

Catch me if you Can

Later, after the whole ordeal was over, Brian Belden would blame everything on the smell.

It was amazing the miracles that modern medicine had wrought. Illnesses that previously carried a death sentence were now eradicated with vaccines or managed with antibiotics, paralysis could be overcome, amputees could be fitted with state-of-the-art limbs—there was almost no end to what medicine could achieve, Brian firmly believed. But one thing medicine could not do was erase the smell of death—of decaying human flesh.

Brian had been warned that the smell would linger on his clothes, despite washing or even dry cleaning. He wasn't worried about that, as he was wearing hospital scrubs, but he also had been told that the smell would remain on his skin and hair for several days despite attempts at washing it out. His college professor had counseled the few select students chosen to witness an autopsy to rub medicated vapor cream underneath their noses or place moist, scented baby wipes inside their masks. Brian had chosen to use the cream.

It hadn't worked.

Although it was fascinating watching the pathologist and diener perform the autopsy with skill, precision, and palpable scientific curiosity, Brian was constantly distracted by the smell. He had thought that his olfactory nerves would eventually adjust, and the smell wouldn't be so obvious, but that wasn't the case.

The smell was so overwhelming that Brian didn't even flinch when the pathologist made a deep Y-shaped incision from the shoulders through the chest and down to the pubic bone. Through the entire procedure he felt almost light-headed, but not enough that he ever thought he would lose consciousness. As he looked around, the pale faces and nauseated expressions of the other two students made him realize that he was not alone. Only the pathologist and diener looked in control.

Brian watched in scientific fascination as the pathologist, one-by-one, removed and weighed the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, and spleen. It was the removal of the uterus that suddenly sent Brian into a tailspin. The room started to fade, but Brian somehow knew that he wasn't losing consciousness. He was fully in control of his faculties, and yet...

It couldn't be.

Brian stared as the room faded, and another scene took its place.

The smell was the first thing he noticed. The metallic, sharp smell of pooling blood.

Brian walked a bit unsteadily down a street adjacent to Buck's Row with its myriad of houses crammed together in a haphazard fashion. He wasn't honestly quite sure how he'd gotten there. Several of his friends from Cambridge had talked him into a night of revelry down in Whitechapel. The pleasures were many, but mean, cheap and unbelievably easy to obtain.

If it hadn't been for the strong Scotch fortifying him, he had to admit that he would have been more than a little apprehensive as his friends pulled him down the shadowed, cobblestone streets. The saucy comments of half-drunk prostitutes echoed those of the neighbors in their ramshackle homes, yelling for silence.

The weather that summer had been unseasonably cold, even for London, and Brian felt a sudden chill, despite the warmth of the liquor coursing through his veins. He pulled his coat more tightly around him and looked up at the bleak sky. Thunderclouds hung overhead, and not even dim moonlight was able to struggle through the oppressive cover. The impending storm caused a shrouded mist to surround them, and Brian paused for a moment as the eeriness of the dark, mean street penetrated his being to its very core.

"Eh, Belden!" one of his friends called out to him. "Are you so drunk that you cannot keep pace with us?"

Riotous laughter followed that remark, and Brian gave a derisive snort, shaking off the dreary feeling of a moment before. He held his liquor much better than those with whom he was walking. But tonight seemed different. The Scotch seemed to have settled deep within him, making the world tilt a bit unsteadily, but giving him the illusion that he was a great deal more invincible than his stumbling steps would make him appear to those around him.

Perhaps it's the Scotch, he thought to himself as he again smelled the strong, pungent aroma wafting from the crowded, dirty street.

"'Tis nothing," he called back, intending to speak further, when an older, roughly-hewn man passed him, bumping his shoulder as he walked.

"Pardon me, milord," the man muttered as he turned into Buck's Row.

"Belden!" his friend called out again. "Will you tarry much longer? We have here some beautiful ladies wanting to spend time with us."

Brian finally shook his head, as if to clear it, and staggered his way forward. "I'm coming!" He laughed a little, barely noticing another man pass him, heading into Buck's Row. "Keep your britches on!"

A low cry was one he'd barely registered—didn't even think about—until much later. And even then, he wasn't sure whether it had been real or just a dream.

"Come and look over here! There's a woman!"

Suddenly, the autopsy room came back into focus. Brian shook his head to clear the vision and looked around. The pathologist and diener were still carefully performing the autopsy. Brian noted that the pathologist was removing a section of the uterus to be saved and sent to the histology lab for further microscopic examination. That meant that the vision had not lasted very long.

He turned to look at his fellow students. Both of them were watching the procedure, neither concerned about him.

Good, Brian thought with relief. No one noticed anything. I can just forget this little episode and pretend it never happened. It was the smell. The smell got to me. That's all.

Once the autopsy was finished, Brian returned to his volunteer status at New York Presbyterian Hospital. Brian was one of 30 college students chosen for an eight-week internship at the prestigious teaching hospital. It was non-compensated, but it would be an impressive addition to his medical school applications. Although he felt slightly guilty that he was not earning money to help contribute to his college fund, which was rapidly dwindling, he knew that this was the best step toward his career in medicine, and his parents agreed.

Brian's best friend, Jim Frayne, had also decided to stay in the city and take summer classes, so the Wheelers had offered their vacant Manhattan penthouse to the boys for the summer. Brian was grateful for the rent-free accommodations and had even tried to promise to pay the Wheelers back at a later time, but they wouldn't hear of it.

Soon after Brian had heard he had been accepted for his internship and Jim had decided to take summer classes, their friend Dan Mangan had learned that he had also been accepted for an internship with the NYPD Cadet Corps. He would begin full-time that summer and continue part-time during the school year. In addition to receiving hands-on training, the internship paid an hourly rate and gave him tuition assistance for college. Dan was grateful for that. Once the Wheelers had heard of Dan's good fortune, they extended the offer of the penthouse to include him. He had gratefully accepted, as the internship would not provide enough money for decent lodging in the city, and he would have had to commute to and from Sleepyside at odd hours.

By the time Di received notification that she had been accepted for a six-week internship geared toward high school students at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bob-White internships were becoming a common phenomenon. At first, Di's mother insisted that she would take an apartment near the city and stay with Di during the internship. But Di's pleas and the Wheelers' logical explanations had convinced the Lynches to let Di stay at the apartment. She could have no better protection than Jim, Brian, and Dan.

With the majority of the Bob-Whites in New York City, Trixie and Honey had been able to persuade their parents to let them take a two-week vacation from their jobs and stay in the city with the other four BWGs. Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler had rented the apartment across the hall, as they had done when the Bob-Whites' Iowa friends had visited. Mart, of course, was invited to stay, too. Once Miss Trask agreed to chaperone the group, it was all set.

With the autopsy still fresh in his mind and the vision still gnawing at him, Brian arrived at the penthouse after his shift to find that Trixie, Honey, Mart, and Miss Trask had arrived and were settling in.

Honey looked over her shoulder and greeted Brian with a warm smile. But before she could say anything, his pair of almost-twin siblings gave him identical wrinkled noses.

"Ugh. You smell horrible!" Trixie said, waving her hand in front of her face. "What in the world have you been doing?"

"I'm studying to be a doctor," Brian said dryly, even as he headed toward the room he shared with Jim. "What do you think I've been doing?"

“If I were to venture a guess,” Mart said, looking at his brother with a speculative eye, “I’d say you’d spent some time with dead bodies today. You smell like decay mixed with formaldehyde.”

Honey looked a little green at the thought, but Trixie’s look of disgust turned to one of interest. “Oh!” she said excitedly. “Was this the week you were going to sit in on that autopsy?”

Brian glanced at Honey, who looked determinedly *not* interested, before turning his gaze back to Trixie. “Yes, that’s where I was. And can we not talk about this right now?” He gestured at his head. “Obviously, you guys can smell what I’ve been smelling since I walked into the autopsy this morning.”

