

# ANATHEMA



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# ANATHEMA

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## PREFACE

4 June, 1858

Nearly two years have passed since the events chronicled herein. The memories tied to that terrifying week are still vivid and capable of inducing the occasional nightmare. I have decided, after considerable contemplation, to commit my recollections to the printed page and thereby exorcise them from the darkest recesses of my mind.

I have described as truthfully and objectively as possible the experiences of my brave band of fellow travelers, supplemented with such personal and public materials as other participants were willing to share or are available, in the hopes that this archive may provide both a record for scholars and scientists should a like matter ever again occur.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Balthazar Andrews, MD

\* \* \*

ANATHEMA  
Or,  
The Hemophage

A CHRONICLE OF THE CURIOUS OCCURRENCES ON THE ISLAND OF NANTUCKET IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD EIGHTEEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY SIX, INCLUDING A SUPPOSITION REGARDING THE LOSS OF THE WHALING VESSELS 'CERES' AND 'BALEEN'; THE SUBSEQUENT HORROR VISITED UPON THE ISLAND AND ITS AFTERMATH; WITH HERETOFORE UNPUBLISHED SCIENTIFIC OBSERVATIONS AND HYPOTHESES RELATED TO THE EVENTS THEREIN; COMPRISED OF NARRATIVE BY THE AUTHOR AND SUPPLEMENTED WITH CONTEMPORANEOUS JOURNALS AND PUBLIC PAPERS.

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER ONE

“Mr. Andrews!”

The stern voice of my landlady, Mrs. Winifred Castle, echoed up the stairs. Bleary-eyed from a late night of studying my anatomy text, I stirred from my bed.

“What is it?”

“You’ve a letter, delivered by a messenger no less.”

I pulled on my robe and stumbled out of my room. To my surprise, Mrs. Castle breathlessly awaited me on the second-floor landing.

A sturdy woman of sixty years, it was a rare occasion when Mrs. Castle’s stony face revealed her emotions. Apparently, the arrival of an envelope by private messenger was one such occasion, for her flushed face was alive with anticipation.

“Thank you for bringing it up.”

“I thought it might involve a pressing matter.” She handed over the envelope and waited, her gaze locked on the mysterious missive. I chose not to disappoint her by retreating to my room before opening the communiqué.

The monogrammed stationery was familiar, as was the precise handwriting:

*Your presence at 12 Everett St. is requested with all due dispatch.*

Her eyes followed the note as it disappeared into my robe pocket. “All is well, I trust?”

“Yes. Dr. Redfern has summoned me.”

“You work all hours in his laboratory as it is. Are you to also be at his beck and call? On the Sabbath, no less,” she grumbled as I headed to my room.

“Do not fear, Mrs. Castle,” I called out. “Upon my return, we shall play our regular game of backgammon.”

\* \* \*

Asa, my mentor's Negro butler, greeted me with his usual warm smile.

“Good to see you again, Mr. Andrews.”

He ushered me across the burnished wood floor of the atrium and drew open two massive pocket doors.

“The doctor will join you in a moment.”

During my frequent visits to the house on 12 Everett Street, I had never passed through those pocket doors into Josiah Redfern’s inner sanctum. My eye quickly took in his splendid study. A desk, equipped with inkwells and open journals, sat beneath a Palladian window that looked out upon expansive gardens. A rococo settee and two matching armchairs, each upholstered in dark red fabric, faced a massive hearth.

Bookshelves dominated the room. Only an occasional bust or keepsake interrupted the parade of scholarly volumes. A cursory examination of one section, devoted to medical and natural sciences, revealed Sir Charles Bell's *The Hand* and Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*, both of which appeared to be first editions.

To my surprise, a section of the bookcase rotated and Redfern emerged. Before the bookcase rotated back into place, I glimpsed a descending stairway. “Good of you to come, Andrews. Sorry for the short notice.”

A former naval officer, he retained the stiff bearing of his service days. His gray hair was close-cropped and a neatly trimmed beard accented the contours of his sharp jawline.

He motioned me to the settee. “A matter of interest has arisen. Are you currently available for, say, the next two days?”

“I am engaged in private tutoring but my schedule is flexible.”

“Excellent.” He removed a meerschaum pipe from his collection and packed it with tobacco from a glass humidior.

“I have received a request from a former colleague, Dr. Ezekiel Stewart. He has a medical practice on Nantucket. Are you familiar with the place?”

“It is an island off Cape Cod.”

“Thirty miles, approximately. At any rate, Dr. Stewart also serves as the local coroner. He has written asking for my assistance in a medical matter, an undertaking that would require my presence on the island. Since I depart for Paris in the morning, I cannot honor his request.”

“May I inquire as to the nature of the consultancy?”

He struck a match and lit his pipe. The distinctive scent of Balkan Sobranie tobacco drifted toward me.

