

**FORTITUDE**  
**KAREN BAYLY**

*We hope you enjoy this Sampler.*

*You can BUY the Printed Book at Lulu :*

<http://www.lulu.com/commerce/index.php?fBuyContent=24764257>

*& the Ebook at Smashwords :*

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/941915>

*The Ebook is also available at iBooks & Kobo*

Published by Mary Celeste Press

'Fortitude'

Karen Bayly

First published in 2019 by

Mary Celeste Press Australia

Copyright Karen Bayly, 2019

Publisher: Matthew Ward

ISBN-13: 978-0-9808495-2-3

***N.B. This Sampler is not to be distributed without the permission of the publisher.***

## *Prologue*

### **Excerpt from “Crisis in New Londinium”**

by **Eli Turnbull**, Editor-In-Chief, *The Triumph*,

**It is an undeniable fact** that everything passes – animals, plants, ideas, beliefs, civilisations, anything that has a glimmer of what may be called life. All die and decay, and from the ruins and detritus springs new life, both similar and dissimilar to that preceding it.

Death had come to Port Durring long before young Miss Viola Winslow visited its withering landscape. Once a thriving centre of manufacturing, based around the twin towns of Portside and Durringham, the rapid technological advancements of the past decade had rendered these palaces of production obsolete. It had proved easier to build new factories and mills than remodel the old, and a new industrial town, Westerhaven, had materialised further up the river.

Subsequently, the land had been earmarked for redevelopment, but no-one had seemed willing to take on the mammoth task of dismantling the rusting remains, nor could anyone agree on how development should proceed. Certain political factions insisted that Port Durring be set aside for commercial or mercantile purposes. The Council of Danaeus, New Londinium’s illustrious collective of the world’s pre-eminent scientists and inventors, was not amongst those factions. Rather, its members wished to create a precinct to serve the citizenry – one with a community garden, a recycling mill, an education centre, and a technology park.

New Londinium, capital of the United Republic of Britannia, has long shone as a beacon of forward thinking for all of humanity. Set on both sides of the River Tamesis, it boasts 3 square miles of industry and business and 117 square miles of villages and farms.

In a world mad about steam power, it was the first city in any country to implement an integrated transport network linking dirigible ports and outer residential suburbs with the central city and its inner suburbs. Steam-powered trains and buses ran so frequently that few felt the need for private transport.

This inventiveness spread throughout Britannia. Indeed, the Republic is an exemplar of solidarity and community. After the cessation of Roman rule in the early fifth century, its provinces battled amongst themselves, each determined to regain its own sovereignty at the expense of peaceful cohabitation. However, the need to defend the land against marauding hordes from their far-northern, eastern and southern neighbours forged a unity and strength that became legendary throughout the following centuries. The country grew to lead the world in science, conservation of both natural and cultural resources, as well as trade and politics. Nowadays, science, philosophy, the arts and the practical application of technology are taught in schools. Everyone is encouraged to contribute to society.

While the social aspects of freely shared power and technology furthered the

egalitarian nature of life in Britannia, the thermal pollution and water degradation from the use of coal-, coke- and charcoal-based steam power caused wide and unacceptable environmental damage. In New Londinium, the ancient and beautiful Tamesis river that serpentine through the middle of the city, became clogged with algae and devoid of all animal life. The air had grown thick with water vapour and particulate matter causing a dramatic rise in chronic respiratory diseases amongst the city's inhabitants. The forests outside New Londinium were almost completely destroyed. To the west, intensive mining of the Silurian coal fields precipitated alarming damage to the surrounding countryside and contributed to the declining health of the miners.

Spurred on by the realisation that coal- and coke-fired steam was unsustainable, the environmental arm of the Council of Danaeus, along with various concerned citizen groups, championed a ban on charcoal. The Council also pooled its considerable resources to provide an alternative source of power. The combined genius of its members changed the face of steam power radically, promoting alternative energy sources for large scale use and creating new machines far more efficient and sophisticated than the old wood- and coal-powered ones.

One invention stood out as an almost perfect balance of renewable and clean power – the Ripley Perpetual Steam Engine. This brilliant device harnesses harmonic molecular excitation of water as a power source and uses a state-of-the-art closed system to recycle the steam. Put simply for non-technical readers<sup>1</sup>, superheated water creates steam, steam drives pistons, steam is cooled by a fan back into water which flows into the heating chamber where the cycle repeats. The ingenious and compact design has allowed engines to be made in smaller sizes, with many smaller vehicles such as cars now able to be powered by steam engine.

1. For more technical detail, refer Ripley, P. PhD Thesis. Oxford University, 1891.

By the mid-1890s, all coal-powered steam transport in New Londinium had been replaced. Now in 1901, sleek and elegant cars grace the streets and the new two-wheeled motosteed is all the rage with more adventurous folk. If New Londinium had seemed egalitarian a decade ago, now it is doubly so. Today everyone has access to the marvels of flight, personal transportation, communication and other devices created to improve the efficiency and comfort of the general populace. We live in a brave new world.