“It is rather...strong,” Honey said hesitantly.

“Let me go change clothes and take a shower,” Brian said. He raised an eyebrow of inquiry at Miss Trask. “Are you guys renting the apartment across the way?”

Miss Trask nodded. “Mr. Wheeler arranged for it. The same one as before. Trixie, Honey and I will be staying in there, and Mart is bunking in with Dan.”

Brian nodded. “I won’t be very long. And I think the others will be home soon. Di will probably be the latest, because she doesn’t get off until five.” He gestured toward the kitchen. “Make yourself at home. There are plenty of drinks in the fridge.”

“Well, why didn’t you say so?” Mart said with a grin.

Brian rolled his eyes and headed down the hallway, ignoring his siblings’ continual banter with Honey’s soothing tones mixing in.

A shower is just what I need. I can wash off this danged smell and put on some clean clothes, and I’ll feel more like a human being.

Brian closed the bathroom door that was off of the large room he and Jim shared and shed his clothes into a pool by his feet. He glanced down and instead of seeing a pile of clothes, he saw dark red, rapidly pooling blood.

The vision so shocked him that he actually stumbled backward, ramming his back against the unyielding firmness of the bathroom door. “Damn it!” he muttered. Brian glanced again toward the pile on the floor, which was again a jumble of clothes.

In self-disgust, he stomped back over to the shower, yanking the knobs to turn on the water. “One little autopsy and you’re seeing blood everywhere.” Brian scowled at himself as he tested the temperature of the water with his hand before stepping around the shower curtain. “Just get a grip, will you?”

Brian gratefully let the hot water flow over him, consciously pushing aside all thoughts of blood and autopsies. As scientific and logical as his mind usually was, seeing his first dead body had gotten to him, no matter how clinical and detached he had tried to remain during the procedure. The last thing he wanted to think about now was his failure to remain objective when it counted, so instead, he concentrated on Honey’s warm smile.

The one drawback to volunteering at the hospital this summer had been his distance from Crabapple Farm...and Honey. He was looking forward to spending as much time as he could with her during the next two weeks. Brian had thoroughly enjoyed the time the Bob-Whites had all spent together in New York City when they were in high school and knew that a lot of good times were just around the corner.

Although, maybe this time, he reflected as he washed his hair for the third time, we won't get involved in a mystery. Maybe this time, Honey and I can go to that little French restaurant alone.

It was with pleasant thoughts that Brian finished his shower and quickly got dressed, subconsciously choosing clothes he had never worn to the hospital. When he joined the others in the living room, he found that Jim and Dan had returned home, and they were all discussing what to do for dinner.

"Wouldn't it be fun to eat at that French restaurant that we ate at when the Hubbell twins and Ned visited us?" Trixie was asking. She glanced at her almost-twin, a mischievous twinkle in her round, blue eyes. "Mart could order the escargot."

Mart grimaced. "I'd sooner order sautéed cerveaux than make that mistake again!" he exclaimed.

"Do I even want to know what sautéed cerveaux is?" Dan drawled from his relaxed position on the sofa.

Honey shook her head. "Nope. First Brian comes home smelling like, well, like death, and now Mart is talking about fried brains! I hope this isn't a sign of things to come!"

Trixie laughed. "We Beldens will try to keep the macabre to a minimum during this vacation."

"Don't make promises you can't keep, Trixie," Dan jeered. "I seem to remember that you're usually the one in the middle of all the mayhem."

"I didn't say I'd keep the mayhem to a minimum, just the macabre," Trixie retorted.

Jim smiled and tugged on one of Trixie's errant curls, the one that always found its way so attractively onto her forehead. "How about we keep both the macabre *and* the mayhem down to a minimum and just settle for a level around exhilarating or exciting?"

Trixie beamed at Jim. "Consider it done, Mr. Frayne."

"Okay, now that we have that settled, where are we going to eat? Di's going to be here any minute and..." As usual, Mart's thoughts turned to his two favorite things, food and Diana Lynch.

"And you can let her get in the door and relax a minute before you drag her out again," Trixie admonished, tearing her eyes away from Jim's handsome face long enough to glare at her brother. "Maybe Di would like to have some input, too."

“Input into what?” Di herself said as she entered the crowded apartment. She set her black leather briefcase down and happily greeted the newcomers, giving all of them hugs. Honey’s eyes twinkled with amusement as she noted that the hug Di gave Mart was considerably longer than the hug either she or Trixie had received.

Realizing that Trixie probably had noticed as well, and looking to head off yet another almost-twin squabble, she responded, “We wondered if you had any advice on where to eat.”

“You know, I’d love to go to that French restaurant we went to when the Hubbell twins and Ned were here.” Di looked puzzled as everyone laughed. “What? What’d I say?”

“Trixie said almost the identical thing right before you came home,” Mart explained.

Once they had decided on the French restaurant, Miss Trask called the eatery to ensure that their group could be accommodated. Once she was assured that there was always a table for Mr. Wheeler’s family and friends, the young people scattered to change into suitable clothing.

Brian, already suitably attired and suddenly weary now that all of the life seemed to have gone out of the room, sank down into the sofa. Di, who also did not need to change, sat down next to him. Brian noticed that she looked as though she was about to say something but suddenly looked confused and then slightly sickened.

Brian sighed. The autopsy he had witnessed was proving to be more trouble than it was worth. “That’s me.”

“What’s you?” Di said, her pretty nose wrinkling as she looked around for the source of the odd smell.

“That smell,” Brian said. “I sat in on an autopsy today, and apparently the smell, uh, lingers.”

“For how long?” Di asked.

Brian shrugged. “A couple of days. It was even worse earlier. You’re lucky you’re getting me post-shower. I even washed my hair three times.”

“And some people do that for a living? Wow. Makes me glad I want to do something with art,” Di remarked.

“Yeah, and that’s not the worst of it,” Brian said without thinking—and immediately regretted it.

“Why? What else happened?” Di wanted to know.

Brian shook his head. “It was nothing.”

“Brian, I can tell by your face that it wasn’t just ‘nothing’. C’mon, what was it?”

Brian looked into Di’s violet eyes and saw nothing but interested curiosity and friendly concern. Diana Lynch was known as a good person to talk to, and suddenly, Brian had the urge

to confess what he had seen, both at the autopsy and in the bathroom of the penthouse. He opened his mouth to tell her, but he was interrupted by Dan's entrance.

"I wouldn't let Mart see you sitting so close to his woman," Dan teased.

Brian shot him a look and said dryly, "Ha ha. Di and I were just discussing our days. How was yours?" he asked, more to change the subject than anything else.

"Still training. We're mostly learning about the amount of paperwork involved when arresting a perp. It's pretty amazing how much paper the NYPD can waste."

Soon, everyone was ready, and as the group headed to the restaurant, Brian tried to pretend that it was just he and Honey headed to the cute little bistro. They would have a romantic dinner together, maybe even catch a play afterward. He would walk her to her door afterward and kiss her soft lips.

He sighed happily and then realized that the group had gotten slightly ahead of him. The night was rather chilly for July, and a glance up at the thunderclouds gathering in the sky told him it was probably going to storm before the night was over.

Funny, he mused, I don't remember a thunderstorm being in the forecast.

His upward-tilted eyes then landed on the sign above one of New York's many pubs. Brian didn't even have time to form a complete thought about the unusual name of the establishment, the Frying Pan Public House, before he felt the world receding for the second time that day. The bright lights and cacophony of the busy New York City street faded, and a world very different from his own took its place.

It was the fifth public house they'd been to that evening. Brian ducked into the entryway of the Frying Pan Public House, taking off his hat and shaking off the rainwater that had accumulated on his cloak from their walk from the last pub they'd visited.