“He requests a second opinion regarding an autopsy.”

“Might I be so forward as to ask why?”

“He only indicated that the matter was ‘curious.’” My mentor puffed thoughtfully. “I want you to stand in my stead.”

I was dumbfounded by the turn in the conversation.

Redfern smiled. “You look as though you have just seen a ghost.”

“Naturally, I am flattered, but wonder if I am qualified to undertake this task.”

“You are too modest. You have observed me on numerous dissections. I find you inquisitive yet dutiful, not given to flights of fancy or leaps of logic, a true apostle of the scientific method. All expenditures related to travel and lodging have been accounted for, as well as a personal stipend.”

He walked toward his desk. “Dr. Stewart is ambling toward his dotage, and, in truth, I have long left such pedestrian investigations behind.” Redfern retrieved a leather folder and tapped it against his palm as he walked back toward me. “I would be happy to sponsor a journal publication if your work there proves of interest.”

He extended the folder. “Within, you will find the autopsy report, a map of the island with Stewart’s office circled, a ticket on a supply vessel which leaves for Nantucket on the morrow, and your cash stipend. Stewart has also offered temporary lodging, should it be required.”

Given the opportunity thus presented, I took the envelope and accepted the consultancy.

Asa entered. “Your carriage awaits, sir.”

“Ah, duty calls—a fund-raising event in support of fugitive slaves. Hopefully, our next president can temper the national debate, unlike Pierce.” He took the proffered coachman’s hat. “I look forward to a full report upon my return, Andrews. Be well.”

## CHAPTER TWO

Fortune had smiled on me, and I was determined to validate my mentor's confidence. As I strolled home, it was only natural to recall the events that led to this moment in my life.

Pale and scrawny as a youth, beset by a variety of nagging medical ailments, I became a voracious reader, fairly devouring text after text. My favorite was Darwin's *Voyage of the Beagle*, but a certain type of novel, represented by *The Three Musketeers* and *Ivanhoe*, fascinated me, for the exploits of a hero in the service of a maiden or kingdom held great allure for a bedridden boy. My reading list also included Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the macabre stories by Edgar Allan Poe.

My sister Emily, five years my junior, a sprite with freckled cheeks, bounded into my room on a regular basis and requested that I read aloud. She sat at the foot of the bed, chin in hands, and hung on my every word.

Her bright-eyed wonder of the mundane—winter's first snowfall, the chirp of newly hatched birds, a butterfly—always brightened my mood.

By the time I reached the age of fourteen, my body had sprouted and the maladies that affected me vanished. Unfortunately, at the same time, Emily succumbed to a bout of influenza. I watched, helpless to affect her fate, and an undefined anger raged, for I could think of no reason a spirit as vibrant as my sister should have been extinguished at such a young age.

In the years since her death, my youthful fury faded, replaced by a nagging guilt that forever linked her demise to my burgeoning vitality.

My father—a compact man, precise in movement and fastidious in appearance—was an accounting clerk in a shoe factory, and from him came my attention to detail. My mother was tall and slender, with translucent skin and eyes of the palest blue imaginable. She drew from an unlimited reserve of patience as my caretaker and constant source of love and reassurance. Emily's death shook them both greatly. My father never again attended a church service after her funeral, while my mother busied herself with volunteer efforts at the local hospital.

During my high school years, every free hour was spent in the large public park a few blocks from my home. I kept a detailed journal of my daily observations. Convinced that I would one day discover some unknown variation of frog or grasshopper, my notes filled numerous journals. (Upon reflection, Darwin's tale of the natural world did drive much of my fieldwork and ambition.)

It was not surprising that, upon high school graduation, I chose a course of study in the natural sciences at the College of New Jersey. While there, a number of my character traits—a desire for solitude, a preference for contemplation over physical exertion, and a reliance on logic over emotion—calcified. I am a man perfectly happy to be alone in a laboratory late at night. During my sophomore year, my father passed away. My mother remarried and moved to Philadelphia shortly after my college graduation.

I gained employment as an instructor in natural science at Phillips Exeter Academy and remained there for one year. At some point in contemplation of my future, the idea of earning a degree in medicine took hold. This impulse probably found its origin in Emily's death, but I also believed the rigors of medical study would present an

intellectual challenge more substantive than teaching well-heeled young men, for whom prep school was merely a right-of-passage.

When I arrived in Cambridge in the fall of 1855, I rented my room from Mrs. Castle. Her late husband was a carriage-trade physician and the home reflected his prosperity. I was lucky to find it, being only blocks from Harvard Yard, and luckier still that she only accepted medical students as boarders. The rent was quite reasonable, considering the accommodations, and, I sensed, secondary to her desire for the company of studious young men who pursued the same career as her husband.