The waters of the Tamesis are clear and sparkling, with fishing, punting and boat racing all popular pastimes. Industrial waste is processed at point-of-origin in Westerhaven and the treated wastewater carried out to sea by steel pipes laid on the bed of the Tamesis. The air is cleaner and fresher than any other major world city. New Londinium truly is the glittering star of the modern age.

Yet where there is light there is also dark, and the Council has often found itself treading the fine line between the creativity of discovery and the destructiveness of unbridled ambition. Any tendency toward the latter generally has been controlled through choosing projects that are both beneficial to the greater good and of the highest ethical standards.

Still, its members are only human and, in retrospect, it seems not all its members have been above reproach. There was one who sought concealment from prying, judging

eyes in order to explore more arcane, unsanctioned pursuits. This person searched and found places where one could do what one wished without censure.

And neither Durringham or Portside were quite as abandoned as each seemed.

## Chapter One

The night was as sullen as the beggar-children down Smegwick way, and equally as unaccommodating. It had been raining for days and the harbour smelled nauseatingly of rotting fish, steamboat oil and salt.

Viola Winslow wrapped her worn cloak tightly around her thin body, pulled the hood over her face and put one foot firmly in front of the other in an effort to prevent herself running in the opposite direction. Every step took her closer to the desolate ruin known as Durringham Power Station and dread sang in her ears. Yet she must keep her appointment, for how else would she discover who had written the letter in the neat cursive of her dead brother, Luther? *'Be at the gates,'* it had said, *'no earlier and no later than 10:00 pm.'* It was quarter to that hour now.

She hurried down the alleyway, ignoring the pit of fear in her stomach, and out into the street which led to the power station. The pavement was lined with hornbeams, the yellow blooms dripping forlornly from sodden branches. Not a bad part of town this; not quite peopled by the upper echelon of society but definitely not your downtrodden scrubbers and lowlifes from her own current abode. Not that she had always lived in such pernicious circumstances. Once she too lived in a neighbourhood like this, not quite as good, but pleasant and friendly. However, that was many years ago, before the influenza epidemic of 1895 devastated her family, before the loss of the family home. Now she lived in a clean but dilapidated flat above a printery in a far less salubrious part of town. It had felt like a home when Luther was alive, but now?

The street flooded with light and she froze. Two women came out of the house opposite, uttering their goodbyes as the door closed, then chattering and bickering as only sisters can. She ducked behind a tree and watched them. One was dressed in a white high-collared blouse with puffy sleeves, teamed with a dark skirt and neat high-buttoned boots. Her blonde hair was styled in the height of fashion, at once both beautiful and an insult to nature. Yet the woman herself was the epitome of feminine loveliness.

The other wore a dark brown leather aviatrix jacket with khaki moleskins and knee length brown riding boots. She appeared to be wearing some sort of voluminous blouse which billowed from underneath the jacket.

'Can you tell me, my dear Thena, why people always mistake ME for the sapphic sister?' said the woman in the jacket.

Viola's eyes widened. This was the famous sister duo of Artemis Devereaux and Parthena Ripley!

'It's because you are so delightfully butch, Arty dearest,' laughed Parthena. 'And tuck your shirt in.'

Artemis gave her sister a withering look as she pulled on her leather helmet and strode toward the Pegasus motosteed parked near the tree where Viola hid. She threw her leg over the beast and turned on the headlights. The young woman shrank further into the shadows, her heart pounding, certain of being discovered.

'Well, hurry up then,' Artemis snapped. 'We haven't got all night.'

Parthena sighed and wandered toward the Pegasus, hitching up her skirts as she

went and exposing a pair of shapely silk-clad calves.

‘I do not comprehend WHY we have to get around on this... this thing. What is wrong with an ordinary steam carriage, may I ask?’

‘Adventure, Thena!’ cried Artemis, adjusting her goggles. ‘What steam carriage could be better than a Pegasus? And besides, it’s partly your creation. “A revolutionary steam engine invented by the extraordinary Doctor Parthena Ripley” – that’s what the newspapers said, wasn’t it?’

She grinned as she fired up the two-wheeled black metal motosteed. It was a magnificent machine, sleek, state-of-the-art and caparisoned with fine bronze decorations. Its horsehead-like steering carriage bobbed, seemingly in acknowledgement of its rider, as the pistons of its Ripley Perpetual Steam Engine pumped rhythmically.

Parthena crossed her arms and fixed her sister with an icy glare. ‘You do realise you shouldn’t rev the engine so vigorously before it reaches maximum compression?’

‘Oh, be quiet and get on!’

Parthena wrapped a scarf over her hair and sighed as she gingerly swung her leg over the passenger seat. Such was the joy of being a genius, forever obligated to use the things she created. Why couldn’t she invent girly things as well?

‘I won’t suffer this monstrosity another time, dear heart.’

