

**LBRIS**

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books

**THE  
RESURRECTIONIST**

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Harper  
North

Little did I know, that brush with death would be my first of many, and at the time it both consumed and compelled me in a way that only one's first encounter with mortality can.

Yet I must insist that, in the end, this is not a story about death. It is perhaps a life story – or even, yes, a love story. It is the story of how I clawed my way from the decay of a crumbling legacy into the modern era of reason and science. It is the story of how I escaped the prison of archaic superstition to the freedom of enlightenment. It is the story of how a rose can blossom from even the bloodiest soil, of how light can grow from shadow, how love can grow from despair.

This, dear reader, is the story of my resurrection.

## I. An Invitation

My arrival in Edinburgh was heralded, quite fittingly, by a deluge of rain, the volume and frugidity of which took me embarrassingly by surprise. I'd ventured that far north only twice before in my life, both times in the basking embrace of summer. Unfortunately, this experience had filled my head with romantic notions of Scotland based upon hazy recollections of carefree days spent upon sun-kissed moors, with the temperate winds of the rugged Highlands ruffling my hair, heather and thistle beneath my feet.

The reality of Edinburgh, however, was a harsh contrast to my fond memories – not just of the untamed countryside, but to my sparse experience of metropolitan life thus far. Juxtaposed against Oxford's dreaming spires, the jumbles of soot-singed bricks slicing jagged black angles into the sky appeared primitive to my discerning eyes, to say nothing of the coal-black sludge lining the cobblestone streets. I'd arrived in the first week of October and quickly grasped that the expressions of amusement exchanged amongst my acquaintances at home upon hearing of my intention to disembark for the North in such a season may not have been without merit. It was staggeringly obvious to me that

my tweed overcoat was utterly insufficient before I'd even set foot outside my carriage.

I'd resolved to take a room based upon an advertisement posted in the hall of the Royal Medical Society, which was the first stop upon my arrival. This would have undoubtedly horrified my mother, who was already offended enough that, unlike Oxford, the university here provided neither porters nor bedders, so I would be responsible for procuring and maintaining my own accommodation. But it would seem luck was on my side, as there were plenty of vacancies listed that boasted proximity to the lecture halls and a set-rate fare for breakfast, and I'd simply pointed my coachman towards the first lodging house on the list.

Under any other circumstances, my initial impression of the Hope & Anchor Inn would have been one of profound revulsion: the windows were caked in several layers of grime, the door handle was disconcertingly slippery to the touch, the interior dim and smoky. But following the interminable journey from Bath, coupled with the disorientation of a stranger in a foreign city and the demoralizingly inclement weather, it seemed to my weary eyes to be the cosiest, quaintest lodging house imaginable. The barman was endearingly gruff – just as I'd imagined every native Scotsman to be – and I was charmed by the prospect of living amongst the local populace. I secured a room, then promptly returned to my carriage to await a porter.

It soon became obvious, however, that porters were not part of the standard service at the Hope & Anchor Inn. What's more, my coachman declined to provide any further assistance besides depositing my trunk and valise unceremoniously upon the rain-soaked street and stealing off into the descending night with barely a tip of his hat in my direction. Thus, it was with the strength of my own two hands and the gritty determination of a man in the throes

of newfound independence that I made my first official entrance as a resident of the Hope & Anchor Inn.

It was not, truth be told, a particularly graceful entrance. I was unable to lift the trunk due to its cumbersome shape, so I was reduced to dragging it behind me as the brass tacks securing the underframe screeched in protest against the wooden floor. The handle of my valise had grown slick with rain, and I fumbled it no fewer than three times as I wove my way between the densely packed tables filled with wary-eyed patrons hunched over tankards of dark ale. A disconcerting silence seemed to follow me, but I resolutely ignored it and made my way to the interior staircase and proceeded to ascend.

Well, I attempted to ascend. As it turned out, scaling steep stairs beneath the weight of my luggage was considerably more challenging than the porters of my past had led me to believe, and I had barely struggled past the halfway point when I lost my grip on the trunk entirely and whirled to watch as it thundered down the stairs in a deafening cacophony – and to my compounded horror, directly into the outstretched arms of a young, curly-haired stranger who'd had the misfortune of rounding the corner at the least opportune moment.

With a startled shout, he braced himself just in time to bring the trunk to an abrupt halt, still perched at a precarious angle and threatening to continue its descent as he strained against its unwieldy bulk. To his credit, the stranger recomposed himself in the blink of an eye, his expression turning from surprise to amusement as he cast a glance up the stairs in my direction.

'Drop something?' His lip was quirked in the hint of a smile, but his blasé attitude towards nearly meeting an untimely end beneath a piece of rampaging luggage did little to fade the blush of humiliation I could feel scalding my cheeks.