She chose me, I am certain, because we engaged in a discussion of the fine points of backgammon during my initial visit. My father taught me the game, and although I did not play on a regular basis, I understood its nuances sufficiently to impress Mrs. Castle. Although not an explicit condition of my lease, every Sunday afternoon for the past nine months was spent tossing dice and moving checkers in my landlady's parlor.

"What did Dr. Redfern want that could not wait until tomorrow?" Mrs. Castle asked.

"He has dispatched me to Nantucket."

"Nantucket?"

"You know the place?"

"Only that it is run by Quakers. Best place for them, in the middle of the ocean, what with their unconventional ideas on social matters." She captured my piece and set in on the bar. My mind was not focused on the game, but rather on my coming journey.

Her categorization of Quakers surprised me, for I was only aware of their strong pacifist attitudes. "What of their unconventional ideas?"

"For one, it is said the women run the business of the island." She rolled the dice and contemplated her next move. "What is it that you will do there?"

"A medical consultation."

She looked up sharply. "I do hope you will be compensated for this service."

"I received a generous cash stipend."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Two days."

She captured another piece. "Your favorite dinner of corned beef and cabbage will await your return."

None of Mrs. Castle's dishes qualified as my favorite. In addition to corned beef, her culinary skills centered about Mulligan stews, cottage pies, soda bread, and a dessert goody. Food was a necessary inconvenience, in any case, not worth a second thought, so long as the portions were ample.

Eventually, my position hopeless, I resigned and begged off another game. On the enclosed front porch, I sat amidst Mrs. Castle's extensive collection of African violets and read the report Dr. Redfern provided.

The facts of the case were simple. The body of a fully clothed man in his twenties washed ashore. The man carried no identification papers.

Dr. Stewart performed an autopsy. His report, however, was incomplete, in that it did not contain a conclusion on either a cause or manner of death. 'Cause of death' related to the medical reason for cessation of life, such as drowning, while 'manner of death' determined whether death was accidental or due to criminal activity. These

omissions piqued my curiosity, but I thought it best to make no assumption regarding the case.

I repaired to my room and packed. My uncle, a successful attorney in New York City, who routinely replaced his possessions with the newest fashion, gifted me his used leather Gladstone bag in perfectly good condition. I packed four pair of drawers (custom-made by dear Mrs. Castle), two shirts, three pair of socks, and a pair of herringbone trousers, a union suit, and toilet supplies. For the voyage itself, I set out a shirt, corduroy trousers with braces, and a pair of beaten preacher boots.

In addition, I prepared my trusted satchel, a gift from my parents upon my departure to the university. Constructed of saddle leather, it sported numerous pockets, brass buckles, and a shoulder strap. Now, the leather, softened and scarred from years of use, was a handsome accouterment and held my journals, writing implements, several specimen collection bottles, a Coddington magnifier, and a collapsible brass spyglass.

Buoyed by Dr. Redfern's confidence in my abilities, I looked forward with keen anticipation to my first ocean voyage and consultancy.

### **Prudence Mott's Diary**

*15 July 1856—I have heard the most interesting news! Dr. Ezekial Stewart has requested assistance from an esteemed Harvard professor. His arrival must be related to the body found on the Eel Point Beach several days ago. According to my friend, Daniel Booth, there were curious aspects regarding the poor unfortunate's body. Moreover, Mother informed me that Dr. Stewart asked if we might provide this visitor lodging in our guest cottage.*

*I hope our guest is open and willing to discuss his findings, for I am interested in the workings of the scientific mind. Certainly, A. Dupin, Poe's wonderful character, relies upon science and objective observations to solve complicated crimes by the process of ratiocination. As noted elsewhere in this journal, I remain fascinated with Mr. Poe's fictions, regardless of his quite scandalous personal life. Would that he were still alive to draw more wondrous tales from his imagination!*

*It is my desire to soon leave Nantucket and obtain greater education, particularly in biology and chemistry, like my good friend Fausta Darkbloom. Mother says that I should be content to find a good Quaker husband and raise a family, here on the island, but I am not at all content with that future. Fausta has stressed that there is a change underway regarding the rights of women in this society, and I should not allow the current male-dominated society to place limits on my future. I choose to follow the lead of my aunt, Lucretia Mott, and involve myself in all matters important to a democratic society, from the emancipation of women to the emancipation of slaves. Would that we all be free as men to pursue our passions!*

*I do so wish Father were here to discuss these matters. There has been no word concerning his fate for two years, though I am certain he shall sail into port, safe and sound, in the coming days.*

*When he departed five years ago, I was but twelve. Now, not only am I four inches taller, but truly a woman in all respects. Will he even recognize me when he walks through the front door? I wonder if my burgeoning desire to leave the island and seek my own future will surprise and trouble him.*

*I must stop now and prepare the cottage for our visitor. I tingle with anticipation to meet our visitor and learn of the world beyond the shores of my beloved island.*

### CHAPTER THREE

The *West Wind* was a handsome clipper, with three masts and twenty sails. (I counted them out of mere curiosity.)