‘You said that the last time as well.’

The Pegasus’ engine purred like a cheetah. Artemis engaged the gears, took off the brake, felt the wheels gripping the road as the machine moved smoothly forward and sped off into the night.

Viola exhaled sharply, thinking she might have been wiser to make herself known to them rather than hide. Their experience with the difficult-to-explain was well-known, and she could certainly have used the help. Never mind. Too late now.

She gathered her cloak around her again and continued down the road toward the power station. Her heels tap-tapped on the stone pavements, too loud for her liking. The last thing she wanted was to draw unwanted attention. As she rounded the corner at the bottom of the hill, she could see the power station’s angular silhouette looming ahead of her. In the dark, she fancied it was a misshapen cathedral, a travesty of the divine erected to mock the faith of humankind. It had served a purpose once, huge engines burning wood and coal, wheels turning and churning out power to New Londinium. Thanks to the Council of Danaeus, of which the redoubtable Parthena Ripley was a member, those days were past. Now, the harnessing of tidal energy provided hydropower for daily use, cleaner than steam power and equally as efficient.

Viola stood at the gateway of the power station and shivered. The smell of oil and another more putrid smell she couldn’t place made her stomach heave. More frightening was the pervasive air of desperation which wrapped itself around her like a damp blanket. She glanced around nervously, aware that anyone could see her, then gritted her teeth and pushed on the iron gate. It groaned and resisted, yet she persisted and it opened enough for her to slip through.

She scampered toward the shadows, then crept along the nearest wall looking for the side door, grateful for the shelter of darkness. Her foot connected with something soft and she heard a faint indignant squeak as a large rat scuttled away. The smell here was overpowering. Gagging, she fumbled in her pocket for a handkerchief, found a fresh lace-

trimmed white one perfumed with lavender, and covered her nose and mouth. Finally, she found herself in front of a brown painted door with a dirty brass knob. She turned it and shoved as hard as she could. It did not budge.

Viola cursed softly to herself. She would never have cursed in the past, but life had become so different lately. Leaning against the wall, she closed her eyes, wanting to cry and singularly unable to do so. What to do now?

Her reverie was interrupted by a persistent shuffling and her eyes flew open in time to see a tall, lanky figure lurching towards her. It stretched out one raggedy arm and clutched her cloak as it thrust its cadaverous face into hers. She opened her mouth, ready to cry out for help when the voice floating on the foetid breath from the creature's mouth stopped her scream in its tracks.

'Hello sister...'

She closed her mouth and stared into the sunken eyes, took in the lines of the ravaged face. Her eyes filled with pity, then joy, then despair.

Luther.

## Chapter Two

Artemis Ripley Devereaux was admired for her feisty intelligence and for possessing an abundance of that elusive quality some call charisma. She had a reputation as an adventurer, a discoverer of rare artefacts, a detector of mysteries. Yet now she felt any admiration was ill-deserved and her reputation for adventure and discovery nothing but a lie. She was a fraud.

She sat at a large oaken desk in the study of the Pennington Arms house she shared with her sister, hiding away from the prying eyes of the world. The charming old mansion was part of the estate left to both sisters after their parents were killed in an experimental steam car accident. She often wondered how her family had lasted this long given the ancestral predilection for scientific experiments, adventure bordering on recklessness and general curiosity of the type renowned for killing cats. Indeed, given Parthena's sexual orientation and her own peculiar marital state, it seemed the Ripley family would not last past the current generation.

She and her husband, ex-Sky Force Captain Nathaniel Devereaux, had spent many years travelling the world in their dirigible *Fortitudo*. All that ceased three years ago when a freak storm downed the vessel on a routine supply run from Buenos Aires to the Andes. Artemis had emerged from the crash with relatively minor injuries and a dose of poisoning from a herbal tea administered by a well-meaning villager. However, despite numerous searches, the body of her beloved Nathaniel hadn't been recovered, and he was presumed dead. She'd never truly decided whether the probability of his demise was greater than the possibility he still lived. As a result, she found herself living in an emotional netherworld where nothing seemed real and everything was so painfully ordinary.

The laughter of children floated up from the park opposite the house and into her reverie, doubling her wistfulness. Children had never been a priority for either of them. It was always one of those things they planned to do later when, or if, they settled down. However, the heart had gone out of her with Nathaniel's disappearance, along with any remnant of desire for motherhood. To say her spirit was dampened was an understatement. Without Nathaniel by her side, her adventuring had been curtailed and her fortunes diminished. She no longer had the stomach for discovery and mystery. The prized *Fortitudo*, what was left of it, had been sold for scrap.

These days her time was spent writing up the memoirs of the travels they shared, a labour of pragmatism rather than love. She'd already been approached by a couple of publishers and even though she had no real desire to share her story with the world, she was desperate for funds to cover the losses of that last disastrous journey.

