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Europe at Midnight

Written by Dave Hutchinson

Published by Solaris

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For you abide, a singing rib within
my dreaming side, you always stay

– Postscript: For Gweno
Alun Lewis

PART ONE

EXILES

AFTER THE FALL

1.

On chill misty mornings, I liked to walk down to the river and fish for a while. I never caught anything, but that didn't matter, particularly. It was relaxing just to stand on the bank and cast and watch the bright orange tip of my float drift downstream. Arblaster, my Residence's Porter, provided me with sandwiches and a Thermos, and I could quite happily stay there all day. Sometimes I could almost forget about the other things I should have been doing.

One day the hook snagged on something huge and sluggish. I fought it up from the bed of the river, thinking about dead logs and old bicycles. There was said to be a huge pike on this stretch of the river, almost a century old and well over six feet long, but this wasn't him. What bobbed to the surface instead was one of the Escaped, bloated up with rot, its thick coat stretched tight across the shoulders and punctured by six ragged holes.

I had that part of the river dragged, and four more bodies came to the surface, all of them similarly swollen, all of them similarly holed.

"There's supposed to be some big old fucking pike around here somewhere," John Holden told me as we watched his team casting the drag into the river again.

I nodded. "I heard that."

"I bet we scared that old sod away today."

"If he's got any sense he's gone somewhere else."

I heard his waders make a sucking sound in the mud below the riverbank. "There's fuck all to eat around here, that's true enough. I don't know why you bother fishing here."

"It helps me think."

John sucked on his pipe and watched his team scrambling around on their flatboat. The drag, mounted at the stern, consisted of a steam-driven winch from which dangled a long chain. At the end of the chain was an old brass bedstead with huge blunt hooks brazed to it. John and I had been standing here on the bank watching the operation for three hours, and in that time two of his students had fallen into the river and one of them had had to be taken off duty because the things that came up on the drag kept making him sick.

"Silly sods," John said, shaking his head, and I didn't know if he meant the students or the bodies we were bringing up out of the weeds.

"They might have made it," I said, deciding to be charitable towards the boys and girls on the boat. "It was always worth a try."

John shook his head. He took his pipe out of his mouth and gestured with it across the river. "Even the kiddies knew not to try a blitz here."

A long time ago, someone had dubbed this part of the river Runway Four, a virtual highway of failed escape attempts even before I was born. The river was broad and slow here, easily swimmable. The meadows on the other side, prettily hidden beneath drifting horizontal panes of mist, were full of boobytraps that we still hadn't got around to clearing. Thirty or forty miles beyond them was the Abbotsbury Forest, of which there may or may not have been maps somewhere in the Apocrypha, and which was similarly boobytrapped. And beyond them were the Mountains. From my office in the Administration Building I could sometimes see, if the weather was right and the air was particularly still, snow on high peaks. Only a lunatic would have tried Runway Four. And the files I had inherited from my predecessor recorded that we had produced plenty of lunatics. More than seventy people had lost their lives here, or in the meadows, or in the forest, in the past two decades. Nobody had made it as far as the Mountains.

"I don't understand why they kept trying," I said.

John looked up at me. "What do you mean you don't understand?"

Well, exactly. I put in a request to the Apocrypha, and to my surprise within a month a slim extract file landed on my desk. Bound in a buff folder with a red Restricted stripe across one corner, it detailed the exploits of one 'Escape Group 9', who had decided to use the chaos of the Fall to cover their blitz.

It was a sad read. You had to take the Apocrypha with a pinch of salt, but if the file was even remotely accurate Escape Group 9 might have been our very last attempted escapees. If they had waited a few more weeks they might not have bothered, but I remembered those weeks and I couldn't blame them for trying.

I put the folder away, thinking it would make a sad little footnote to our collective History, but at the next Board meeting Chris Davenport said, "If this was Escape Group 9, what happened to the other eight?"

Everybody looked at me, and I responded by groaning and leaning forward until my forehead touched the tabletop.

"You're supposed to think about this kind of thing," Rossiter told me mildly.

"Yes," I said, sitting up and making a note. "Yes, I'm sorry."

"Because the other eight might have made it," Chris went on, not caring that he was further complicating my life, which was already complicated enough.

I made another note. "I'll have the river dragged again."

"I mean," said Chris, "why call yourself Escape Group 9 if there haven't already been eight of them?"

I looked around the table. Everyone was looking at me. "Why not?" I tried weakly.

Everyone started to talk at once, but Rossiter raised a hand for silence. When everyone had quieted down, he looked at me.

"All we've got is a reference," I said. "It's from an unattributed Residence History; we don't know where it came from and we don't have names."

Rossiter caught on to what I was talking about, and he said, "No."

I put down my pencil and clasped my hands on the table in front

of me. "I can't spare anyone, Richard, and I can't do it myself. I'm busy."