'Sorry, so sorry, a thousand apologies—' I somehow dropped my valise again in my haste to retreat down the stairs to free the young man from his current quagmire, and to my relief – and perhaps mild indignation – he laughed.

'Keep your head on, I've got it. Why not pop your bag up on the landing, then come back here and we'll hoist this beast up together, shall we?'

'Oh! Um, yes, of course, quite right you are . . .' I hastily followed his directive, and we were soon working in tandem to shepherd the offending beast up the stairs, which proved to be considerably easier than manoeuvring it solo. The stranger showed no hesitation in providing me with instructions as I struggled awkwardly backwards up the stairs, and I in return duly hid my chagrin at his continued sniggering at my clumsiness. An unspoken gentlemen's agreement reached, we summited the staircase with a collective shout of triumph and gave the Beast a final heave in the general direction of the bedchambers before collapsing on either side of it in mutually undignified surrender.

The stranger was still grinning, his amusement apparently unimpeded by exertion. I found the sentiment to be contagious and grinned back.

He recovered his breath first. 'So. I take it you're new in town, and not just carting this about for the entertainment of local bystanders?' He gave the trunk a good-natured pat.

I took a gulp of air and mopped the sweat from my brow with the back of my hand, only to discover it had mixed with the rainwater to form a rather unsavoury salty sheen. 'Just arrived from Bath. I'm starting at the medical school this week.'

His smile grew even brighter. 'You, too? Brilliant! There's a whole group of lads here from the new class; we were just enjoying some ale downstairs. You ought to join us.'

Transferring the sweat from my hand onto the twill of my breeches, I shook my head forlornly. 'Look at me. I'm

clearly in no state for socializing. I haven't even dressed for dinner, let alone—'

To my surprise, the stranger let out a bark of laughter. 'My dear fellow, not sure what pubs were like in Bath, but around here we tend to be a bit more informal.'

I eyed him appraisingly, attempting to determine his back-story in the few details illuminated by the sparse lamplight of the landing. His accent sounded civilized enough – London, or thereabouts at least – his boots well cobbled, and his shirt finely tailored. But he wore no jacket or waistcoat, his cravat was loose at his throat, and his sleeves were rolled above his wrists. After two months of the rigorous cap-and-gown standards at Oxford, to me he appeared nearly charlatan in his approach to propriety, and a part of me wanted to doubt his seemingly earnest intent.

This being said, there was no malice in his eyes, no judgement in his tone, and no hesitation in his speech. What reason would he have, I puzzled, to cause me more indignity than I'd already suffered as a result of my own poor coordination and physical ineptitude at something as simple as wrangling my own trunk? After all, I was a stranger in this city – no family name to honour, no tradition to uphold. I was, at last, free from the rigid mores of my past! It seemed that the very least I could do was indulge in a well-earned pint with my new peers.

With a curt nod of assent, I extended my hand. 'In that case, it would be a pleasure to join you. My name's James, by the way.' This didn't seem to be the proper place for titles.

He took my hand and, much to my surprise, rose to his feet and pulled me up bodily with him, our sudden proximity exuding an air of familiarity that was my first cherished hint of welcome in so foreign a place. 'I'm Charlie. Now, let's get the Beast to your room and head back downstairs before we miss all the fun.'

We made quick work of depositing my trunk into the darkened chamber whose number coincided with that of my newly acquired key. I admittedly made no effort to assess my new abode, as Charlie seemed keen to rejoin the revelries downstairs and I had no wish to detain him further. Mere moments later, he was leading me back into the smoky din, a flush of excitement on his cheeks – mirroring my own feelings. For this, right here, was to be my new life! A life of independence, of personal discovery, of raucous bars and newfound friends, of loosened cravats and rolled-up sleeves, of dark ale and sticky floors, high-minded ideas and low-minded gossip, and everything in between. For while it was the sanctified surgical theatre that had called me north, it struck me then and there that it was only the base of the bargain. For the first time ever, my life was mine, and I was determined to live it to the fullest.

We approached a booth into which were crowded three young gentlemen of a similar age to myself, all huddled over an unidentifiable object resting upon the surface of the dark oak table. The tallest of the men, capped with a shock of red hair offset by a brilliant green overcoat, was poking at the object in question with a fork, while the other two hissed on encouragement.

‘Oi! Lads!’

At once, three heads snapped our way in perfect unison with uniformly guilt-stricken expressions upon their faces, but seeing it was only Charlie approaching, they quickly shifted back to conspiratorial excitement.

‘Charlie, where’ve you been?’ The red-haired gentleman beckoned him frantically. ‘Hamish is here, and he’s brought an ear!’

‘Hush. Christ, you’ll get us thrown out again!’ spat the beak-nosed boy to his left, who looked considerably younger than the other two upon second glance, though

the glower on his face conveyed an anachronistic maturity about him.