Around her lay papers and various other bits and pieces, memory-joggers, and sentimental reminders of a life she had adored. She hated the apathy she felt. Most of all, she was angry that she would never see Nathaniel again. She longed to wake up in the morning, naked and cocooned in the security of their marital bed and feel his arms around her, his lips on hers and the hard, warm strength of his body. Yet she could wish all she wanted. That part of her life was over.

She'd considered setting out on an expedition with Parthena but her dear sister was

the stay-at-home type, happiest when she was ensconced in her laboratory creating some new device. Though not all Parthena's inventions were ultimately practical, each was most certainly diabolically ingenious.

Artemis envied Parthena for having a purpose so clear and fulfilling. Her own purpose was clouded, all her plans for the future in disarray. For the first time in her life she had no direction, no inspiration. What was she to do now?

She heaved herself out of the comfort of the tattered leather chair and wandered to the open window. The day outside was bright and fresh, with a hint of summer on the breeze. Sunlight glinted on the duckpond in the park and her spirits lifted momentarily. She could hear the sound of a dirigible engine. She leaned out the window, suddenly invigorated by the idea that someone was flying somewhere new and exciting. The vessel floated overhead, set like a jewel against the pale sapphire sky, its gold and silver striped hull gleaming in the late morning light. Her heart tugged a little at the memory of the Devereaux airship, so similarly decorated in gold and silver. However, the gondola underneath this dirigible was different – a sepia-toned wood of some sort with dark glass windows. Artemis could only wonder how the pilot could see to fly the ship.

The side of the gondola was emblazoned with gold lettering, no doubt the name of the ship. Unable to make out the words with the naked eye, she grabbed a pair of brass spyglasses from the mahogany side cabinet and deftly adjusted the optics. The words zeroed into focus and she froze, unable to believe what she had seen. Hands shaking, she re-adjusted the optics and checked again, just to be sure. There was no mistaking the name in flowing gilt copperplate – Fortitudo.

Artemis fumed. Who could have had the audacity to build this ship and name it after her beloved flagship, to copy its colours and style? As if it wasn't bad enough that the life she loved was in disrepair. Now someone had dared to sully the memory of her adventures by copycatting. How had they received permission to use the name Fortitudo? It was still registered in both her and Nathaniel's names. She would go to the Registry of Dirigibles immediately and demand an explanation. How dare they release that name without her permission, how dare they!

She stormed down the stairs, muttering expletives, and grabbed her jacket from the leather ottoman where she had tossed it the previous evening. Parthena popped her head out from behind her laboratory door, her scope-goggles giving her a vaguely mantis-like appearance.

'What is the matter with you? And mind your language.'

Artemis scowled at her, opened the front door, letting daylight flood into the house and pointed upwards to the diminishing shape of the dirigible.

'That, Parthena,' she said pointing upwards, 'is someone's idea of a bad joke.'

Parthena removed her goggles and squinted into the light.

'It's a dirigible,' she remarked mildly.

Artemis gritted her teeth.

'Doesn't it look familiar?'

Parthena looked at Artemis blankly.

'It looks like the Fortitudo!'

'I suppose it does look somewhat like the Fortitudo,' Parthena agreed. 'But then

most gold and silver dirigibles would.’

‘Except that this one is also called the Fortitudo and I’m going to do something about it.’

Parthena sighed, grabbed Artemis by the arm and turned her round so that they were face-to-face. Artemis glared at her.

‘Let me go, Parthena.’

‘Not until you calm down. And not until you wait for me to go with you.’

Artemis’ face grew stormier.

‘I will be quite all right on my own.’

‘I have no doubt of it, but one of us has to keep a clear head, and it obviously isn’t going to be you.’

The Fortitudo was more than a state-of-the-art dirigible. She was an exercise in luxury and opulence. The gondola was huge but elegant, and consisted of three sections: the control foredeck and navigation room, the living quarters, and a cargo hold. The foredeck was a gentlemen’s retreat of the most luxurious order. The walls were panelled in satin-polished oak and the drapes were the finest Krautian velvet, woven from a deep burgundy thread, and tied with golden silk ropes. The air was fragrant with quality Cubana tobacco although a hint of something sickly sweet, repugnant, lay underneath the fine aroma.

The darkness of the place was a haven of peace to its inhabitant. He stared out into the day sky, his eyes shielded from its bright harshness by the thick photosensitive silver-glass. Moving his gloved hands over the gleaming brass controls, he set a course for his refuge at Pepperton airfield. He’d seen Artemis again today – from a distance where she could not possibly recognise him – but to his keen eyesight, it was if she were only a breath away.

The first time he’d laid eyes on her was at a party to celebrate his cousin Jacinthe’s surprise (some said unearned) appointment to the Franconian Institute of Science. He’d only recently arrived home, tired and disillusioned, from his first commission to the Sudland. Mingling with the glitterati of New Londinium and making small talk was low on his list of must-do activities but he felt obliged to show support for his cousin. The Sudland had revealed horrors he didn’t wish to describe to anyone, and the idea of fielding questions from young ladies keen to hear of his adventures filled him with dread.

