

## [1]: Beaton's House:

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The cobbles underfoot are slippery with the grime, grit and stench of decay. Puddles of urine, faeces and tainted water run as slushy rivers, merging into each other, or laying stagnating in the harshness of tonight's frost. A drunk lies passed out in a frozen pool of his own vomit. Beyond any doubt, he will not make it through this night, either from the cruelty of the night's touch or from my own predilections.

There is little light on Cowgate this eve, little to prevent my wanderings, my transgressions against humanity, my subtlety with a blade. There is little point denying it, to stalk these streets, to become one with the stench and decay of this assumed fair city, is one of life's rewards. It is ironic, this very street was once the home to aristocracy, to the gentleman and rich of the 1500's. No more! Now it is little more than a public toilet, putrefying and degenerating into the cesspit of Edinburgh's underbelly. A constant reminder to those currently in power that wealth, happiness and calm are but veneers on the constants of the human condition.

I close my gloved fist about an oil lamp, snuffing it out of life in a ritualistic homage to my premeditated impending adventure, my dance with the lord of death, the riskiness of courting the jester of mortality. It is at this point I see my prey off in the distance of Cowgate. The mists shroud them, just as it shrouds me from the prying eyes of the degenerates and cretins around me. I close my fist about my knife of choice, a strange blade of even stranger origins.

I pick up my pace, silence cloaking my approach, only the slither of leather on ice to give me away. Cardinal Beaton's palace, his pride and glory, the hovel it has now become, passes me on my left. Would he approve? His persecution of Protestants surely included a dose of life's finer glories, of fantasies as dark as my own, of self-righteous self-centred desires at the bleeding point of humanity's condition? The reformation be damned! Beaton might have have joined me for this evenings jaunt into debauchery, transcendence into butchery, journey to the Pearly Gates hand in hand with our victims. But then his own pomp may have stayed him.

Perhaps in honour I will re-enact his 1546 assassination, or rather pay homage as such . . . In my own majestic fashion, at least. Cowgate - as then - is silent. To touch the frost, to taste the mist, to smell the decay of Scotland's capital, these to me are the sensations of wonder. But nothing will match the heights of tonight's adventure.

I approach from the left, a sodden sack masking my footsteps. My victim stumbles. Perfect. My victim fumbles with a snuff box. One snort or two? The stink of an Edinburgh whore contrasts with the perfumed finery of his cologne, of his starched shirts and the metallic taste of his cufflinks. He is probably riddled with syphilis, pocked and scared by it, internally festering with chlamydia. I detest his ilk, forever looking down at us through monocles, hooked noses and snuff. Forever destroying the dreams of the workers upon which they build their fortunes upon. Forever wiping their brows of the responsibilities towards their fellow man. I doubt he paid the whore well. She was probably glad he paid at all, given the preponderance for men such as him to spit in disgust at the supposed creature they've just bed.

Love? Pahh! For these men, it is an exercise in civil liberties. Not as in adhering to the laws of the land, not paying respects to the rights of personal action and personal speech, but literally taking liberties with other humans, other members of our civilisation.

I grip the knife, this blade of pure glass. It glints bright from its sharp edge, but one cannot see a blade such as this. No ordinary glass, no ordinary craftsmanship. He may see it coming, but for him it will feel like he is being cut by naught but the air.

I test the blade on my cheek and ready my arm for that glorious thrust. I can feel the residual esters and volatile compounds of his spirits upon my cheek, condensing in the cold air and re-vaporising as they touch my hot murderous flesh.

I strike, the blade as fine as air gliding into his seedy underbelly, his undercarriage of city slicker, his abdominal cavity as abominable as the street upon which he will die. He turns by half a degree, his eyes wide reaching to their far extent as he attempts to look upon my face. I let him, for I too want to experience this moment, I too want to feel his pain and rejoice in his final moments. He splutters, his starched shirt splattering with the dark stains of death. I feel the warmth of blood flow over my own arm's veins, pulsing and bursting from my flesh as I slide the blade vertically upward.

I see a glint in his eye, a single far off oil lamp, its rays pitiful in comparison to the darkness and depravity that now surrounds him. He grips my shoulder as he slumps, his movement adding to the forces of gravity as his flesh is requisitioned by my blade. I see the snuff still embedded in his upturned nostrils, as the stench of his final copulation fills my own.

It is over...

His blood mingles with the urine, faeces and tainted water of frozen Edinburgh.

I turn, flicking his corpse with muck as I slink up the confines of East-Niddry steps. I open up my own veins letting Edinburgh's cold enter me, letting my blood flow down into that festering street, letting my own life become muted by the sharpness and cleanliness of this blade.

\*\*\* *Epilogue* \*\*\*

*Cardinal David Beaton was the last pre-reformation archbishop of St Andrew's (1494-1546). He was an influential Scot, being the ambassador to France and Lord Chancellor of Scotland. Beaton had a preponderance for persecution of Protestants which became local legend for his vigour. He fell from the heights of his political might due to his policies on reform, becoming deeply unpopular with new Protestant feeling within the aristocracy and clergy. On the morning of May 29th 1546, Beaton was assassinated by several Protestant fanatics (some followers of John Knox no less, the later Scottish*

reformer) within the walls of St Andrews Castle. He was killed by multiple sword blows, his body mutilated and hung from a castle window. French troops, under orders from the mother of the 'Baby Queen', Mary Stewart, besieged the castle, eventually punishing and killing the murderers. Beaton's body was later salted, encased in Lead and sealed within the ground floor of the sea tower at St Andrew's castle. Beaton owned a house on Edinburgh's Cowgate, this included an unusual hexagonal tower. Indeed, in the 1590's Cowgate was so affluent an area that it was described as 'where the nobility and chief men of the city reside'. After the house became known as a 'palace' of sorts, his death left the property to fester. It became a shop during the affluent years, however it later fell into disrepair and as with the rest of Cowgate and St Mary's Wynd eventually became a slum. The house was demolished in 1847. Edinburgh's Cowgate remains dirty and seedy, with present day ghost tours of the vaults under South Bridge, reminding us of the criminality and deprivation of the area.

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The End....