Upon my arrival at the wharf, the first mate ushered me to his own cabin. This deference did not surprise me, nor did the fact that Dr. Redfern was able to book passage on the supply vessel with short notice.

My mentor cast a long shadow across the Harvard campus. Granted, much of this was due to his significant research accomplishments in pathology, but his shadow was elongated, or darkened, depending on your view, by an undercurrent that churned beneath the placid surface of faculty politics. This combination of awe and envy was not based on the Beacon Hill dinner parties he frequented, or the stunning women he squired, for most faculty would have gladly stood in his stead, if invited.

Rather, he was the subject of rumors regarding certain activities that required his absence from the classroom or laboratory, always at a moment's notice. The fact that these absences were allowed to pass without comment from the administration—that is, that he possessed an unspoken license to do as he pleased—evoked grousing among his peers.

Because the nature of these extracurricular activities was unknown, in that they did not lead to journal articles or even an explanation from Redfern himself, they provided ample grist for the faculty club rumor mill and led to hushed references concerning secretive government agencies or supernatural investigations.

I spent much of the voyage incapacitated from seasickness. The boiled egg and apple slices Mrs. Castle handed me earlier that morning remained untouched. (Some Darwin, I am!)

My stomach eventually settled and I made my way up the stairwell onto the main deck. A stiff wind buffeted me as I found a spot amidships, in the narrow space between two lifeboats. The ship plowed through the ocean and sent an occasional spray of seawater across the deck.

I became acutely aware of my surroundings—the ever-present sound of the wind caught in the billowing sails, the creak of the vessel's great beams, and the brisk, salt-tinged air.

No land was visible in any direction. It was a different world from the bustle of Boston; the ocean was humbling, for in this environment Man seemed insignificant, unable to shape this liquid world in the way he did the soil and stone of land. The sea swallowed any trace of our passage.

“Are we close to Nantucket?” I asked a tall sailor as he coiled a thick rope.

“Aye. It's out there, for sure,” he shouted and pointed in the general direction of the bow. I elongated my spyglass and scanned the horizon, but I saw only a thick bank of fog ahead. I assumed that my destination was located within that misty shroud.

A short while later, the deck of the clipper exploded with activity. Sailors hustled about with clear purpose and maneuvered the sails according to a logic known only to men of the sea. As the port drew closer, the enormous chains near the front of the ship sang out and the vessel slowed perceptibly. Ropes were tossed down to waiting hands on the dock and, in short order, the ship sat motionless.

A forest of masts reached to the sky from the various vessels tethered to six docks. Of note were large ships whose blackened hulls glistened in the sun, as though soaked with oil. In addition, multitudes of other craft bobbed in the open harbor or were moored to the docks, a wide variety that included smaller sailboats, rowboats, and a surprising number of steam-powered vessels, identified by their smokestacks and paddle wheels. One dock was reserved for the Steamship Authority.

Low-slung warehouses edged the wharf area before me. In addition, numerous shanties rested upon wood and stone pilings. In the distance, beyond the harbor proper, narrow sandy beaches stretched as far as the eye could see. A number of impressive homes were scattered at the higher reaches of the island, indicating an obvious prosperity. A lighthouse was visible far down the shore.

A raucous cacophony punctuated this picturesque scene. The source of this racket was the multitude of seagulls that strutted about the docks or glided gracefully upon air currents.

A squat sailor sidled up to me. "This way, sir."

Several huge pulley contraptions were already lowering pallets of wood from the hold to waiting horse-drawn wagons. I shuffled down the gangplank on unsteady legs and leaned against a dock post to gather myself.

A veritable hornet's nest of activity swirled about me, over which floated a continual hubbub of shouted instructions and arguments. It certainly was cooler than Boston, a fact I concluded must have something to do with the ocean breezes and currents, though I had no real understanding of the physics behind such an effect.

The din faded as I walked away from the docks and onto Main Street. Carriages moved along with a rhythmic clacking of hooves against cobblestone. A man wearing a battered Stetson shouted at the top of his lungs, "Oyez, oyez! Ferry from the Vineyard arrives in one hour!" Vendors stood on corners, selling fresh fruits and vegetables from wheeled carts.

I unfolded the map Dr. Redfern provided and made my way to the office of Dr. Ezekiel Stewart, passing under numerous signs that dangled above the sidewalk, identifying establishments named the Rusty Scupper, Iron Skillet, Tinder Box, and other delightfully descriptive names.

