him she couldn't tell.

"Mr. Treves," said Mrs. Mothershead quickly, "I was just going to send for you, sir. The man wants to see you." She handed him the card the cabman had given her.

"Thank you, Mrs. Mothershead. I was expecting him." Treves looked at the cabman. "Is there no one else with you?"

"No, sir. Just this—er—gentleman." The man waved a vague, anxious hand in the direction of the creature, who stood silent and immobile. Only one eye could be seen through the slit on the left side of his face, and that was so deep in shadow that the effect was of a blind statue. To Treves this was momentarily more disconcerting than the reality that he knew there would be hidden underneath. He pulled himself together and thrust some money into the cabman's hand.

"Very well. Thank you for your trouble."

“Not at all, sir. My—pleasure.” The cabman’s voice was filled with relief as he departed.

Still the creature made no move, no sound, gave no sign that he was aware of anything happening around him. Remembering how it had obeyed Bytes’ shouted orders the day before, Treves thought that something, no matter how little, *must* be getting through. But perhaps it was like giving orders to an animal. Only the tone of voice was understood.

He became aware of Mrs. Mothershead staring at him.

“I’ll be in my rooms, Mothershead,” he told her. “I’m not to be disturbed.”

She nodded silently and shifted her stare to the silent figure between them. Treves forced himself to address it.

“Come with me, please.” He turned on his heel and made to leave. At the door he looked back and found that the creature had not moved. The head was turned in his direction, and from a short distance away the impression of blind incomprehension was even more marked. A silence lay over the entire room. Everyone in it was now watching the little scene. At last Mothershead said, “You heard the doctor. Go on.”

Her voice held a firm note of command, and after a moment the creature began to shuffle very slowly to the door. His feet, which he could not lift properly, were encased in old bits of canvas sacking, clumsily sewn together in the rough shape of shoes, and as he walked they made a horrible, scratchy, dragging sound. Treves stood back to allow him to pass through the door and then closed it behind him. Even through the thick oak he could hear the excited babble that broke out immediately.

It took an age for them to climb the two flights of stairs and go down the three long corridors that were necessary before they reached Treves’ office. Treves ground his teeth in frustration. At every point they were stared at by nurses, doctors, even other patients who happened to be out in the corridors. The man shambling painfully along seemed oblivious to this harsh curiosity, but Treves had an uncomfortable sense of being stabbed by knives. He was used to being stared at—with respect by students who attended his anatomy lectures, with awe by patients he was treating, with open hostility by other doctors when he had heedlessly overstepped the bounds of professional etiquette. He quite enjoyed the respect and awe, and hostility held no tenors for him.

But these stares were different. They held the jeering curiosity that the normal offer to the different. They were primarily for the clumsily grotesque creature, but they also took in the man with him. Treves got his first experience of being treated as a spectacle, and he did not like it. He felt a twinge of discomfort, remembering that his own first gaze at the Elephant Man had contained something of the same character.

They reached his room at last and he opened the door to lead the way in. The creature paused on the threshold and turned his head uneasily. Treves gave him what he hoped was an encouraging smile and beckoned for him to come in. As the silent figure passed him he tried to get a furtive glimpse at the eye-slit, but whatever was inside was in shadow.

As he closed the door he tried not to gag. In the small room the smell of the Elephant Man was overwhelming. It was an effort to force himself to go close and help the creature to sit down, and when he had done so he went to the window and opened it as far as it would go. When he turned back it seemed to him that the shrouded figure drooped, as if in shame. He told himself not to be fanciful. He could not remember being so nervous before.

“My name is Frederick Treves,” he informed the bent head. “I am a surgeon here at the

London Hospital, and I lecture in anatomy at the Medical College.” There was no response of any kind. He went on hurriedly. “I would very much like to examine you. Would that be all right?”

Just how much, if anything, could the thing understand? It sat quite still, staring at the floor, seemingly oblivious to its surroundings. Treves’ sense of discomfort was growing. His own voice had begun to sound ridiculous in his head. He looked at the floor for a moment, then locked his gaze on the figure’s left arm, the one part of it that looked normal.

“Ah—yes. Um—first I would like to ask you a few questions. Would that be all right?”

All the formal words and expressions that had served in other, similar situations now clattered uselessly to the floor between them. Treves made the awkward discovery that when the familiar lines proved inappropriate he had no others at his command. He must go on reciting the senseless part.