The raucous laughter of the pub's occupants made his eyes light in anticipation. The food smells wafting from the kitchen seemed rich and succulent.

Nicholas Roberts clapped him on the shoulder with a grin. "Are you as hungry as I am, milord?"

"Moreso," Brian said firmly. He tugged at the tie of his cape and draped it over his arm. "That last pub's fare was abominable."

"Agreed," his friend said. He looked over at a stout, middle-aged man, who was wiping his hands on his dirty apron, as he hurried over to greet them. "My good man!" he said. "We need a private room with some of your best fare and ale."

"Of course, milord," the man said with a credible bow. "A room will be prepared for ye. 'Twill just be a moment."

As the man was talking, Brian felt a slight form brush up against him. He looked down in distraction to see a petite woman with brown hair and eyes looking up at him. She reeked of drink, and Brian noticed, as she smiled unsteadily at him, that several of her teeth were missing.

“Sich a handsome man,” she cooed at him. “’Tis late. Is you lookin’ for a quiet place to sleep?” The woman ran a hand encased in a ragged glove up and down the sleeve of his greatcoat.

“Polly!” The owner of the pub called out, a scowl on his weatherbeaten face. “Leave the gent alone. Didn’t I tell ye to get on your way?”

She ignored him for a moment, her glassy eyes gazing at Brian with a mixture of hope and desperation. Before Brian could even say a word, the owner of the pub grew closer, glaring angrily at her. “Polly!”

“Aye,” she said, her scowl matching his. “Can’t blame a woman for tryin’, can ye?” The woman dropped her hand to her side before she reached up to pull the strings on her black bonnet and sniffed before she stumbled toward the door, opening it and heading out into the pouring rain.

Brian watched her go, a troubled look on his face. He felt then, another squeeze on his arm.

“You can’t save them all, Brian,” Nicholas said in a low voice.

Still, the woman’s desperation spoke to him on some level he didn’t understand. He stepped toward the door, almost as if he were compelled to follow her.

“Brian,” Nicholas said in exasperation. “Really, chap. The weather is monstrous. The pubkeeper has a room ready. She’s a damned whore. She’ll give you the pox. Brian...”

“Brian!”

Brian blinked his eyes, happy to be greeted with the sight of crowds and bright lights.

“Brian, you coming?” Trixie called from just outside of the door of the restaurant.

Brian quickened his step and called, “Coming.” At his reassurance, the rest of the group headed into the restaurant. Only Honey hung back, a pleasant smile on her face as she waited for Brian to hurry along.

“Sorry about that,” Brian apologized as he caught up and he and Honey stepped into the stylish eatery together.

“It’s no big deal.” She looked up at him, her large hazel eyes filled with concern. “Are you all right? Ever since this afternoon you’ve seemed a little...I don’t know...reserved.”

Brian took Honey’s hand and gave it a reassuring squeeze. “I’m fine. I guess the autopsy just affected me more than I thought it would.” He ignored the little voice inside his head that shouted, *That’s an understatement!*

Honey nodded. "That makes sense."

Brian didn't have time to say anything else because the maître d' was showing the Bob-Whites and Miss Trask to their table. The evening passed in a blur of activity and congeniality, and before he knew it, Brian was in his bed, anticipating another day of volunteer work at the hospital.

A day with no corpses, was his last waking thought before sleep claimed his tired being.

The next day...

The morning sun streamed into his bedroom, teasing Brian awake. He blinked his eyes open and yawned. Glancing over, he saw Jim still buried under his blanket, trying to drown out the sunlight. A smile quirked his lips as he remembered Jim desperately attempting to stay awake the night before, listening to Trixie go on about whatever her latest mystery had been. His friend was normally an early morning riser, but his late night with Trixie, combined with no early morning class, had him still sleeping away.

Brian quietly got out of bed and made it absentmindedly before he headed toward the shower. The aroma from the autopsy was not quite as pungent as it had been the day before, but Brian still scrubbed his skin extra thoroughly with the bar of soap and washed his hair twice, trying to hurry the process along.

After Brian had dried off and finished his morning ablutions, Jim was stirring. The redhead yawned and raised a hand in greeting before he buried more firmly into his pillow.

"Good luck with that," he murmured as he headed out into the hallway. "That'll teach you to sit with Trixie all night."

"Go away," his friend muttered, pulling the blanket up more firmly around him.

Brian chuckled as he closed the door and headed down the hallway toward the kitchen. He knew it was only a matter of time before Jim gave up the ghost and got in the shower. The latest he'd ever seen Jim sleep was eight o'clock, and that time, he'd been sick.

He entered the kitchen and was surprised to see Mart sitting at the table, his nose buried in the newspaper. "Good morning," he greeted his brother as he headed over to the coffee maker, which was, blessedly, full of coffee.

A non-committal grunt from his brother was the only response. Brian grinned as he opened a cabinet, pulled out a coffee mug and filled it. He sipped at the steaming beverage before he ambled over to the refrigerator to look inside. "If you're that tired, why are you up?" he demanded.

"I'm not tired," Mart said finally, peering over the edge of the newspaper briefly before returning his gaze to its pages. "I'm reading."

"And what's so fascinating in the news this morning?" he asked as he pulled out milk to pour on his cereal.

“You mean you haven’t heard?” Mart demanded.

“Heard what?”

“About the serial killer running loose in the city?”

Brian frowned. “A serial killer?”

“Yeah. He’s murdered four prostitutes. Really nasty deaths. Carved these women to pieces.” Mart folded the newspaper and placed it on the table before he turned to the cereal bowl in front of him that had previously been hidden by the newspaper’s pages. “The newspaper says it’s a lot like Jack the Ripper.”

“Jack the Ripper?” a voice demanded from the kitchen doorway. Dan gave Mart a curious look as he entered the room. “Who’s talking about Jack the Ripper before breakfast?”

“*During breakfast,*” Brian said glumly as he sat down next to his brother.

“It’s all Trixie’s fault,” Mart pointed out. “She’s been keeping track of the case from home, I gather. It’s on all the news channels lately.”

“Yeah, she kept Jim, Mart and me up way past our bedtimes, giving us the scoop on the horror stories,” Dan said with a yawn. “I have no idea how I’m going to make it through today. I’m so wiped.”

“Why didn’t you just tell her to shut up and go to bed?” Brian asked, rolling his eyes. His outward demeanor was exasperated, but inside, his heart was pounding. *Whitechapel. I was in Whitechapel in those...episodes. Whitechapel is where Jack the Ripper killed all those women, isn’t it?*

“Trixie never listens,” Mart said with a grin. “Besides...we were all interested. Even Frayne. Trixie tells a very good story.”

“So, uh, they’re calling the guy Jack the Ripper because of the brutality of the crimes?” Brian asked, trying to keep the desperate curiosity out of his voice.

“Sort of,” Dan said as he poured himself a cup of coffee. “That’s part of it anyway.”

“Part of it?”

“Well, the guy seems to be following Jack the Ripper’s footsteps,” Mart explained. “Something about the women here is like the women who were murdered in London by Jack the Ripper in the 1880s.”

“What do you mean?” Brian asked, taking another sip of his coffee, more for something to do with his hands than anything else. He barely tasted the hot beverage as it sloshed down his throat.

“Well, one woman spoke fluent Welsh, which you’ve got to admit is a weird ability in this day and age. And two were killed on the same day within an hour of each other, just like two of the women from back then.” Mart’s face was alight with interest as he spoke.

Brian, however, felt a sense of dread that only increased as the victims were described. “You said there were four, right? What about the last one?”

“The last woman had a boyfriend of sorts. Or maybe a regular john or something. His name is Edward Stanley,” Dan offered. “One of the Ripper victims had a guy with the same name.”

Brian’s eyes widened at that. He swallowed and looked from Dan to Mart and back again. “How many victims did Jack the Ripper have?”