Two impressive buildings dominated the corner of Main and Centre Street. A red brick Federalist structure held the Pacific Bank, while the Methodist Church sported a particularly handsome colonnaded facade. I turned onto Centre and soon arrived at a narrow storefront where a frosted glass entry door identified the office of "Ezekiel Stewart, Doctor of Medicine and Apothecary."

I entered to the tinkling of a bell and encountered a hulking man in a lab coat conversing with a nurse matron.

"Good morning. My name is Balthazar Andrews. I seek Dr. Ezekiel Stewart."

The man nudged the nurse out of the way and extended his hand. "I'm Dr. Stewart." The faint scent of Scotch floated toward me.

From his wild gray muttonchops to his hefty stomach, Dr. Ezekiel Stewart appeared to be inexorably coming apart at the seams, both literally and figuratively. His stained pants were in need of pressing, the cuffs on his shirt were threadbare, his full head of hair sprouted like an unkempt garden, and he had cut himself at least twice during his morning shave. His bulbous nose had the florid tone of a man who enjoyed

‘pulling a cork.’ The features of his face had no more definition than a bowl of pudding.

“Dr. Redfern sends his regards and wishes he were able to honor your request. However, he departed Boston for Europe this morning.”

Dr. Stewart set his index finger against his lip as he studied me. “I see,” he finally said, disappointment evident in his weary tone.

I noted a dozen labeled bottles sitting on a nearby table. “You have produced your own elixir?”

He retrieved a bottle and displayed it. I noted the square and compass on his ring, emblematic of the Freemasons.

“‘Stewart’s Splendid Superior Elixir,’ guaranteed to alleviate a wide variety of common maladies, from the common cold to gout,” he proclaimed with obvious pride. “A concoction of my own recipe, based upon tincture of opium. I seek a distributor in Boston.”

“I will keep that in mind.”

He frowned and carefully replaced the bottle. “Let us retire to my office.”

I followed his shambling gait past an examination room and into his cramped office. He removed a stack of books from a wooden chair and motioned me to sit. He dropped into the bentwood swivel chair behind his desk like a sack of potatoes, rubbed his eyes, and sighed. “How long have you practiced, Dr. Andrews?”

“I have not completed my studies. I serve as Dr. Redfern’s research assistant.”

“Research Assistant?” Stewart replied with a hint of incredulity. He leaned back, hooked his thumbs into his belt, and stared at me. I took this to mean I was expected to present my credentials.

“I have taken anatomy and I have assisted Dr. Redfern with numerous dissections. I am, therefore, familiar with his reasoning on a wide variety of medical matters.”

Stewart harrumphed. “Very well, then. I trust my colleague’s judgment that you will be helpful in this matter.” He patted his ample belly. “I have not yet eaten. Let us repair to my apartment.”

I followed him down the hallway and up a creaky stairway to a room containing a stove, dry sink, table, battered Chesterfield sofa, and wardrobe. Daylight, filtered by a layer of dust on the single window, provided fitful illumination.

He gestured to three biscuits on a plate. “Might I offer you a scone?” As I sat, he grabbed the coffee pot from the stove, along with two cups from the dry sink.

“You have read my autopsy report?” he asked as he poured the coffee.

“Yes, sir. If I may be so bold, it is incomplete.”

“That is correct,” he replied, setting the coffee cup before me.

No steam was evident; by which I concluded the beverage was not freshly brewed. I nibbled the scone and found it dry and tasteless.

He sipped his cold coffee and winced, “A curious matter, indeed.”

“Would you care to elaborate?”

“The body is currently in the icehouse. Perhaps we should observe it there first and then I will have it brought to my examination room.”

I wondered what possible purpose staring at the body in the icehouse would serve, but chose not to question his methods.

He finished the scone, slapped the crumbs from his hands, and stood. “Off we go, then.”

We headed back toward the harbor, turned down a narrow side street and stopped in front of a set of double doors. Two sullen young men stood against the wall, idly puffing on cigarettes. They snapped to as we arrived and pulled open the doors.

Inside, the doctor lit a lantern. Huge blocks of ice were stacked along the walls. Slabs of meat, impaled on hooks, hung from the ceiling. The doctor opened yet another door and we entered, chasing our frosty breath.

A naked man lay on a wooden table, his midsection covered with a sheet. Stewart raised the lantern and placed it on a hook above the body.

In the pale light of the lantern, I stared at the corpse. The deceased’s skin was ghostly white. I found this curious, since I would have expected a blue tinge, brought on by the constriction of blood vessels in the chill air.

“Deposited by the deep blue sea onto our shores like a piece of meaningless driftwood. Would that we not again witness the flame of youth extinguished by the harsh wind of fate!” Stewart spoke with a great booming voice. He stood motionless, arms extended, chin raised, as though a statue.

“I’m not certain why you would request a second opinion on a drowning victim.”

His pose dissolved. “He most assuredly did not drown, for there is no salt water in his lungs.”