“Good.” He sat down at the desk and picked up a pencil. “Now let’s see, your owner .. The word slipped out before he could stop it and he could have bitten off his tongue. But the Elephant Man seemed to notice nothing. He sat there, immovable in the silent agony of his own world. “Um—the man who—who looks after you—tells me that you are English and your name is John Merrick. Is that correct?”

He had not really expected to receive a reply, nor was there one.

“Do you know where you were born?” he persisted. “Where you come from?”

Still the silence, but the Elephant Man lifted his head very slowly and stared blindly at Treves.

“I tell you what,” said Treves desperately, “I’ll ask you a question, and you shake your head like this for ‘no,’ and nod like this for ‘yes.’ All right?” Silence. “Do you understand?”

After a long interminable moment the ponderous head waved uncertainly up and down once, and a wheezing sound came from the chest as though the effort had been great. Treves gave a sigh of relief, and his voice became businesslike.

“Have you always been—” He fought for a description that the thing could comprehend. “—the way you are now?” he said at last.

Again there was no response, and Treves wondered if he had taken too much for granted. Perhaps it was beyond whatever existed in that huge head to discern the difference between himself and other people, in which case a phrase like “the way you are now” had no meaning for him.

“Are you in any pain?” he asked.

This time there was a reaction, violent and startling. The creature began to babble in a series of staccato gulps, punctuated by wheezes. Through the tiny slit in the face mask a stream of desperation and distress seemed to flow. Alarmed, Treves interrupted.

“No—just nod your head like this for ‘yes’ and shake it like this for ‘no.’ ” He demonstrated slowly. “Now, are you in any pain?”

This time there was no babble, just a slow shake of the head.

“Are your parents still alive?”

Immobile silence. The thing before him might have been a block of wood. It was exasperating when he had thought he was beginning to get through.

“Do you understand? Are they dead? Your father ...” He waited a long time. “Your mother.”

At once a desolate moan filled the room and the Elephant Man began to rock back and forth as if in agony. From behind the mask came sounds that might have been someone trying to weep, but unable to.

Treves stared at him, feeling desperately uncomfortable. But he was saved from having to offer some response by two sharp raps on the door. The Elephant Man flinched perceptibly.

Fox's head appeared round the door.

"Freddie, what are you doing for—" He wrinkled his nose in disgust. "I say, do open the window in here or ..." For the first time he noticed the Elephant Man. "Oh, I'm dreadful sorry. I had no idea that ... I say!" His voice died away in embarrassment.

Treves crossed the room in two strides, seized Fox by the arm, and bundled him forcibly into the corridor, closing the door behind them. Fox blew out hard.

"Good Lord, Freddie, what have you got in there?"

"You'll know presently. At the meeting of the society. But until then, I beg of you, Fox, keep it to yourself."

"Certainly, if you insist. You must have quite a find there."

"I don't know what I've got."

Fox gave him a cynical glance. "Nothing of any importance, eh?" he repeated.

Treves turned to re-enter his office but looked back at the last minute.

"Keep it to yourself, Fox, please." He went in and shut the door firmly behind him, turning the key in the lock. Then his eyes swept the room in dismay. The Elephant Man had gone.

It was impossible. There was no way out except by the door—unless the wretched creature had contrived to throw himself out of the window. For a terrible moment he half believed it, then a faint movement caught his attention and he breathed again.

In a far corner stood a glass display case filled with specimens, each one neatly labeled. There was just enough space between the end of the case and the wall for a man to stand, and there he was. Even through the enveloping cloak Treves could see that he was shaking.

"Come and sit down," he said gently.

The Elephant Man's only reply was to press himself further back against the wall as though he would vanish into it. To the stench of his body was added that of his terror.

For a moment Treves wondered if it was all worth it; wouldn't it be better if he simply packed this thing up into a cab and returned him to where he came from? But the meeting of the Pathological Society of London was only two weeks away and he had nothing better than this to introduce. Nor would anyone else have.

He went to stand in front of the man, taking the left hand firmly in his own. Slowly and without wrenching him, he drew him away from the wall until they had reached the chair.

"Sit down," he said, keeping his voice quiet and friendly. He had seen enough the night before to be certain that whatever the original state of Merrick's mind he must now be half-crazed with terror and ill-treatment. Overcoming that would be half the battle. As if for confirmation the man made no further resistance but sat down.

Treves found himself at a loss. There was plainly no point in asking further questions of someone who seemed unable to understand or reply. With relief he decided to put that part of it off.

"I think I'll examine you now," he said. "I'll save the questions for later. Will you take off your hat now please?" The Elephant Man did nothing, and Treves tried to make his voice

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