"We're all *busy*," he told me. "I've a stack of memos from Harry Pool wanting people to go out and deal with the flu thing on the South Side."

"I'll do it when I have time," I promised.

"This is the sort of loose end that causes all kinds of trouble," he said, looking at me over the top of his spectacles.

"Yes, sir."

"And stop calling me 'sir.'"

I DIDN'T HAVE time to worry about Escape Group 9. There was always too much to do, and every time I made anything more than tangential contact with my in-tray it seemed that there was more work waiting for me. I put in another request for the Apocrypha to be checked for anything and everything that might give us a clue to the names of EG9's personnel, but nothing came up. A month or so after my ill-fated fishing expedition, it started to look as if EG9's security had been better than most. Which made it all the more a shame that they hadn't managed a home run.

It was around that time that I went back to the river. The first morning, watching the float bob gently on the surface, a rhythmic splash-splash from upstream announced the appearance of a young woman single-mindedly paddling a canoe. I sat where I was and the canoe shot past me and ran my float down.

The canoe splashed away downstream and out of sight round a curve in the river, and I was left to reel in. At the end of the line was nothing but an end of line, curling like a pubic hair. Hook, float, shot and about a foot of leader had been torn clean off.

While I was packing to go, the splash-splash came back. She paddled in to the bank and grabbed at a protruding root to stop herself floating away.

"Hey."

"Hey what," I said.

She gave a little jerk of the chin towards my fishing gear. "Catch anything?"

"Not a thing, no."

She looked about her, at the river, at the bushes along the banks. "Ever catch anything?"

"Not a thing, no."

She wrinkled her nose at me in a fashion I found rather attractive. "Not much of a fisherman, are you."

I did up the buckles of my fishing bag and slung it over my shoulder. "There is a school of thought," I told her, picking up my fishing rod, "which teaches that fish are actually more intelligent than people, but, having only short-term memories, keep forgetting how bright they are. The task of the angler is, therefore, to judge when the fish are at their stupidest and most easily caught."

I'll give her her due; she thought about it. "But that's bollocks!" she said.

"There are also no fish in this part of the river. It helps me to think," I added, in case she thought I was crazy. "Where were you going?"

"I'm looking for a job."

"What do you do?"

"I teach Literature. Is there a post here?"

I laid my rod aside. "What's your name?"

"Araminta Delahunty. What's yours?"

"Rupert of Hentzau." I'd been reading too much Anthony Hope in the recent past. I reached a hand down to help her from the canoe. "I'm sure we can find some space for you somewhere."

I LEARNED TO regret my choice of introduction. She cracked seemingly inexhaustible jokes about *The Prisoner Of Zenda*. She refused to use my real name, preferring to call me 'Rupe' instead. She taught with a passion and ferocity which unnerved and entranced her students by turns. She wouldn't sleep with me, but persisted in wandering naked about my rooms, and saw nothing out of the ordinary in coming into the bathroom and engaging me in conversation while I was on the toilet.

She said she had canoed almost a hundred miles from School 902, on the East Side, and she had something of the long vowels of the

Eastern accent in her voice. She was always full of questions. She wanted to know how the Fall had taken place on this part of the Campus, what last Winter had been like, how the Residence records were organised. She had a terrible sense of direction – "The only way I got out of that fucking place was on the river, Rupe," she told me one day. "You can't get lost on a river." – and gathered maps in bewildering numbers. "Just getting my bearings," she called it.

From the East, she brought four changes of clothing and a locked metal briefcase. She read voraciously, putting in four and five hours in the Library after a full day of classes. She meditated in the mornings, and in the evenings she practised a form of dance called something like 'capybara,' which she claimed was also a species of unarmed combat.

Meanwhile, the small sad mystery of Escape Group 9 was beginning to eat up an appreciable amount of my time. The fact that we still didn't know the identities of the four bodies brought up from the river was an irritation, true, but the Fall had left us with hundreds of unidentified and often unidentifiable corpses, and I felt that I could live, if unwillingly, with the idea of four more. There has to come a point where you stop obsessing about the dead.

"THEY MADE THEIR run four days before the Fall," I told the Board.

"Poor buggers," said someone.

Rossiter looked at me for a few moments. "And?"

I checked my notes and shrugged. "And."

"That's it? After two months?"

"It's all I could get out of the Apocrypha," I told him, and we engaged in a brief staring contest, which I lost.

Joe Richardson said, "If Escape Group 9 wasn't the first, and all the others were the same size, that's thirty-six people. Thirty-two of whom are unaccounted for."

"That's if they were all the same size," Ian Daniel put in, always eager to jump on a bandwagon. "Maybe we haven't found all the bodies from Group 9 yet."

"I had the river dragged again, and we didn't find any more bodies," I said. "Don't you lads read my reports?"

"Gentlemen," Rossiter warned.

"This is getting ridiculous," I told him. "I haven't got the time to spare for this. I'm still helping to prepare the case against the Arts Faculty."