His statement shook my confidence, for I had been cautioned many times by Dr. Redfern never to draw a conclusion before all available evidence had been analyzed. Yet, on my first solo consultation, I had incorrectly deduced that a dead man found on a beach must have drowned.

“Did your examination of the body reveal any other possible cause?”

Dr. Steward glanced at the corpse and then at me.

“As far as I can determine, Mr. Andrews, this man’s body contains no blood.”

## CHAPTER FOUR

Outside the icehouse, Dr. Stewart conversed with the two young idlers, one of whom was named Daniel.

“They will bring the body to my examination room,” he explained as we walked back to his office.

“I am struck by your remarkable statement, sir, concerning the lack of blood in the body.”

He did not respond to my query as he greeted many of the passing townspeople.

Back in his office, we repaired to his examination room. The air was thick with the smell of carbolic acid. Several trays of medical instruments, jars of cotton balls and tongue blades, bottles of pills, and a skeleton mounted on a rolling stand were in evidence. I felt very much in my element.

“I must retrieve my satchel.” He nodded and I found my way to the stairs. By the time I returned to the examination room, a large sackcloth bag lay on the examination table. Stewart handed the icehouse boys some coins and they departed.

“A sea shroud,” Stewart explained as he cut the thread that secured the cloth and revealed the corpse, “used aboard ships to consign the dearly departed to the deep.”

I walked slowly around the table. The body showed signs of having been fed upon by sea life, with severe damage to the toes and fingers.

“When you say there was no blood in the body, you are not exaggerating?” I asked.

Stewart’s brow knotted. “I have completed over fifty dissections, young man, and am a capable physician.”

“I do not mean to impugn your expertise,” I replied, “but when faced with a statement that a human body contains no blood, I must press the matter to my satisfaction.”

Stewart drew himself up. “Very well. The heart and the vessels leading to the heart did not evidence a drop of blood. No clotting was evident. There was no pooling of blood within the body cavity. The kidneys were pale and so I dissected them and found no evidence of residual blood or clotting in the vessels. The liver was also pale and dry, with no clotting in either the portal vein or hepatic artery.” He leaned against the wall and sighed. “I have never encountered a similar situation.” He might have well been describing a bad dream, so softly did he speak.

I estimated the victim to weigh around one hundred and seventy pounds. An adult body should contain approximately five liters of blood. If the femoral or carotid artery were opened, a great deal of blood would be lost very quickly and the victim would bleed to death. The loss of blood would cause the heart to cease beating and whatever blood remained would pool in the body cavity. The body evidenced no open wounds and yet had been drained of blood.

I noted a peculiar discoloration on the neck, above the carotid. With my Coddington magnifier, I noted six puncture marks, arranged in a purplish semi-circle that resembled a quarter-moon.

“What have you there?” he asked, rising up on his toes to look over my shoulder.

“The victim has a tattoo on his neck.”

I handed the Coddington to Dr. Stewart. “Indeed. I took it for a bruise.”

The case presented fascinated me. I had never come across a similar instance in the lab nor in the medical literature. It was the sort of curious case upon which Dr. Redfern built his reputation.

“Let us consider possible explanations,” I began. “The first is that this individual may have been anemic, a condition described by Anral, of the University of Paris, in a paper regarding the proper constituents of blood. However, that would not explain the total absence of blood. Next, let us consider hemophilia, where the afflicted individual lacks the ability to stop bleeding once having started. Recent studies have determined that this is due to the absence of a clotting factor.” I stopped, my mind turning, “Where is this man’s clothing?”

“I examined it and found it to be unremarkable. I ordered it burned.”

“I take you at your word. Without the availability of a test for presumptive evidence of blood on clothing, I would have no way to move beyond your visual examination, in any case.”

“What are your thoughts regarding the clothing?”

“Hemorrhagic fever.”

“You refer to the yellow fever, of course.”

“Indeed. It is a tropical disease, although it has appeared in our country, most notably in Philadelphia in 1791. At any rate, this fever causes hemorrhages, including the expulsion of blood through vomitus.”

“Black vomit.”

“His clothing would have borne evidence of this condition.”

“His shirt was muslin and there was no visible evidence of such.”

“Salt water will act upon blood and so would have removed the traces.”

Stewart sighed heavily and rubbed his chin. “Perhaps. However, a bloodstain is quite difficult to remove completely. It would have left some visible discoloration.”

“True.”

This discourse was most enjoyable and I felt a growing acknowledgement from Dr. Stewart regarding my competence.

“Even yellow fever would not account for the utter lack of blood,” I concluded.

“There is another possibility,” Dr. Stewart said suddenly. “Rats are quite prevalent on board ships and carry various diseases. On a journey to a faraway land, could this young man have been bitten by a rat carrying an unknown plague?”