Artemis Ripley was there with her sister, Parthena, who had attended university with his cousin. Both women were striking, but Artemis captured his attention and he found he had no desire to look elsewhere. She was remarkably attractive – dark hair, dark eyes, dark-coloured attire but with pale, luminous skin and rosy lips. Compelling and so different to all the other young women there who reminded him of squawking parrots with their brightly coloured clothes and animated chatter.

Those hoary platitudes about eyes across a crowded room were ridiculously true in their case. She looked up at him from at least thirty feet away and it was if she were standing directly in front of him. Everything about her took his breath away. When they were finally introduced that evening, he was almost speechless, yet acquitted himself well enough in conversation to elicit a further meeting, then another and another. Her intelligence and spirit captivated him as much, if not more than, her loveliness. He knew that he had found the one woman with whom he could fully share his life. They had

married eight months later, in a dirigible high above the city, and had been inseparable companions, adventurers and lovers until that fateful journey.

He longed to speak with her, touch her again. He'd reveal himself to her soon, but there was so much at stake. Most of all, the fear that she would be revolted by him held him back. He didn't know if he could bear her despising what he had become.

In his favour, there was much about him which hadn't changed. His appearance was the same. Tall, broad of shoulder yet lean of body, with hawkish brown eyes gazing out from a face surprisingly smooth and unlined for a military man. Artemis had teased him about the softness of his skin saying that if it weren't for his defined jaw and determined mouth, people might think him a dandy on first glance. What would she think now that his hair was unfashionably long and pulled into a small ponytail at the back?

It suited him. He couldn't be bothered with sitting in a barber's chair being dandified for the sake of social niceties. His appearance was a product of what he could do himself. Shaving he did as a matter of comfort – he wasn't fond of facial hair and eschewed the moustaches and sideburns so beloved of this era. His clothing had never been the latest style but always of a good cut and quality material. He was neat but not vain, and wore the outer trappings of his existence with a strength of character that defied criticism of its quirks.

Inside, he remained a man of integrity and commitment to duty. He was still the brave and resourceful Nathaniel Devereaux she loved. Most importantly his love for her had in no way diminished. If anything, absence had deepened his affections and he longed for her more than he wished to admit. It had not been his choice to become this thing of darkness, a fact he prayed she would understand, if the prayers of such as he were accepted.

He took a swig from a small silver flask, the reddish liquid staining his lips until he licked it away. He felt the yearning surge through his body and closed his eyes. Please forgive me, Artemis. Accept me as I am.

## Chapter Three

### *Six months earlier*

Titus Johannes stood outside an abandoned warehouse in Portside, frowning in confusion. He examined the address written on the card he'd retrieved from the back of a drawer in his laboratory at the Council. This definitely was supposed to be Silas Begby's research facility.

The outer door was locked, so he knocked politely and waited. There was no answer. He knocked again, a little louder this time, and pressed his ear up against the door. He thought he heard someone moving about inside, but he couldn't be sure. He wondered if doors acted like seashells (put your ear close to them and you heard the sea, or in this case, what you would expect to find behind a door).

He cleared his throat. 'Hello? Any b-body there?'

He took a step back and looked around. The place seemed like it has been abandoned for quite some time. What should he do? He'd been filled with a surprisingly overwhelming urge to confront Silas and then report the events of the past few months to the Council. Now he wasn't so sure.

This was most unlike him. He was a man who knew how to complete any project he started. Yet he would freely admit that it was starting a project that so often eluded him. It wasn't that he was devoid of ideas; rather the opposite. His mind was always racing with plans for machines, blueprints of inventions and experiments of discovery, all of which defied the confines of current scientific thought.

If any criticism could be levelled at Titus' imaginative faculties, it would be that he had too many ideas. His difficulty was selecting just one of the countless marvels in his head to pursue.

Occasionally, one idea would beat back the rabble of its fellows, and present itself to Titus with such clarity and insistence that he would be compelled to take action. He'd become so single-minded about birthing this idea into actuality that he would forget to eat, sleep and bathe. He could easily have starved if not for his long suffering landlady. Mrs Chen, who would bring him regular meals, and curse at him in Chinois until he had taken at least one bite.

As to the other two – well, Titus seemed to have a great capacity for going without sleep for days, and people knew not to visit him when he was so possessed, thus avoiding the pervasive odour of genius-at-work. (At these times, his landlady was known to make a point of wearing a gas mask when delivering his meals. Not that Titus ever noticed. He was not one for picking up hints, subtle or otherwise.)

If he had ever heard anyone refer to his moments of creative frenzy as "genius-at-work", he'd have blushed like a schoolgirl, for he was a humble soul and not given to singing his own praises. He was brilliant, but loath to shine, and unassuming to the point of being overlooked by his peers, which is why few recognised the enormity of his creation until it was too late to avert its misuse.