“Well,” Mart said, “according to the paper...” He tapped the newspaper next to him. “...they think it could have been up to 18. But the traditional die-hard Ripperologists say there were only five confirmed to be his work.”

“And there have been four murders here in New York?” Brian asked.

“Yeah. Only four.”

“Stands to reason he’ll probably try to commit another one,” Dan said grimly.

“Who was the fifth victim?” Brian asked, his throat tight.

“Mary Jane Kelly,” Mart promptly supplied. “This guy seems to be going in the reverse order, though. Mary Jane Kelly’s copycat murder was the New York City Ripper’s first, but Mary Ann Nichols was the London Ripper’s first victim.”

“I thought her name was Polly,” Dan interjected. “Didn’t Trixie say ‘Polly’ last night?”

Brian blanched. “Polly?”

“A nickname, I think.” Mart finally took notice of his brother’s pale complexion. “Are you all right?”

“I...I’ve got to go. I, uh, have to go to the library...to research a medical case.” When Mart and Dan gave him incredulous looks, he pushed forward with a hurried explanation. “My mentor assigned all of us to research a medical case. Medical interns and students do it all the time,” Brian said, pushing his chair back from the table. “I’ll see you guys later.” With that, he hurried out of the kitchen, ignoring the bewildered look exchanged between his brother and his friend.

Oh, my god. That woman...she was...her name was...

Polly.

After Brian left, the room seemed eerily quiet. Mart and Dan both knew that something important had just happened, but neither knew exactly what.

“Has Brian been...” Mart trailed off, not sure exactly how to word his question.

“Acting strange lately?” Dan finished for him. At Mart’s nod, he replied, “No. Brian’s been completely normal, as far as I can tell, since we all moved in here.” Dan was quiet for a moment as he thought back to his friend’s actions. “As a matter of fact, it wasn’t until last night that he was acting different. Did you notice how quiet he was at dinner?”

Mart nodded. “I thought that maybe he was just working too hard and was tired. Is that not the case?”

“Well, he’s Brian. He always works hard. But he’s been keeping pretty regular hours at the hospital, and when he comes home, he leaves his work at the hospital and just kinda relaxes. He says it’s been nice to get home and not have to worry about piles of homework. Even though he’s keeping early hours at the hospital, I’d say he’s *less* tired than during the school year.”

Mart nodded slowly. “Okay, then what happened yesterday to make him so tired and distant?”

The two friends looked at each other and recognition dawned at once. “The autopsy,” they said in unison.

“What about the autopsy?” Honey asked as she entered the kitchen. “Good morning, guys. I hope it’s okay that Trixie and I let ourselves in.”

“Natch,” Mart said easily as Dan smiled a greeting at the two girls.

“What about the autopsy?” Trixie repeated Honey’s question as she opened the refrigerator and pulled out a container of orange juice.

“It smelled,” Mart said, not able to think of a better story on such short notice.

“Yeah, it did,” Trixie said, wrinkling her nose at the memory as she poured herself a glass of juice. Mart relaxed as he realized that Trixie was going to accept his lame answer.

“Is Brian up?” Honey asked as she took the juice container from Trixie and poured her own glass.

“He headed to the library,” Dan explained.

Honey frowned. “But he said he was going to be around this morning because he didn’t have any work to do.”

It was Mart and Dan’s turn to frown. “He said he had to go to the library to research a medical case,” Dan stated. “Something about how his mentor had assigned all of the volunteers to research a case, just like a medical student or an intern would. That’s not what he told you?”

Honey shook her head. “No. He specifically said that he would be around this morning, because he wanted to take a walk with me through Central Park.”

“That’s weird,” Mart muttered.

“What’s weird?” Trixie asked, her sandy eyebrows raised. “This is Brian. We all know how dedicated he is to his career aspirations and how hard he works.”

“But we also know how organized he is and how he likes to keep a promise,” Dan pointed out. “If he said he wanted to take a walk with Honey this morning, then we can bet that he didn’t have any research hanging over his head.”

“Then where did he go?” Trixie asked.

“That,” Mart said, “is the million dollar question.”

Four pairs of concerned eyes stared at each other.

Meanwhile, Brian was on his way to the library to research Jack the Ripper, both the 1880s London version and the current New York City version. There was a perfectly good computer with high-speed Internet access in the Wheeler penthouse, but Brian didn’t want everyone to see what he was doing.

The walk to the library was short, and he soon was ensconced in the hush of a New York Public Library branch. He sat down at an empty computer and began typing in his search phrases. Fortunately, there weren’t a lot of people interested in research first thing on a Saturday morning, and there were several other free terminals, so he did not have to adhere to the 30-minute time limit just yet. As the library began to fill up, he knew that he would have to finish up his research and free up the computer.

He scribbled notes on a pad: Mary Ann Nichols, August 31, 1888...Annie Chapman, September 8, 1888...Elizabeth Stride, September 30, 1888...Catherine Eddows, September 30, 1888...Mary Jane Kelly, November 9, 1888. M.O. was to strangle prostitutes until they were unconscious or dead. Then he cut their throats. Took visceral “souvenirs.” Some were grotesquely mutilated. The sexual organs were always attacked. Had to have some knowledge of anatomy. Skilled surgeon?

Brian stared at the scrawled words. *What am I doing?* he asked himself. *This is Trixie’s forte, not mine. Why am I sitting in a library researching Jack the Ripper when I could be in Central Park with Honey?*

But something compelled him to continue his quest. The rows of books and rich, paneled oak of the library walls faded as he threw himself into 1880s London. The description of the viciousness of the original Ripper sickened him as he read the details of the five canonical murders. Despite the vivid images playing in his head, heightened by the memory of the autopsy the previous day, Brian forced himself to keep reading.

“Okay...Edward Stanley,” he muttered to himself as he continued to make notes. “Mart said something about that name being related to one of the current victims. Originally, Edward Stanley was associated with Annie Chapman. Mart also said that the first New York victim was named Mary Jane Kelly. Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddows were killed an hour apart, just like Mart mentioned. That leaves Mary Ann Nichols...Polly...as the only canonical victim that doesn’t have some sort of tie to any of the current victims.”

Brian stared at the paper. “So what?” he grumbled to himself. “Congratulations, Brian, you’ve just figured out what even the greenest rookie on the NYPD could have figured out. *Why are you doing this again?*”

Because you have something the police don’t have, a voice inside Brian’s head said. He shook his head to clear himself of such thoughts.

“You’re cracking up, Belden,” he said softly as he stared unseeingly at the computer screen in front of him.

No, you’re not, the voice said again. *You have to help. You’re the only one.* And, once again, Brian sat paralyzed as another vision overtook him.

The alcohol humming through his veins made him feel as if he could do anything—be anything he wanted. After four—or was it five?—pints of the Frying Pan Public House’s finest ale, he and Nicholas followed their friends back down Osborn Street.

Chuck was singing a ditty about a girl from Wales, while Will leered at a couple of prostitutes who gestured at him with come-hither smiles.

They looked a lot prettier in the golden glow of the streetlight than they had the first time they’d meandered down the cobblestones. Brian squinted at them, trying to take in their forms through bleary eyes.

“Eh, handsome!” one of them called out. “It’s late; ye want a nice set of pillas to lie down on tonight, don’t ye, laddie?”

This produced a wild, raucous laughter from his friends. Chuck stopped singing and slapped him on the shoulder. “That one there’s a right looker,” he said jovially. “Think she’d enjoy a tumble from you, milord?”

Brian couldn’t help the flush that started in his cheeks. Perhaps it was the teasing; more likely, it was the ale, which had already changed allegiances. Instead of the high energy that had buoyed him for the last hour, an inexpressible sense of dread and sadness pulsed through him.

He stumbled forward then, pushed by a very unsteady woman, who staggered down Osborn Street, ignoring the catcalls of the men around him.