“You raise a plausible hypothesis.”

Stewart raised his index finger. “A section of flesh is missing on the posterior, around the left shoulder, probably the work of a large fish. You may examine it if you wish, but my own sense is that it was post-mortem. At any rate, it could not possibly have been fatal.”

I placed my arm under the corpse’s shoulder and lifted. It was as Dr. Stewart said, a bite wound not deep enough to expose the underlying muscle. “I concur with your assessment.”

I returned the Coddington to my bag and set about washing my hands. “Dr. Stewart, cause of death should be noted as exsanguination. I can reach no conclusion over how this happened. Manner of death is, therefore, accidental, without criminal implications.”

The doctor rested the elbow of his left arm in the palm of his right hand and tapped his finger against his lips. He moved his head slightly back and forth, as though weighing the evidence. "I had hoped that Dr. Redfern would have recognized this condition," he said.

"He has asked me to make a complete report to him. For all I know, he has seen this before. However, it is unknown to me."

"Yes, yes," Stewart replied, almost imperceptibly.

"If you do not mind, I would like to take a day to gather all the evidence in this matter for submission to a medical journal. I believe we may have discovered an unknown disease or condition here. Dr. Redfern suggested the possibility of lodging?"

Stewart nodded. "Abigail Mott has a cottage where you will have privacy. Her husband, Caleb, a whaling captain, is feared lost at sea. I will summon a carriage." He placed his arm upon my shoulder. "Our lovely island provides an atmosphere of a much different nature than is available in Boston. It may well stimulate your thinking."

I took my leave, excited by the possibility of a scientific discovery that could earn the respect of Dr. Redfern.

## CHAPTER FIVE

A two-wheeled calash fetched me. The driver was a taciturn sort whose sole means of communication was a series of nods.

The landscape changed as we moved upward and away from the town proper. The higher elevation had a windswept, untamed feel, with thick stretches of huckleberry, scrub oak, and goldenrod. My eye took in large tracts of land and distant buildings set behind split-rail fences.

The road was thick with sand. The cart swerved this way and that as it trundled along to the clop of the horse's hooves and the creak of the buggy's wheels.

We followed a long border of blue hydrangea and turned right onto a narrow dirt road. A neatly lettered white sign indicated we had arrived at the Mott farm.

The cart stopped before a two-story, gray-shingled house. A front porch extended the length of the home. A cupola on the peak of the roof was the famed widow's walk, prevalent in towns where the sea trade is predominant. The house was substantial and well maintained, with a black-shingled roof and numerous window boxes filled with purple and white petunias.

I gripped my Gladstone and alighted. The calash departed. To my left, a herd of sheep grazed in a fenced enclosure, while a rabbit munched clover in the shade of an oak tree. The bucolic surroundings and sunny day made me feel as though I were truly on vacation.

The porch was furnished with a wooden glider and several wicker chairs. I knocked on the door and presently a woman answered. She wore a simple black dress and white bonnet.

"Good afternoon. I am Balthazar Andrews. Dr. Stewart spoke to you regarding the use of your cottage?"

"Yes. Welcome. I am Abigail Mott." She eyed me for a long moment. "Thou art younger than I expected."

"Dr. Stewart requested my mentor but must settle for me," I replied and stepped inside, where the yeasty aroma of fresh bread greeted me. A quick glance at the parlor suggested an unpretentious household, with functional furniture and few wall decorations.

I followed her through the kitchen, where a pot of chowder simmered on the cast iron stove, and down a narrow hallway to an exterior door. In spite of the richness of the aromas in the kitchen, I followed a cinnamon scent that clearly emanated from Abigail.

Outside, at the end of yet another flagstone walk, sat a modest gray-shingled cottage. Blood-red roses climbed a trellis set next to the door.

"Thou mayst come and go as thou wish. Of course, thou be'st most welcome to take thy meals with us. If thou need anything, thou need only ask." Her large brown eyes seemed pools of infinite sadness.

She smiled for the first time, tight and brief, then turned and walked back to the house. I assumed from her dress and odd manner of speech that Abigail Mott was one of Mrs. Castle's Quakers.

The inside of the cottage was furnished with a bed, dresser, water pitcher, and bowl. In addition, a handsome veneer desk with turned legs, as well as a matching

chair, sat in one corner. French in design, it was the sort of object a sea captain might obtain on his travels.

Arrayed on the walls were numerous paintings of ocean vessels, an oval mirror, and a pendulum clock. A soft breeze ruffled the white curtains in the only window, through which the distant azure line of the ocean was visible.

There were two interior doors. Behind the first was a clothes closet lined in cedar. The second revealed a porcelain commode encased in a wooden enclosure. A pipe led down from the ceiling, with a lever attached midway. To the right of the commode, recessed into the floor, was a wide circular tin tray with a drain hole, and above it, another copper pipe ended in a wide copper disc the size of a skillet, punched with numerous holes.