In truth, Titus' intentions had been always been thoroughly noble. He'd wanted to

invent a clean energy source which could use all types of inorganic matter – whether newly sourced or recycled – to create energy. While the Ripley Perpetual Steam Engine had contributed enormously to creating cleaner energy, the disposal of both industrial and everyday waste was still a major headache worldwide.

One night when Titus' myriad imaginings were struggling for recognition, the thought that beat back its fellows was the Possibility Converter. It burst forth fully formed, like Athena from the forehead of Zeus, ready to serve Titus' vision for a better world. He could see precisely how to change matter from one form to another without heat and knew the exact method by which inorganic material would either change its state to solid or liquid or gas, or convert straight to pure energy.

His invention was capable of calculating the possible states of any material at a submicronic level, by examining and quantifying the current vibratory state of its molecules. One could then choose a new target state, and the machine would stimulate a few molecules to vibrate in alignment with that target state. At critical point, when a requisite number of molecules were vibrating at the new state, a chain reaction would initiate causing the whole of the material to be converted. Titus had even devised a formula to calculate this critical point for any given material.

Titus was extremely proud of his new machine. It stood in the corner of his laboratory in the Council of Danaeus headquarters and he would often sit in his favourite chair, admiring his creation. It was beautiful with its elegant brass computational cabinet and its state-of-the-art components – an infinite on/off switch simulator, resisting and capacitating coils, ferro-magnetic core memory banks, and his treasured gold-plated micronic measuring probe.

Titus sighed and wandered round the back of the building, hoping to find signs of life or at least another door. It had been the probe which had been the beginning of his woes. Titus had realised long ago that he was not a man given to understanding the complexities and nuances of politics. Still, he was resigned to the fact that there was a strong political aspect to science, and that funding was dependent upon on a labyrinthine structure of who-knew-who and why-this-should-be-done-now and that-should-be-done-later. It was something he didn't even wish to understand and which he left to those more experienced in such matters.

Usually, he would take his discoveries to the Elders of the Council of Danaeus, who would then enlist the expertise of other Council members to assist with the politically tricky development phase. This usually meant his projects were always regarded as a collaborative effort between him and a number of other scientists, an arrangement which suited his humble nature.

This time, he'd broken with protocol as he wanted more than anything to complete the Possibility Converter on his own. As the idea had presented itself to him fully formed, so he wished to present his masterpiece to the Council fully formed.

He'd been able to source most of the materials himself as there was nothing out of the ordinary in the computational part of the machine. However, gold-plated micronic measuring probes – indeed, gold *anything* research-oriented – was distinctly extraordinary. He'd canvassed a number of colleagues in private, but all had looked at him blankly, then suggested he take his request to the Elders. Worse still, no-one seemed to understand the importance of his work for no-one showed any significant interest. That

is, except for Silas Begby.

Titus did not really like Silas Begby, despite the man's notable seniority and position as an Elder. He found him bumptious and opinionated, yet worryingly difficult to fathom. So he was not at all pleased when Begby approached him to offer assistance. His first instinct had been to say no, but by this stage he'd completed the computational heart of his machine and desperately needed materials to build the conversion apparatus. So he reluctantly engaged Begby to source all that he required.

To his dismay, Begby had wasted no time in making an appointment with Doctor Corazon Paget, Scientist Laureate and Head of the Council of Danaeus, to present the details of the project. Titus had dreamed of impressing Doctor Paget and would have much preferred showing off his invention after it was completed. When he explained this to his new partners, the elder scientist dismissed him with a wave of his hand.

'Who knows more about selling product, young Johannes,' he'd blustered, 'you or yours truly?'

Titus felt he had to defer despite his misgivings. After all, the man had been elected "Master of Research Advancement" by Council members. Even though Doctor Paget showed nothing but disdain for the man's scientific credentials, she encouraged his participation on the Council because of his well-deserved reputation for securing funding for a variety of projects.

To Titus' thinking, Begby gave a florid and rather data thin explanation of the potential of the Possibility Converter and Doctor Paget had been unimpressed.

'I'm surprised you are championing this machine, Begby. It doesn't seem to be the typical money-maker you usually favour. Yet you seem to think it is worth significant investment of time and resources by the Council.'

'Indubitably, m'lady. We have already seen extraordinary preliminary results.'

Titus blanched. The machine hadn't been completed. Did the man have no shame?

Begby tucked his thumbs under his lapels. 'I have no doubt that further research will prove we have a new and viable means of creating energy.'

She'd peered at them both, grunted, then walked to the window where she stared outside for an interminable time. Titus felt he was about to die of embarrassment.

'M'lady?' Begby smiled ingratiatingly.

'Very well,' she'd replied, 'but keep me informed of all developments.'

Now Titus was not naive. He suspected Begby's assistance would come at a cost. Therefore he had not been surprised when he arrived at his laboratory one morning to find Begby waiting for him.

'Ah, good morning Doctor Johannes,' Begby beamed. 'Quite an impressive setup you have.'