The red-haired gentleman – or perhaps boy would be a better descriptor for him, too, considering his distinctly ungentlemanly conduct – rolled his eyes before proceeding in an exaggerated whisper. ‘It’s still got the cochlea on it!’

Repulsed, I turned towards Charlie, who, to my surprise, looked beyond delighted at the prospect. ‘Really? Attached?’

‘Indeed.’

‘Excellent!’ He pressed forward and snatched the fork from Red-Hair’s hand before leaning over the table to inspect the specimen himself, leaving me standing in an awkward hover.

My presence wasn’t lost on Beak-Nose, who eyed me up and down incredulously. ‘Who’re you?’ His Scottish accent was so thick I could barely understand him.

‘Oh, that there’s James,’ quipped Charlie, without raising his gaze from where he was poking a disturbing tangle of pale, stringy threads protruding from the apparent ear. ‘He’s just come up from Bath, starting with us this week.’

Red-Hair raised his eyebrows. ‘Ah, another aspiring medical man, eh?’

I gave a hapless shrug. ‘Hopefully.’

‘Better be more graceful with a scalpel than you are with luggage,’ Beak-Nose interjected, and Red-Hair elbowed him good-naturedly as I felt yet another blush rise in my cheeks; apparently my less than distinguished entrance hadn’t gone unnoticed by these particular patrons.

‘Ignore him; he’s just being vazey,’ Red-Hair continued with a grin. ‘I’m Phillip, by the way, and this here’s Hamish, our man on the inside, who brings us all sorts of delightful toys to play with.’

I swallowed uncertainly. ‘Toys?’

Hamish gave a coy shrug and leaned back in his seat. 'Just bits and bobs from the school where I work. Fancy a go at the ear? We've got a spare fork.' He held it up and waggled it suggestively in my direction.

'Er, not right now, thank you . . .' I cast about for a valid excuse, but was luckily interrupted by the stocky, sandy-haired fellow seated opposite.

'I'm Luke,' he said cheerfully. 'And seeing as how you're already standing, I think it's only fair you buy us all a drink.'

'Gladly.' Relieved to have a chance to collect myself, I turned and made my way towards the bar, my mind reeling a mile a minute.

So these were the students of the medical persuasion, destined to be my companions on our quest for the highest level of knowledge that humble Man had yet attained – gathered around a gritty pub table, poking a human ear with a fork. My stomach churned as I contemplated the prospect.

Of course, I was well aware that I would encounter cadavers during my medical training, but in my mind it had always been in a very civilized manner: within the hal-  
lowed walls of the operating theatre, beneath the watchful eye of a master physician demonstrating proper technique in a hushed tone of reverence and respect. The thought of confronting a disembodied appendage over a few pints at the local pub without so much as a by-your-leave was abhorrent to me in the utmost.

And yet . . .

These men were, for better or worse, to be my colleagues. I'd known all along that the University of Edinburgh was unlike Oxford or Cambridge, not just in the vastly more varied breeding of the students but in the pragmatic philosophy of their education. They had come here for the same purpose as I, to further their knowledge of the human form, to attain comprehension where before there had been

nothing but prejudice and superstition, to learn to heal and cure and prosper. That was to be our unified mission, each and every one of us, and far be it from me – a newcomer to this flourishing academic scene – to define what constituted propriety in the fast-changing world of medical scholarship.

Resolve revived, I gathered the pints of ale on a tray and wound my way back to the booth, where I was met with a round of raucous cheers. This simple gesture of camaraderie fortified me, and it was with a sigh of relief that I slid into the spare seat beside Charlie, and we raised our tankards to my arrival. Glancing around the table at their eager faces, I found it all too easy to ignore the disembodied ear which served as the macabre centrepiece to the jolly tableau.

'So,' Charlie ventured, slapping his half-drained tankard down and turning in my direction, 'what brought you here, James?'

I took a sip of my own ale; it was bitter and almost alarmingly thick, but I willed it down and attempted to apply a casual air. 'I want to be a physician. I was at Oxford before' – I deliberately ignored the rather rude murmur from Hamish at this admission – 'but I knew that if I wanted to pursue the medical profession the proper way – in the manner of the New Enlightenment, that is – Edinburgh was the only place for me. So . . . I left Oxford, and here I am.'

'Well, that explains a lot,' muttered Hamish into his pint, and despite my good nature, I was irritated by his continued obstinance.

'What exactly do you mean by that?'

Hamish drained another swallow of ale and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. 'Nothing at all. Just that you seem a bit of a toff to be around these parts. Not the type to . . . get your hands dirty, as it were.' He leaned forward and gave the lobe of the ear a rather menacing flick in my direction.