“Best check for your purse, Brian,” Will shouted as he glared at the woman with her dark bonnet askew.

The woman from the public house. The thought made it through his dulled mind with startling clarity. “That woman...” he rasped, pointing after her.

“Did she nick your purse, then?” Chuck demanded. “I can call for the constable.”

“No.” Brian shook his head even as he felt for his money bag, still firmly in his pocket. He looked over at his friend, Nicholas, who gazed back at him under hooded lashes. “She was at the public house. She...”

“Is that all?” Will asked scornfully. “It’s late. It’s raining. They’ll all be looking for a warm bed by now.” He shook his head.

“She had teeth missing,” Nicholas pointed out. “And if I’m not mistaken, she’s probably old enough to be your mother.” He slapped Brian’s shoulder. “Don’t think on it, mate.”

Brian still continued to stare down the street, where the woman had joined another soiled dove. Her grating, lower class accent was apparent in the loud words she spoke to the other woman.

“I had me doss money three times today,” she said as she staggered over to the nearest wall, resting herself against it. “And I drunk it away.” This was followed by a high-pitched giggle. “Three times!”

“What’re you goin’ to do?” the other woman asked, pulling her shawl a little more tightly around her shoulders.

“I ‘spect I’ll return to Flower and Dean Street.” The woman tugged on her bonnet straps and then continued, “It won’t be long before I’m back.”

Before Brian could do anything, his friends steered him around the women, who watched them go. “C’mon!” Nicholas said. “We’ll find better trade up a few blocks. Less chance of the pox that way.”

Once again, Brian was jolted back to the present. He looked around to see if anyone had noticed anything. On one side of him, a middle-aged man with a graying goatee sat reading the latest online news. The terminal on the other side of Brian was empty. Everyone else seemed to be absorbed in their own work.

“What does this mean?” he murmured. “What could this possibly mean?”

Brian had to consider why he felt so compelled to pursue this case. Even the prospect of a morning stroll with Honey Wheeler hadn’t been able to discourage this drive—this *compulsion*—to research the serial murders. Why? Why had he immediately connected the murders that Mart described with his visions? Some sort of visceral instinct had kicked in, though, and he had just *known* that the two were related.

“This is ridiculous.” Brian didn’t believe in visions or the supernatural. He didn’t care what everyone said about Lizzie Borden’s ghost, or about whatever it was that happened at the house in Chicago, or the unusual visit to Jim’s dad’s grave, or that nonsense with the Hessian soldier. Whatever he was seeing, whatever was happening, it *had* to have a rational explanation.

What that explanation might be failed him presently, but he was sure he would think of one eventually.

Don’t be so sure...

That voice again! Brian turned his full attention to the computer screen. He was *not* going to let that ridiculous voice get the best of him.

Focus on the present, Brian, he told himself. There has to be a clue here somewhere.

He poured over pages and pages of news coverage of the current Ripper and wondered how he had managed to miss this story. He made notes of all of the details that the media provided, noting both similarities and differences to the Whitechapel Ripper. The one main difference that Brian noted was the difference in the time of year that the murders were committed. The Whitechapel Ripper had started his spree at the end of August and finished in November. The New York City Ripper had committed his first known murder on May 31st. Other than the two victims that had been murdered an hour apart, the frequency of the New York murders did not resemble that of the Whitechapel ones. The only similarity in that respect was that both first murders had occurred on the 31st of the month.

Despite the fact that the murderers had not followed the same timetable, Brian had an instinctual feeling that the killer in New York was using the Whitechapel murders as a map—a game plan to spring off of. Brian did some mental calculations and came to the realization that if the New York killer allowed himself the same amount of time for his murders as Jack the Ripper had for his, the next murder would have to occur in two days. He wondered why that particular thought had struck him. So far, the murderer hadn't adhered to the Ripper's original pattern of time.

Once again, though, deep down inside, Brian *knew* he was right. The New York Ripper was going to strike in two days. Swiftly on the heels of this thought, another, more horrifying thought struck the dark-haired young man.

Brian Belden knew he was the only one who could stop him.

Brian barely remembered the brisk walk back to the Wheelers' apartment. His mind was consumed with the facts he'd tried to absorb from the various web searches that he had done to find out all he could about one Mary Ann "Polly" Nichols.

The papers in his hand crumpled under the force of his grip, and his stride was long, fast and furious as he walked down the street toward the large high-rise in which he was currently residing.

His concentration was so acute that he barely registered the cacophony that awaited him upon his arrival at home.

"Where have you been?" demanded Mart, jumping up from the couch where he'd been sitting.

"What kind of medical research requires you to be out of the house before nine?" Trixie added, right on his heels.

"Weren't you supposed to go with Honey to Central Park?" Dan interjected.

Jim glanced at his watch and then back at his friend. "You've been gone for nearly two hours. What's going on?"

Brian slowly switched from the urgent voice in his head to the loud, demanding ones in front of him. He glanced Honey's way and gave her an apologetic look before he turned again to notice six Bob-Whites and no Miss Trask. "Where's Miss Trask?" he asked.

"With her sister," Trixie replied swiftly. She shook her finger at her brother. "Don't change the subject. We want to know what you've been doing and where you've been doing it."

Brian hesitated, looking at the concerned looks on his friends' faces, and then deliberately walked over to where Di was sitting alone on the couch. He gestured at the other seats around him. "Sit. I need clear heads to help me with this. It's very important."

At Brian's urgent order, the five standing Bob-Whites did as he asked, looking at him with even greater concern. Honey gestured at the crumpled papers in his hand. "Is that what you need to talk about?"

Brian glanced down at the papers as if he'd only just noticed them. "I...yes." He put the papers on the coffee table in front of him and tried to smooth out the wrinkles he'd inflicted.

Trixie had chosen the seat on the other side of her brother and looked eagerly over his shoulder at the papers. She read for a moment before her eyes widened. "Jack the Ripper?"

Dan and Mart exchanged glances. "We were talking about Jack the Ripper this morning," Dan said slowly.

"Yes. Him and the person who's imitating him here in New York," Brian said shortly.

"You said this was important," Jim said hesitantly, his green eyes troubled. "Have you...well...do you have something...to help the police? Or...?"

"Not exactly," Brian hedged. He let out his breath in a long exhale. "This isn't easy for me. So, just listen until I'm done, okay?"

The Bob-Whites exchanged looks with each other, but finally, to a one, they all nodded. Trixie and Mart both moved forward in their seats, watching Brian with a energetic expectancy.

"I went to that autopsy yesterday. And...well...there was something strange about it," Brian began.

"Strange how?" Trixie demanded.

Honey gave her friend a disapproving stare. "Trixie!"

Brian ignored them both and continued, "I thought I was going to pass out. The smell—well, you've smelled it. It's about a thousand times worse in person. And it didn't help that it was a woman they were doing the autopsy on."

A small, sad moan escaped from Honey, who clapped her hand over her mouth at the sound.

Brian closed his eyes and ran his hand through his hair before he looked again at his friends. “I thought I was going to pass out, but I didn’t. Not exactly.”

“Not exactly...” Dan repeated, a look of confusion on his slender face.

“I had a vision. Or a flashback. Or something like that,” Brian said. He clasped his hands in front of him, wondering if the pressure of his hands would help assuage the churning inside him.

“What kind of a vision?” Jim asked.

“I think it was of a murder,” Brian said grimly.

Di and Honey gave him identical looks of horror while Mart demanded, “A murder? Whose murder?”

“Polly Nichols’ murder,” he whispered.

Diana looked from one of her friends to the other before fixing her gaze back on Brian. “Who is Polly Nichols?”

“One of Jack the Ripper’s victims,” Mart advised her before he began peppering his brother with questions. “But Brian...I don’t understand. What kind of vision? Did you *see* who murdered her? How do you know it was her?”