'Thank you, D-Doctor B-Begby. May I inquire as to how you g-got in?'

'The door was unlocked,' Begby replied. 'I must admit I was quite surprised to find it so. You really should be more diligent about security.'

Titus was quite certain he had secured both doors last night and he was the only person who had keys. Even the cleaning staff could only enter his – or any other research facility on Council property – with the express permission of the lead researcher.

'You wouldn't want anyone stealing your ideas now, would you?' Begby

continued.

‘I d-don’t think that anyone at the C-Council –’

‘Ah now, you are too trusting Doctor Johannes,’ Begby interjected, ‘and that is the very reason why I wanted to help you with your project. I can provide not only any materials you may require, but round the clock security.’

‘Thank you, but I d-don’t thi –’

‘I won’t take no for an answer. It would be a pity for the Possibility Converter to falter at this stage of its development.’

Begby’s expression scared Titus and he dared not refuse him. He could not risk losing the support he did have, and surely greater support and security would only be of assistance?

If only he’d trusted his initial misgivings!

Titus had designed the Possibility Converter for use on inorganic matter only, and his initial experiments on industrial sludges and waste were highly successful. Every material he used easily converted to clean harnessable energy. His Possibility Converter did everything he had hoped and he was keen to present his results to the Council’s Board of Elders and the redoubtable Doctor Paget for review. However, Begby insisted that experiments be extended to converting organic matter, on the basis that the Possibility Converter could contribute to improved sanitation and community health by converting the waste of everyday existence to energy.

At first the results had been promising – vegetable matter and human refuse such as faeces, slaughterhouse leftovers, and so on, were easily converted, and Titus wondered why he had never thought to include these. With his wholehearted approval, experiments were extended even further to the conversion of animals that had died of natural causes or had been exterminated as pests, and these too had yielded ideal results.

It was during these experiments that Titus discovered the Possibility Converter had an unexpected effect when used within three hours of death – rather than convert the body to energy, the body was reanimated. He first observed this phenomenon in rats. One couldn’t say they were brought back to life. There was no discernible heartbeat or breath, and the poor creatures barely ate or drank.

Titus was so horrified by the outcome, he’d written clear procedures regarding the use of whole animal matter, outlining the brief window in which reanimation occurred and recommending that conversion not be commenced until at least three hours had passed. He’d presented Silas Begby with a copy, stressing the ethical and moral importance of adhering to these new procedures. At the time, he had been certain that Begby agreed.

Shortly after this discovery, the laboratory was visited by a number of other “collaborators” invited on to the project by Begby. Early one morning, three such collaborators arrived in the company of Begby, completely surprising Titus who had fallen asleep over the proofs he had been writing. The elder scientist had seemed uncharacteristically flustered to see Titus there.

‘What on earth are you doing here? Don’t you have a home to go to?’ Begby blustered.

Titus stood up half in apology, half in greeting.

‘Sorry, must have d-dozed off.’ He ran a hand through his hair and waited to be introduced.

‘Well, go home and freshen up,’ Begby snapped. ‘You look like a vagrant.’

With that, Begby lurched out of the room, the three strangers in tow. Titus had felt uneasy for the rest of the day. He was fairly certain that none of the men he saw were members of the Council of Danaeus, and Begby’s reluctance to introduce them to him raised red flags.

However, when Titus saw Begby that evening, the elder scientist was apologetic.

‘I am sorry about this morning, dear boy,’ he said. ‘I was showing our investor collaborators around the facility to assure them their money was well-spent. A scruffy scientist asleep at the bench does not create a good impression for men of their calibre, so I thought it best to hurry them away. No offence meant, dear chap.’

‘No offence taken,’ he’d replied, though he felt otherwise. ‘I look forward to meeting these investor collaborators soon.’

‘All in good time, young Johannes. All in good time.’

Over the next few weeks, the collaborators came and went numerous times, but Begby never introduced any of the men to Titus. Rather, they studiously avoided him, to the point of rudely ignoring his friendly hellos and striding off in the other direction. Titus observed at least four men, all of different ethnicities and accents, yet all had one thing in common – each wore an odd gold and onyx signet ring with an emblem of a three-headed dog.

Around this time, New Londinium had a small but contained outbreak of flux. As was often the case, this outbreak of disease was contained, the victims isolated and treated behind closed doors. Should death occur, close kin were informed of their loved ones’ passing, the bodies cremated and the ashes returned to the grieving relatives.

Despite Titus’ protestations, Silas had procured twenty-eight of the dead for conversion to energy rather than cremation, his reasoning being it was a shameful waste to cremate good energy resources. Titus was horrified at the very idea of experimenting on humans, even dead ones, without the sanction of the Council of Danaeus and he refused to have anything to do with it. He’d every intention of reporting the matter to the Council, yet to his shame, his courage had failed him for he was still in need of the money and resources the older scientist could provide. So he’d buried himself in his rooms, away from the Council building, hoping against all hope that Begby would change his mind about his unethical behaviour.