'Ah, Hamish, lay off, he's just—'

'No, Charlie,' I interjected, 'it's quite all right.' Despite my family background and my profound respect for etiquette, I'd never been one to bow out of a verbal altercation, and I most certainly wasn't going to start tonight, the first night of my new life. 'As a matter of fact, I left Oxford for that very reason. It was all thought and hypothesis, no action and conclusion. All play and no work. All brain and no hands. Here, I aspire to use both.'

'Ah, so you'll be joining the surgery lectures, too, then?' Luke inquired eagerly.

Surgery lectures? There was a difference between that and the physicians' training? It slowly began to dawn on me that I should perhaps have put in a bit more research about my exact course of study prior to my arrival.

But now was no time to back down; the lads were all staring intently in my direction, and the correct answer was more than obvious. 'Of course! The surgery lectures. Absolutely.'

'Brilliant!' Charlie chimed in. 'And Hamish has got our inside track into one of the best private schools in town.'

'Private schools?' I was confounded; wasn't the university to be our place of training?

But my consternation was summarily drowned out by Hamish, who was waving his hands and clicking his tongue. 'Ah, sorry to disappoint you all, but Knox is full up this term already. Yer on yer own.'

There was a chorus of groans, which luckily gave me the opportunity to interject my private inquiry with Charlie. 'What's Knox?' I was growing more disquieted by my ignorance with each passing moment.

Charlie clearly didn't pick up on the sensitive nature of my question and responded loudly enough for all to hear. 'Dr Knox owns one of the private surgical schools here in town. Hamish over there works as an assistant in his labs,

which is where he gets his hands on all of this delightful stuff.' He gestured vaguely towards the ear.

'But . . . pardon my asking, aren't you all attending the university? Why do you need a private surgical school if you're already enrolled in all the lectures required for a degree?'

A round of laughter ensued, but to my relief, it was neither mean-spirited nor dismissive; instead, it smacked of honest amusement.

Phillip was the first to respond. 'Have you ever been to an anatomy lecture before? Here at the university, I mean.'

I shook my head. 'No.'

'Well, it's a bit . . . useless,' he continued diplomatically. 'A hundred and twenty students in the theatre, craning their necks around the crowd to get so much as a glimpse of the demonstration. I'm in my third year now, and I've never been closer than thirty feet to a body on university grounds.'

I furrowed my brow; this information was quite contrary to what I'd come to understand about medical training in Edinburgh – the city was meant to be the heart of practical surgical training. How was it possible a third-year student had such limited access to the necessary syllabus?

'And so . . . the private schools are different?' I ventured.

Hamish snorted into his ale. 'That's one way of putting it,' he muttered.

I resolutely ignored him and turned my attention back to Phillip. 'How so?'

Phillip steepled his fingers, a mischievous look on his face. 'Have you ever heard of the Parisian manner of dissection?' Once again, I shook my head. 'It's a method of learning in which each anatomy student is provided with a corpse of their own for dissection.'

The thought was utterly astonishing. 'Their own . . . corpse? For every student?'

Next to me, Charlie nodded, his eyes alight with enthusiasm. 'Exactly. You get practical experience in anatomy, dissection, diagnosis – before you even meet your first patient! It's how they do it on the Continent, you see, and Edinburgh's the only city here that's caught on. *That's* what makes it so special. That's why this is the City of Science. That's why we're all here.' He gestured towards the nodding faces around the table, and I marvelled at the possibilities.

'So . . . how do we gain admission to a private school?'

Hamish interjected once again, this time with considerably less derision, much to my relief. 'Knox is already full up this term, but plenty of other schools will be hosting their open houses for prospective new students this week. Malstrom's gallery will be accepting twenty, I've heard – you ought to try there first. There's a demonstration Thursday next.'

'Fantastic.' Charlie raised his eyebrows in my direction. 'So, James. Ready to get those toff hands dirty?'

## 2.

### An Observation

The first fortnight of my new education passed without much cause for notation. I found my lectures enlightening, my new peers welcoming, the locals enchantingly warm (if a bit rough around the edges), and my lodgings tolerable enough. For all the talk of its incomparable convenience, the Hope & Anchor proved to be convenient in its proximity to the university alone; the rest of its features left much to be desired. Despite my satisfaction with the location, my chamber itself was sorely lacking. There was no hot water, the bedclothes were worn beyond reasonable repair, the floor ice-cold save for a small threadbare rug, and the breakfast consisted of no more than unbuttered bread, an overboiled egg, and a tepid pot of tea. Yet I held my tongue rather than observe all of this aloud, as it seemed that the accommodation was deemed sufficient not only by Charlie but by the myriad of other students who took their lodgings there. And as I had quickly learned upon my arrival, it was not my place to comment upon the quality of my surroundings, lest I catch wind of a less than courteous hiss of 'Toff-Boy' uttered in my direction beneath Hamish's breath.