Brian slowly began to tell them about his visions over the past twenty-four hours. How the visions correlated with the known facts of Polly Nichols’ last night alive. How he kept running into the woman and seeing her desperate face as she searched for shelter that fateful night.

“But this woman’s been dead for...what? More than 120 years?” Di demanded. “Even if you saw the murderer in one of these visions, he’s dead as well. There’s nothing you can do about it now.”

“But there’s another killer on the loose,” Trixie breathed.

“And he’s repeating Whitechapel murders.” Mart’s voice was as excited as his sister’s.

“Which means...” Dan said slowly.

“That I might be able to stop him,” Brian said hoarsely. He glanced down at the printed out papers from the library. His eyes lit on the mortuary photograph of Polly Nichols—the same woman he’d seen in the public house, trying desperately to find a place to sleep that night. He couldn’t help her, but he knew, somehow, that she wanted him to help her present-day stand-in from a similar, terrible fate.

He raised his eyes and found that Honey had also been looking at the picture of the long-dead Polly Nichols. She sensed his gaze on her and looked up, her hazel eyes brimming with unshed tears.

“How can we help?” she asked huskily.

As Brian looked around at his friends, he realized how lucky he was. They had just jumped in and begun helping him without question.

Okay, there were a few questions. Brian grinned to himself, despite the serious situation. When the Bob-Whites had realized that one of their own needed help, they were there for him.

Despite the fact that I haven't been there in the past for them, he thought ruefully. *When Trixie was convinced the ghost of Lizzie Borden's stepmother was trying to talk to her, you scoffed at her, he chided himself. When she was convinced the ghostly moll of some gangster had a message for her, you called her crazy. But she—and everyone else—just took you at your word when you said Polly Nichols had a message for you. You've got a lot to learn, Brian Belden.*

He raised his eyes just then and met Honey's warm, hazel gaze. She smiled reassuringly at him before her head bent back down in concentration as she stared at a set of printouts.

After he had told his story, it had been no surprise that Trixie had immediately begun marshalling the troops. She had quickly taken the papers from Brian, divided them up, and handed out sections for detailed examination. Mart had been sent to the kitchen for the newspaper he had been reading that morning. Jim had been dispatched to the lobby newsstand to buy copies of the *Post* and the *Daily News* to see if they had anything to add to the story Mart had read in the *Times*. He had also been instructed to buy a map of the city. Jim, being Jim, happily ran the errand for Trixie.

Within twenty minutes, the seven of them were pouring over varied accounts of murder. The only sound that could be heard in the apartment was the shuffling and rustling of papers. Every now and then Di or Honey would murmur regretfully or outright gasp, and Brian felt a tug of guilt at what he was putting them through. Looking at pictures of mutilated bodies and reading graphic descriptions about the work of a vicious, sick mind was not how most people wanted to spend their Saturday morning.

“Oh, this is too bad,” Honey said softly, shaking her head at the words on the page.

Trixie looked up from her own reading. “What?”

“Listen to this.” Honey read from her printout. “3:15 a.m.—P.C. John Thain, 96J, passes down Buck's Row on his beat. He sees nothing unusual. At approximately the same time, Sergeant Kerby passes down Buck's Row and reports the same.” She looked up, her large eyes filled with sadness. “Two police officers patrol the street Polly was murdered on only minutes before she's murdered. If only she had passed through there a little earlier or even just one of the policemen patrolled a little bit later. It's just so sad.”

The others soberly nodded their agreement, but Dan's black eyes were sharp with interest. “What did you say the officers' names were?”

Honey looked back down at her printout. “Sergeant Kerby,” she promptly responded, “and...John Thain.” She looked back up at Dan. “Why?”

“Well, it’s weird, but one of the police officers that I used to work with was named John Thain,” Dan explained.

“Used to?” Di gulped. “What happened to him?”

Dan chuckled. “It’s nothing like that. He asked for a transfer—was really adamant about it, too—and he got it. He started his new beat, oh, I’d say, about a week or so ago.”

“That’s a weird coincidence,” Di said. Trixie and Honey exchanged meaningful glances, an action that Mart’s quick blue eyes did not miss.

“Okay, shamuses, spill it,” he said. “You two can talk volumes with your eyes. What’s up?”

Trixie steadfastly met her brother’s glare. “Honey and I realized a long time ago that coincidences when working on a case usually aren’t so coincidental.”

“So, what do you think this means?” Jim wanted to know.

Trixie shrugged. “I don’t know. But what I do know is that something compelled Honey to read that line out loud. If she hadn’t, Dan wouldn’t have been able to identify the name on the officer as being the same as an officer he knows.”

Mart hooted. “Now something from the ‘Great Beyond’ is speaking through Honey?”

Yes! The voice inside Brian’s head was a shout. At his gasp, six heads swiveled toward him.

“You okay, Bri?” Jim asked, concern clearly written on his face.

“Umm, yeah,” Brian mumbled. “It’s just...it’s just...”

“It’s just what, Brian?” Mart demanded.

Suddenly, Brian spoke in a loud, clear voice. “I think Trixie’s right. I think Honey was supposed to read that out loud. And I think Dan was supposed to hear her.”

“Okay,” Mart said, drawing out the word.

“Then what do you suggest, Brian?” Honey asked quietly.

Brian didn’t hesitate. He *knew* what he needed to learn about, although he didn’t know *how* he knew. “Tell us about John Thain, Dan.”

Dan was quiet a moment, as if thinking. “Well, he was one of the officers assigned to mentor those of us in the Cadet Corps. He seemed okay on the outside, but there was something about him that made me very uncomfortable, and I never really understood why. He acted all right, I guess, but there was this...quality about him that made my hair stand on end every time I was around him. Everyone else seemed to like him okay, though.”

“You said that he requested a transfer.” Trixie prompted him.

Dan nodded. “Yeah, about a month ago he came in talking loudly about wanting a transfer over to Brooklyn.”

“To Brooklyn?” Honey asked in surprise. “Is that where he lives?”

“No, that was the weird thing. He lives in the Bronx. So, this transfer that he ‘needs’ all of a sudden actually moves him farther away from where he lives.”

“Don’t most people try to lessen their commute to work?” Mart asked.

“You would think,” Dan replied. “Plus, he’s moving into a less prestigious area than Manhattan.”

“So, he asked for this transfer *after* the recent murders started,” Trixie stated. “Did any of the murders occur near the precinct where he transferred?”

Dan grabbed the map Jim had bought and on which Mart had marked four red spots. The murder sites. Dan’s eyes traveled over the map. “These are much more spread out than the Whitechapel murders must have been.”

“Actually,” Mart said, “he’s hit every borough except for one.”

The room went still as everyone stared at one another. “Brooklyn.”

Fifteen minutes later, Dan was hanging up the phone after a fishing expedition.

“Well?” Trixie said before Dan even had a chance to take a breath.

“Trixie,” Brian admonished, “give him a second.” But he turned worried eyes urgently to his friend.

“The dispatcher says that he’s not in today, but when she found out I was a member of the Cadet Corps looking for him, she was willing to give me the route of his beat.”

“And?” Trixie demanded impatiently.

“And now we need to hop online and find out everything about it that we can,” Dan said. The group crowded around the computer and waited as Dan fired up an Internet browser. Even Mr. Wheeler’s “blazing fast” high-speed service wasn’t fast enough for Trixie, who hopped back and forth on each foot in impatience.

After a few mouse clicks, Dan was comparing the route he had hastily drawn on the map to some quick searches he had done using street names combined with other geographical search terms.

“It’s near the DUMBO neighborhood of Brooklyn,” he read off of the computer screen.

Di giggled. “What a name!”

“It stands for ‘Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass,’” Mart explained.

“I don’t care what it stands for—it’s still funny.”

