

ABBERLINE PT1

Abberline found it difficult to look at Mary Kelly. The scene was a kind of pornography beyond or beneath comprehension that tainted the onlooker. He found himself looking at the faces of the other men in the room, searching for some sign of anxiety; but seeing none, Abberline slid his hands behind his back and simply stared at the floor, mimicking the calmness around him. It was a long time since that had happened, since he was confronted with his first murder victim, in fact. The rats had been at that gentleman's face as he lay on the river bank, and the eyes stared empty and lidless just as Kelly's did; but the river had washed the blood from the many knife wounds, and they were spared the sensory assault of this shambles. The uniformed sergeant stood by the door with its spring latch and considered the little room without any show of emotion on his bewiskered face, then turned and frowned at the sounds of rowdiness outside drifting through the shattered pane of glass in the window. The shattered pane lay a small distance from the latch on the door; a long arm might snake through. Who in the dead woman's small world might be aware of this unfortunate fact? Mary Kelly undoubtedly knew a great many men of short acquaintance he thought, and gaining entry into her home may not have been such a challenge. Abberline turned and faced the horror once more; the dapper Dr Bond seemed coldly absorbed as he stood by the ratty little bed and did not speak. The pale fingers of the victim's hand were touching Bond's trouser leg, as if frozen in the act of gaining the Doctor's attention to something, or perhaps she was pointing at something. Abberline followed the still finger to the fireplace. What looked like the burned and blackened remains of clothing lay in the grate. Something moved above him; something small, probably a cat, had jumped to the floor and padded across the floor, disturbed by all the commotion perhaps. But the thin, ill fitting floor boards could not conceal even this tiny presence. This was something new. Abberline had never seen such bestiality; it was an image conjured by fevered medieval minds, a maid flayed by a werewolf. But this creature had hid itself in a fair human skin, passed through a crowded land aroused by fear and alive with watching eyes and accusing voices hoarse and shrill, and into a wary woman's home. He had worked even as a lodger slumbered a matter of nine feet above them, then he had calmly burned the bloodied rags he had used to clean his hands and perhaps the blood drops from his shoes. He felt anxiety creeping upon him, Possibilities that lay outside his own experience enveloping like the fog; the world he thought he knew so well had conjured a thing beyond his reckoning. Abberline slipped passed the broken door, and Just as soon as he had stepped onto the greasy cobbles, he was accosted. Perhaps it was the man's expensive clothes and his confident air that had intimidated his inexperienced officers into letting him pass. A gold watch chain hung from the breast pocket of his fine blue serge suit, and a gold pin pierced the claret coloured silk tie. The man drew himself close to the Inspector; close enough for Abberline to smell stale sweat and something sickly sweet upon him.

'Inspector, any details for my readers?' said the man, giving Abberline his chummy smile with row of blackening teeth.

Abberline placed his hand upon the man's shoulder and walked him back towards the crowd.

'The coroner's report will be published with all haste.'

The man looked back over his shoulder, paying no attention to Abberline.