A few days later, Silas, full of apologies, came to visit Titus. He said he thought it best that he remove himself from testing the Possibility Converter, and would instead return to his own laboratory on the other side of the city to continue his own work. Titus was relieved to have his lab back to himself. He’d avoided any further contact with that odious man and concentrated on compiling his results in a report to present to the Board of Elders.

Yet his experiences with Silas had alerted him to how his creation could be misused, and he was no longer certain that he wanted to go public with it. Plus there was the matter of Silas’ gross transgression in the unsanctioned use of corpses, for which Titus felt compelled to take some blame. These dilemmas tore at him – he could not work nor sleep, he lost weight, his skin was grey, his eyes hollow and haunted. And for once,

people noticed him and were shocked by the change from brilliant but bumbling inventor to that of tormented soul.

He knew he had to make reparations which is how he found himself wandering around a deserted building looking for a way in.

• • •

Titus shook himself from his reverie. He was at the back of the building now and there was another door, equally as unpromising as the one at the front. It seemed pointless to knock but he had nothing to lose. He banged his fist against it several times, fully expecting no-one to answer. He was about to leave when he heard movement from within, then a whispered debate. At last the door opened a crack and large nose poked through followed by a most unwelcoming ruddy face.

‘What do you want?’ asked the man suspiciously.

‘I’m D-Doctor Titus Johannes. I’m l-looking for Silas B-Begby.’

‘No-one here by that name here, mate. Sorry.’

The man started to close the door. Titus grabbed the door edge and pulled back hard on it to stop him.

‘May I come in then? I’m a colleague of D-Doctor B-Begby.’ He almost choked on those last few words.

The man hesitated for a moment, then opened the door. Titus entered the dank, dirty cavern and stood before two glum men, dressed in grubby white shirts and dark trousers covered by long grey aprons. He assumed they were laboratory assistants.

‘Where are the rest of the research staff?’

‘Don’t know of any research staff, sir. We’re just here to do a job.’

‘There must be research staff. This is a research facility, is it not? Or so Begby tells me.’

The men looked at each other.

‘Who are you again?’ said the taller man, the one who had opened the door.

‘D-Doctor Titus Johannes. I’m in charge of the project,’ he added as grandly as he could muster.

Both men blanched then the shorter man began to speak, the words tumbling out.

‘So sorry, sir, we were told not to speak to anyone of our work here.’ He gestured to the other man. ‘Arthur here and me, we’re morgue workers, y’see. Our employer said ’e had received a letter and a cheque from some third party ’bout a job that needed doin’, somethin’ to do with some research what had finished. We was told to come here and dispose of some bodies inside. No questions asked. No matter what. And that is what we have been doin’.’

He noticed Titus’ alarmed expression.

‘Of course, I am only speakin’ to you now because you clearly knows ’bout the research here, bein’ in charge an’ all that.’

In truth, it was not the man’s babbling that alarmed Titus. It was the emphasis put on the word *research* and the fact that there were bodies. Hadn’t Silas already disposed of

all the bodies he'd acquired back at Titus' lab? Had he acquired new ones in those few days he still had access to the Possibility Converter?

'Might I see these b-bodies, please?'

The two men looked at each other nervously, but led him to a large cool-room filled with row upon row of gurneys.

'Here we are, sir,' said the shorter man.

Only a few gurneys were still occupied, each body covered with a grubby white sheet and strapped down with leather bindings.

'Why on earth are they strapped d-down? They're *dead*.'

He was met with silence and furtive looks. The taller man licked his lips.

'Ah... funny you should say that, sir. Uh. Um. It's odd but –'

'Sir, they are not dead like I ever seen,' blurted out the shorter man. 'There's no pulse, no breath, yet they move!'

A frightful sense of foreboding began to prick Titus' neck as the shorter man began to blubber. The taller man hushed him and turned to Titus with stricken eyes.

'I've burned many a dead body, good sir, but never one that cried out in agony. My conscience is uneasy on this matter, sir. I have burned fifteen of these lost souls and I'm loath to burn another.'

'Me neither, sir, me neither,' bleated the shorter man.

Titus looked askance from one to the other, then strode over to the nearest gurney. He pulled back the sheet to reveal a man of around twenty-five, apparently dead. He leaned forward to look more closely. He could feel no breath on his face, nothing to indicate life of any kind. Suddenly the corpse's eyes flickered open and turned toward him with an expression of abject terror and sorrow.

'Help me please, I beseech you. Help me!' it pleaded.

Titus took a step backwards, then cried out in horror.

The young man had been reanimated.

***We hope you enjoyed this Sampler.***

***You can BUY the Printed Book at Lulu :***

***<http://www.lulu.com/commerce/index.php?fBuyContent=24764257>***

***& the Ebook at Smashwords :***

***<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/941915>***

***The Ebook is also available at iBooks & Kobo***