Dan clicked on a link, and suddenly Trixie, reading eagerly, gasped. “Do you see this? The DUMBO section of Brooklyn is known for its cobbled streets! Just like Whitechapel did in 1888! How many neighborhoods in New York still have cobbled streets? ”

Jim whistled. “She’s got a point there. But it’s still a big area. How are we supposed to know if we’re right? And if we are right, exactly where the murder is going to occur?”

Brian spoke up. “We’re right. I feel it in my bones that this is the neighborhood where the next victim is going to be murdered.” At Mart’s startled look, he asked defensively, “What?”

Mart shook his head. “I just never thought that those words would ever come out of your mouth. My irresponsible younger sibling, yes. But my ever-responsible and level-headed older sibling? No.”

Brian managed a chuckle. “Me, neither, Mart. Me, neither.”

Trixie looked around at her fellow Bob-Whites, her blue eyes sparkling with excitement. “So, who’s up for a walk around DUMBO?”

Two hours and a subway ride later, the Bob-Whites walked along a cobbled street, following Officer Thain’s route. Trixie’s eagle eyes darted everywhere, looking for a clue, while Brian’s own sharp eyes absorbed the scene around him, waiting to spot something that was familiar from the visions. The group was three-quarters of the way through the route, and he was starting to get discouraged, when suddenly, he knew he was at the murder spot.

The tall, hovering outline of the Brown and Eagle Wool Warehouse cast a dark shadow over the street beyond the Roebuck pub on the corner of Brady Street.

Brian only knew the name of the warehouse because Chuck had leaned next to him as they walked past it, pointed at the dark brick building and whispered dramatically, “M’brother invests in that company. On the ‘change, you know.”

“He does?”

“They manufacture...wool, I believe,” Chuck continued, his nose wrinkling as he stared at the soot-covered building. “Dreadful place, isn’t it?”

“Dreadful,” Brian echoed. A shiver went down his spine as he continued to stare down the street. There was a sad little glimmer of lamplight near some of the tenement cottages crammed together further down on Buck’s Row. People live here?

Brian thought of his wide, open country estate with its large expanse of green around it and swallowed hard, somehow wishing he could transport the residents of Buck Row there.

Chuck strolled forward, whistling as he went—another ditty that he'd learned in the pub they'd just left. Nicholas called out to a couple of the prostitutes, hovering in a doorway, exchanging drunken taunts with them.

Brian took one long look at the darkened street, trying to ignore the whisper against his neck that made his hair stand on end—as if something was definitely not right in the murky, sinister decay of Buck's Row.

He began to lengthen his stride, walking to catch up with his friends. And as he passed the corner of the warehouse, it was then he noticed the metallic smell of pooling blood.

The present-day Brian found himself staring up at a nineteenth-century, red-brick building that proclaimed itself to be the “Eagle Warehouse and Storage Company.”

“Who has the printouts?” he asked the others, who had moved slightly ahead, not realizing that Brian had stopped.

“I do,” Honey said, reaching for her shoulder bag and pulling them out. “Why?”

“Do any of the articles say anything about an Eagle Warehouse being located near where Polly Nichols was found?” Brian asked as he moved to stand next to her. He read over Honey's shoulder while Trixie stood next to them fidgeting, as she was unable to see anything with Brian's shoulder in the way.

Finally, Honey located the right page. “She was found across from the Brown and Eagle Warehouse,” she reported. Everyone followed Brian's gaze to the large, brick building.

Trixie's eyes gleamed. “I think we've found our murder spot. Now, it's time to catch a murderer.”

A day or so later...

The seven Bob-Whites had spent most of the previous 36 hours preparing what Trixie excitedly called a “sting.” Although the group had thought about involving the police, the idea was quickly vetoed, as they had nothing concrete to go on...only Brian's visions and hunches. Dan had explained that the police were probably already overwhelmed with bogus tips to the hotline they had set up.

After careful rereading of the documentation about the original murder in London, they determined that the murder then had taken place sometime after three fifteen in the morning, in between the two police officers patrols.

And try as he might, Brian couldn't shake the feeling that John Thain would try to repeat history as much to the letter as possible.

So, it had been quickly agreed that the seven Bob-Whites would patrol the area in front of New York's Eagle Warehouse between the hours of three and four in the morning to try to prevent another murder.

The difference, however, between the two streets could not have been more vast. Where Buck's Row had been small and dark and mean with shadows, Old Fulton Street was large, paved and busy with bright streetlights illuminating the road and its surrounding sidewalks.

As they exited the subway and headed down the street toward the red brick building with its arched entryway and glass clock at its top, Jim leaned over to Brian and said in a low voice, "What now? I don't see a lot of good places to stand without getting into a lot of trouble ourselves."

Dan, who was walking next to Jim, muttered, "Yeah. Wouldn't it be nice if our murderer arrested us for loitering?"

Brian didn't reply, but searched the block in front of the building. The streetlamp illuminated the street with a friendly glow, highlighting a few cars parked in front of the impressive building. He saw no other people.

"These are apartments," Honey said, looking over her shoulder at the others. "What do we do if the person he's after lives in one?"

The group looked at each other in consternation and then, as one, turned to look at Brian.

The whole idea of following something by instinct and premonition was completely foreign to Brian. He swallowed, looking up at the ten-story building, wondering how they would ever determine who was the intended victim.

Wait.

The voice in his head was a soft, guttural whisper. His stomach clenched, and without even thinking about it, he pulled the others to a stop.

A bus rambled up to the edge of the block and let out several people, who walked with the brisk, late-night, "don't-mess-with-me" walk of a city dweller, headed toward the entrance to the Eagle Warehouse.

Without so much as even a flicker of an eyelash toward the Bob-Whites, the three men and one of the women disappeared inside, which left one woman walking a little more slowly behind them.

Her brown ponytail, which hung limply down her back, looked as tired as the woman herself did. She fumbled with her purse, searching through it as she talked on a cell phone tucked under her ear. "I'm fine," she said impatiently. "I can see the doorway of my apartment from here." The woman glanced at the Bob-Whites as she walked past them, a slight frown etching her forehead. Her eyes came to rest on Brian, and they stared at each other for a moment before she averted her eyes and kept walking. "No. Seriously. I'm fine. Will you go to bed?" With a couple of muttered comments, she hung the phone up and headed toward the entrance and disappeared under the archway.

Brian's heart was beating so rapidly that he was afraid it might leap out from under his skin. The face, the hair, the eyes—especially the eyes—were an exact match of the woman in his vision.

“Brian?” a soft voice came at his elbow.

Brian shook his head as if to clear it and looked down at Honey, who regarded him in concern.

“I...that...” He stopped for a moment, took a deep breath and said, “That’s her.”

“Are you sure?” demanded Mart.

“It’s the same woman. The one I’ve been seeing—” Brian stopped short as he heard a muffled scream.

The Bob-Whites all exchanged horrified glances. “Was that...?” Di said, her face pale and panicked.

“Come on!” Trixie demanded as she took off running down the street.

I gave the lady no time to squeal.

The pounding of his footsteps echoed the pounding of Brian’s heart. The length of the street seemed interminable to him as he ran.

My knife’s so nice and sharp.

The Bob-Whites all reached the entryway to the building one right after the other. Hidden in a small stairwell under the archway were two struggling figures.

The smaller one was the tired-looking woman, her hands scrambling desperately trying to loose the stronger hands that throttled her neck. Her attacker was clothed completely in black, a ski mask pulled down over his face.

With speed born from adrenaline, Brian pushed ahead of the others, running up the stairs to where the pair were struggling. Jim, Dan and Mart followed behind him, but it was Brian who reached the man first. He threw himself into the struggle, yanking on the hands around the woman’s neck.

“Let go of her!” Brian snarled.

The woman turned terrified eyes to Brian. “Help...” she croaked.

