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To my heirs –

I am all too conscious, as I assemble this rambling narrative, that it may prove altogether too fantastical for the reader to believe. If these pages do indeed come down to you, descendants of the Thursday line (in the confident and expectant hope that a young lady will one day accept my unworthy hand!) then I trust that you will look kindly on your ancestor and do not look upon these scribblings, instead, as pointing to any softening of the brain.

I have attempted, in a regrettably haphazard fashion, to collect into a coherent story the various accounts which began in 1893 with my unfortunate brother's disappearance and ended in a sooty alleyway in Bradford – and the altogether more mysterious disappearance of a tall blue box. Together these journal entries, phonographic recordings, scribbled notes, eye-witness accounts and best guesses constitute what the yellow press came to call 'The Crimson Horror' – and its curious prequel.

There is much here that is unaccountable. Much that is baffling and strange. But though you may suspect your unfortunate relative to have been under the influence of Mr Wells' scientific romances or, more perfidious even than sensational literature, to have been in the thrall of the Green Fairy, all that you are about to read is TRUE.

Even the sillier parts.

Jonas Thursday. Islington. 1895.

Prologue

To Madam Vastra, I am always *the* Woman.

Or at least I should bleeding well hope so. She has a bit of a wandering eye even beneath that heavy veil. A very beautiful, glittering reptilian eye, I might add – but a wandering one all the same.

The Crimson Horror! Blimey, yes. How could I ever forget it? I remember the case well, being as how it was the first time that the Mistress, that is Madam Vastra, entrusted me, that is Jenny Flint, with a delicate mission on me own. By then, see, she had enough faith in me to know I wouldn't muck it up. Or hoped I wouldn't at any rate.

Up until now, it had mostly been the three of us. Me, the Mistress and Strax but with the Mistress very much taking the lead. We'd been set up there at No. 13, Paternoster Row for quite a few years and a very cosy little situation it had become.

Madam was the lady of the house – though veiled when outside owing to, well, what she like to call her

‘striking visage’. Strax – who had a striking visage all his own – was cook and butler and made a very dapper example of the London slavvy, I must say, despite his great potato head. And me, I did for Madam Vastra – general housekeeping, laying the fire and whatnot. I also did other things – but that come rather more under the heading of pleasure than work.

When we wasn’t at home, we was off having adventures, Madam being what she privately billed herself as, the world’s only consulting reptile detective. Clients had been thin on the ground to start with but word had eventually got around that if you had some queer business that needed sorting, if the official channels and the police could provide no succour, then Madam Vastra was your woman. Or your late-Cretaceous reptilian life form whose people had been the original rulers of Earth, if you want to split hairs.

But the Crimson Horror was a matter quite unlike any other we investigated.

It really began with— oh hang on, though. *No!* There was *another* case. A case that come first! Back in 1888, before old Straxxy was with us. And we didn’t know it at the time but it was sort of connected. It was a strange business (as all the good ones are), involving some of the highest and some of the lowliest in the land. And it was the case where I first clapped me peepers on the Doctor, having only heard of him by repute, as it were. So, if you’ve a moment or two to spare and you’re tucked up

in bed or by a nice blazing hearth with a glass or three of madeira, I'll tell you all about it. I'll fill in the bits what I wasn't concerned with in a sort of authory way, like Conan Doyle does or Dickens did or that other one that Madam likes who was a lot odder and always poorly.

You game?

Chapter the First

‘City of Dreadful Delights’

Being the reminiscences of Miss Jenny Flint, lady’s maid of Paternoster Row, London.

The year ’88 furnished us with a series of cases of greater or lesser interest. (This is me, you see, coming over all *Authory!*) Spring brought us the matter of Miss Gregory’s Disgrace, and then the business of the Man with the Manganese Teeth while all through the summer we was hard at it on the curious affair of the Sentient Battenburg. After these exertions, Madam had been all for a little holiday in Margate when an evening stroll through the streets of Whitechapel changed everything.

Outside the Pomegranate Music Hall, or the ‘Old Pom’ as we always called it – a bustling, lop-sided dear of a place that occupied the corner of Newark Street and Stepney Way – posters was plastered all over the slimy brickwork. One such stood out above all –

*‘CUPID’S FROLIC!’ – A musical mixture.
With beautiful scenery and charming effects.’*

“MISS FLORRIE BOOTH – the jolly jack tar.”

“With a little bit o’ scrimshaw in me hand”.

*‘ALL-BRITANNIA APTITUDE CONTEST – at the
Pomegranate Halls.*

*Every night at 8 under the stewardship of Mr Gideon
Mortlock!’*

By the merest chance, the Mistress and me happened to be walking past the Old Pom that night, strolling back towards the Underground, arm in arm, after we’d been to a meeting of the Fabians. We was full of excited chatter about the new world what we was going to help build, of the fairer and more just society that Britain would become – and of what a looker that Annie Besant was, who had been speaking with such passion at the town hall meeting. That was when we heard the cry that all people dread – unless you’re us. For this particular cry is often the call to adventure!

*‘Murder! Oh Gawd, **MURDER!!**’*

Madam turned to me and I could see her eyes gleam even through her heavy black veil. ‘Murder?’ she said.

I smiled, a little guiltily. ‘No doubt ... ’orrible. Let’s have a gander. Could be a juicy one.’

Madam sighed theatrically and put a hand to her breast. ‘Ah me, there speaks the modern world.’ Then she hitched up her skirts and pulled me forward. ‘Come on then!’

The cry of ‘Murder!’ rang out again and we followed it to a small alleyway round the back of the Hall. A very young copper, with one of them smooth blushing faces that boys only ever have at that age, was standing in the shadows, his bulls-eye lamp held in one, gloved hand. A small crowd had gathered round him, including a toothless crone, who turned her wrinkled face away from whatever lurked there in the dark. And what the lamp light revealed was a corpse. A corpse without a head!

The copper looked at what his lamp revealed – turned and was nosily sick on the cobbles.

Madam and me was by his side in a moment. ‘My dear fellow,’ said Madam. ‘You do look peaky. Allow us to be of service.’ She turned to me. ‘Look after the officer, would you, my dear?’

‘Very kind of you, miss, I’m sure,’ said the lad ‘... but I’m quite recovered now.’

Nevertheless, I dutifully took him to one side, all caring and solicitous-like – so that Madam could have a good shuffy at the body.

‘I suppose his head must be around here somewhere,’ I heard Madam mutter, then she bent down and seemed to take something from the corpse’s loud, checked suit.

‘Ere!’ said the copper. ‘You shouldn’t be interfering with—’

Madam prodded the corpse with her cane and blood fountained messily from the severed neck. The copper promptly spilled his guts again.

‘Well, good night, Officer,’ said Madam, turning away. ‘Hope you get your man.’ She winked at me – and I took the copper’s arm.

‘Come on, love,’ I said to the poor kid. ‘I’ll sort you out. You know, I thought you boys went round in pairs?’

‘Yes,’ he said, wiping his mouth. ‘Gerald usually does this with me but he’s poorly ...’

Ten minutes or so later, I met Madam on the street corner. ‘Well?’

For answer she unfolded her gloved hand, revealing a screw of bloodied paper. ‘Got this from the corpse’s pocket,’ she whispered.

I flattened it out. On it was scrawled a bold message:

MORTLOCK IS NOT WHAT HE SEEMS

*

The next night found us at the Pom itself, having purchased two thruppenny tickets for the main event. The whole place was humming with life, a blur of light and colour and laughter and stray fights, like one of them pictures by Sickert, heaving with patrons, right up to the Gods, singing their lungs out, spitting and hawking and chucking peanuts across the aisles at