These contraptions aroused my curiosity.

I walked outside and around the rear of the cottage, where I discovered a large water tank supported on four thick wooden posts. A large copper pipe traveled from the bottom of the tank through the cottage roof.

Behind the cottage sat a garden. Corn, beans, and squash were planted in neat rows and showed robust growth. I surmised that the waste from the commode was dispatched into the earth and fertilized the soil.

Another copper tank was visible on a platform below the roofline of the main house, designed to maintain architectural harmony. The ingenuity evident in these arrangements was impressive.

To my left, edging the property, stood butterfly bushes, six to seven feet tall, festooned with flowers the color of claret wine. A monarch butterfly fluttered among the blossoms. To my right, a handled water pump was set in a surround of cobblestones.

I walked over to the large, two-story whitewashed barn and peeked through the open doors. A large flatbed wagon and various farm implements sat beneath a loft stacked with bales of hay. A horse whinnied from somewhere in the darkness. The rich scent of dung wafted toward me.

A smaller outbuilding stood next to the barn. I stared through the window but a thick layer of dust and cobwebs obscured my view.

The sound of clucking startled me. I turned to see a large rooster staring at me. It crowed, feathers ruffling, wings spread. A number of hens pecked at the ground in front of a chicken house. The rooster strutted toward me, obviously protecting its domain.

I retreated to my cottage and unpacked, using both hooks in the closet and the dresser drawers to properly stow my clothing. From my toilet kit, I removed my tooth powder, hairbrush, pomade, straight razor, shaving mug, and flask of limewater. From my pockets came my watch fob and leather billfold. I arranged these items on the dresser top.

The pendulum clock was silent. I opened the glass, set the proper time according to my pocket watch, and used the key to wind the mechanism.

From my satchel, I removed a map of the island Redfern provided and unfolded it on the desk. The island was shaped like an apostrophe set upon its side. The main harbor, where the *West Wind* docked, was located on the north shore, at the midpoint

of the island. A dense collection of streets clustered about the harbor area. This was where I found Dr. Stewart's office, and it was clearly the hub of activity on the island.

The rest of the island appeared to be rural, based on large stretches of uninhabited land bisected by lonely veins of roads.

Many areas on the map had formal names, either Indian in origin (Shawkemo, Pocomo) or vivid (Altar Rock, The Moors). However, the word of choice, judging by its proliferation, was 'point,' as in North Point, First Point, Second Point, and so forth.

I traced the path of Main Street, where I had caught the calash, to the approximate location of the Mott Farm, west of town.

I pulled off my boots and sat on the bed. No creak was audible, so I examined the underpinnings of the bed frame. I found a lattice of heavy rope along with two turnbuckles to keep the rope taut. Captain Mott, while not on his sea journeys, apparently tinkered with various inventions, perhaps with an eye to commercial production one day.

I lay my head upon the soft down pillow and the rhythmic tick of the clock lulled me to sleep. A firm knock at the cottage door woke me. I glanced at the wall clock and was surprised to learn I'd slept for three hours.

I opened the door to find a young woman, dressed in the same style garb as Abigail wore earlier. She was younger than I, but not by many years.

"Hello. I am Prudence Mott," she said in a firm, clear voice. A few wisps of raven hair were visible beneath her bonnet. "And you, Balthazar Andrews, cannot possibly be an esteemed professor."

I was immediately struck by her comely physical attributes. Like her mother, she was long-shanked, with wide shoulders that tapered gracefully through her slim hips. She radiated a sense of constrained energy, not the restlessness of a child, but rather the friskiness of a pony ready to gallop the moment it was unbridled.

Her oval face rested upon a long and elegant neck. Though she would not be considered a classic beauty, her features combined in a striking way. Like her mother, she was surrounded by a distinctive scent, in her case, reminiscent of a forest after a spring rain. Mischief danced in her steel blue eyes,

"You are quite perceptive," I finally said. "I am neither esteemed, nor a professor."

"Mother hath sent me to check on thy condition, since thou hath not been seen since thine arrival," she said. "Dost thou intend to remain cloistered in the cottage for the duration of thy visit?"

"I took a short nap and have only just awakened."

"Art thou hungry?"

"Yes, for I've only had a scone today," I replied.

"A scone of thine own?" she said, and flashed a toothsome smile as she turned from me. I watched her stride purposefully, arms swinging in concert with her legs, back to the main house.

As I combed my hair, it struck me that Prudence Mott resembled the woman my dearly departed sister Emily would have become, had the virus not struck her down.

When I entered the kitchen, Prudence was alone. She set a glass of lemonade on the table, next to several slices of dark bread. "Where is your mother?"

"She hath gone to town and will return in due time. There is chowder, if thou wish."