Brian’s firm punch to the stomach forced the man to loosen his hands. Mart grabbed the woman and pulled her out of the man’s reach. The man took advantage of Brian’s distraction and knocked him backward with a quick fist to his face. Then, he jumped over the railing and landed firmly on the ground below.

But before he could run out to the street, Trixie kicked him, straight to the groin. The man’s breath came out in a long whoosh. He bent over, howling in pain.

Brian, in the meantime, vaulted over the railing and landed right on top of the man, crashing him to the ground. Within moments, Jim and Dan had rushed down the stairs, helping to subdue him.

Honey grabbed the ski mask and yanked it off his head, fury sparking in her hazel eyes as she demanded of Dan, “Is this the guy?”

A loud gasp echoed from the woman behind them, still standing in the protective circle of Mart’s arms. “John?” she cried.

Much later...

The sun had risen before the Bob-Whites had been able to leave the Eagle Warehouse. The fight with John Thain had awoken several conscientious neighbors, who’d called the police.

The woman he’d been attacking was his estranged wife, Polly—the woman who had been his true intended victim all along.

As they all filed into the condo, Trixie headed blindly over to the couch and sank onto it, her blue eyes still reflecting her horror and shock. “He murdered those poor women as a *cover*.”

“I can’t believe it,” Diana said, shaking her head. “To set up all those other murders just so it would look like a Jack the Ripper copy cat.”

“What kind of person does something like that?” whispered Honey, her hazel eyes filling with tears.

“A deranged one,” Mart said grimly.

“His ancestor must be rolling in his grave right now,” Trixie said, a scowl on her face. “Can you believe he’s related to that cop that just missed catching Jack the Ripper in the act?”

All the other Bob-Whites seemed to want to talk—just to get out the revulsion and distress they were feeling. Brian, however, could not bring himself to speak. All he could think about was the hand in the tattered glove that had stroked his sleeve and the desperate look in a woman’s eyes, more than a hundred years before, that had never been answered.

A muffled cry that had never been heard.

Brian felt a hand on his arm, then, and turned a bit reluctantly to look at its source.

The woman peered up at him, the tattered fingers of her glove patting his arm. But this time, she had a smile on her weatherbeaten face.

“I don’t understand,” he whispered.

She tilted her head toward the darkened alley of Buck’s Row. “They be findin’ me soon. No worries, mate.”

“But...I didn’t...I couldn’t...”

“Save me?” she laughed. “T’weren’t meant to.” Polly nodded meaningfully. “’Tis her I were worried about.”

Brian stared at her for a long moment, just before she pulled the ribbons tightly on her bonnet and gave him a wink. “And as for me...I never need worry about my doss money e’er again.”

With those words, she turned on her heel and disappeared into the shadows of Buck’s Row.

“Brian?” a voice called out. “Brian?”

“Brian!” The voice was more insistent this time.

Brian blinked and looked down into Honey’s worried hazel eyes. He tried to smile. He tried to speak.

But with Honey, words weren’t necessary.

She pulled him into her arms and hugged him tightly, offering him what comfort she could. After a bit, she stepped back from him and offered him a tremulous smile. “Are you going to be okay?”

He exhaled as he ran a hand through his hair. “Yeah, I think so.”

Trixie came up to him, wrapping her arm around his waist, and squeezed him. “At least we got the bad guy this time,” she said firmly.

“Exactly,” Mart chimed in from his seat on the couch next to Diana. “It’s about time one of these tangles with the supernatural actually *solved* a crime!”

As glad as he was to have helped Polly Thain escape her ex-husband’s insane scheme, all Brian could think about was the metallic smell of blood and the hoarse cry of a working class man that alerted the world to one of its most famous murders.

He knew that one crime had been solved.

And one had not.

Catch me if you Can.

THE END

Authors' Notes:

Susan

I can't believe it's year FIVE of this universe already!! Dana and I have so much fun writing these stories. Dana is an absolute blast to write with. Our plotting and scheming chats are always, IMHO, the best part of the whole thing. :) Thanks, sweetie, for always making it so much fun!!!

We decided Brian was about due for torturing (what is it about that boy that we love torturing him so much?) because he'd been so stiff-necked in all of the other stories. So, for a year, we've been scheming. It was great fun to put him into this supernatural situation!

Obviously, this story is based on the real murders that happened in Whitechapel, a neighborhood in the East End of London. Mary Ann "Polly" Nichols was a real person and the events in the flashback are based on the accounts of what she did that night. Obviously, she never interacted with Brian or his friends. John Thain, Sgt. Kerby and Mary Jane Kelly were also real people. All the places mentioned in the flashbacks were real places in Whitechapel, and the street names were all real street names at the time. Polly Nichols was found across from the Brown & Eagle Wool Warehouse, in front of the door to their stables, which lay across the street. Any variations or inaccuracies from what really happened that night are purely our doing and part of our artistic, uh, license. Brian's friends, by the by, go in the Trixie books under the names of Chuck Altemus, Bill Morgan and Nick Roberts. ;)

The Whitechapel murders by the man claiming to be "Jack the Ripper" have never been solved. They are, however, of great interest to a number of people. I was helped greatly in my descriptions of the area in London by the folks at <http://casebook.org>, a Jack the Ripper research site. Wikipedia (<http://wikipedia.org>) and the Crime Library (<http://crimelibrary.com>) were also very helpful in providing information and details.

For a nice look at the archway in which the fight with John Thain occurred, you can check out this page: <http://newyorkdailyphoto.blogspot.com/2006/11/eagle-warehouse.html>

Pictures of the places in question (for the curious) can be found as follows:

The Brown and Eagle Wool Warehouse - <http://forum.casebook.org/attachment.php?attachmentid=9366&d=1193870882>

The Frying Pan Public House: <http://ripperlocations.blogspot.com/2006/07/frying-pan-public-house.html>

Buck's Row: http://www.casebook.org/victorian_london/sitepics.w-bucks.html

The three quotes, "I gave the lady no time to squeal."; "My knife's so nice and sharp."; and "Catch me if you Can.", are from the original letter from Jack the Ripper to the police. The letter is considered the only confirmed, genuine correspondence from the killer.

A few Victorian terms: "the pox" is the disease of syphilis, which ran rampant among prostitutes of the day, "doss money" is money used to get a place to sleep—doss meaning "A place to sleep, esp. in a cheap lodging house" (Random House Dictionary) and the 'change is a

shortened form of The Exchange, ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Exchange_\(London\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Exchange_(London))), which was a place where merchants and tradesmen could do business. Kind of like a precursor to the stock exchanges of today.

As usual, the Trixie Belden characters are owned by Random House, and their use here is not for profit, etc.

I'm already looking forward to next year!!

Dana

So, I didn't starting writing my notes until I read Susan's, and she's covered a lot of the things that I was going to say, so I won't repeat them. Okay, I will a little. *g* I do have to say that casebook.org was an incredible resource for the writing of this story. I don't know what I would have done without it!

The fellowships mentioned are actual fellowships. More information can be found at nypdcadets.com and <http://www.metmuseum.org/events/students#internships>.

And I don't know what I would do without my fellow Bob-White and co-conspirator, Susan. I managed to stand her up AGAIN this year when we were supposed to have our annual plottingfest. *sigh* I am sooooo sorry, Susan! But, as always, she is wonderful and forgiving. Best of all, she didn't disown me. *g* We went on to have our plotting chat the next week, and, as always, it was the most fun EVER! Seriously! Our plotting chats are always one of the highlights of my year, and I thank my lucky stars every day to be associated with such a talented writer. Susan is the wind beneath my wings—writing with her always elevates my own writing, and I am eternally grateful for that.

Just one last quick note, the note that Honey reads is verbatim from the casebook.org website. Now that I've cited it, Aleta won't have to flunk me! Susan and I did tweak the punctuation, though, but not the wording. It was not included in the word count total for either of us.

I also can't wait for next year! Thanks for reading!

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