"I'd judge this is pertinent to your work then," said Rossiter. "Runway Four was Arts Faculty territory."

I sighed. It wasn't going to go away, no matter how hard I tried. "All right, I'll look into it. But I'll need some help. The Librarians won't wear this one, you know what they're like. I'm understaffed, and what staff I do have are overstretched. I can't plough through the whole of the fucking Apocrypha on my own."

Rossiter nodded. "All right, you get your way. I'll see to it that you get a Research Assistant."

"*Several* Research Assistants." We stared at each other for several seconds, but I knew it was no use and finally I just took a file at random from the pile in front of me and waved it wearily at him to demonstrate my ever-increasing workload.

He nodded at the file. "This," he said, "is exactly the same as that."

I suddenly realised what I was waving. "It is not," I told him. I'd read the file that morning, and it was like nothing I had ever seen before.

He ran the tip of his tongue between his top lip and his teeth. "It's all atrocity," he said crisply. He started to gather up his notes. "We need all our available people to help with the reconstruction over on the East Side."

"The East Side can *wait*."

He looked at me and shook his head. He tut-tutted. "Shame on you. And you living with your bit of Eastern totty."

"She is not my totty," I said, and there was a ripple of laughter round the table, which was what Rossiter had wanted. The atmosphere in the regular meetings had become noticeably strained in recent weeks. Nobody looked as if they were getting enough sleep. The phrase *mass execution* had come up more than once in relation to the Old Board. We were all finding Democracy more difficult than we'd imagined.

Rossiter smiled. "I can't spare you half a dozen people," he said.

"Half a dozen wouldn't have been enough anyway," I muttered peevishly.

"You get *a* Research Assistant," he said firmly. "Now. Drugs."

I looked around the room. It was small and musty and smelled of cabbage, but from here the Old Board had ruled us for more than two hundred years. I tried to come here as little as possible, for any number of reasons. "Doesn't anyone *else* here do anything?"

"You wanted the exciting job," said Ian.

"I did not want the exciting job," I told him. "I *inherited* the exciting job. And it's not *that* fucking exciting."

Rossiter took off his spectacles and polished them on the hem of his cardigan. "Drugs," he said again.

"Some of the reconstruction gangs have been caught using pep pills," I said. "Harry Pool says they're not standard issue."

"Science City," Rossiter said, and there was an almost-comical moment when the other members of the Board tried to look busy with their notes in case they got drawn into the conversation and wound up having to do something about it.

"There's nothing to link them to the Science Faculty, but I'm going to see Callum about it," I told him.

"I wish you all the luck in the world with that," he said.

"If anyone has a better suggestion, I'm listening," I said, but no one did.

"I CAN'T REALLY see the problem," Araminta said, picking a rag of wilted lettuce from the middle of her ham salad roll and dropping it delicately into the ashtray in the middle of the table. The slice of ham underneath was almost transparent, the roll of very poor quality. "You told me yourself that the Faculty registers are full of missing people. Your thirty-six missing escapers will be in there somewhere."

I shook my head. "The registers aren't complete. People got into some of the Faculty offices during the Fall and made bonfires with any documentation they could get their hands on. We did our best to stop it, but we couldn't be everywhere." I took a sip of my beer and winced. Unlike food in general, the Administration pub's beer

was cheap and plentiful. It was also virtually undrinkable, and even if you could stomach it, it was impossible to get drunk on.

"So what now? You check this Apocrypha thing?"

I started to take another drink of beer, but thought better of it. "The problem with the Apocrypha is that every bit of official, semi-official and unofficial paper the Old Board ever collected is there, and nobody understands their filing system. All you can do is start at Filing Cabinet A and just read the stuff until you bump into what you're looking for. We were lucky to find that one mention of Escape Group 9."

"So it might take a while to track the rest of the operation down, right?"

"Right."

She shrugged and drank some beer; the appalling taste didn't seem to bother her.

I said, "Are things this bad over on the East Side? I haven't been there in years."

"Missing people, you mean?" Her eyes took on a dreamy, sad expression. "Everybody knows someone who disappeared."

"You too?"

She focused back on my face and she smiled a sad little smile. "Me too."

This wasn't the right time or place to ask who, so I said, "It's a bad do. We'll be years clearing up the mess they left."

"I think you take too much on yourself, Rupe, you know?"

"I get it given to me."

All of a sudden, she broke into a huge smile. "Oh, Rupe, sometimes I could just hug you, you're such a good soul."

I actually felt myself start to blush. "I've been called a lot of things..."

She laughed. "I'm sure." Then she suddenly turned serious. "Rupe, am I cramping your style?"

"What?" She was always using unfamiliar words and phrases and sentence constructions, East Side slang. Another few years of the Old Board and we would have been speaking different languages.

"Having me living with you," she said. She grinned slyly. "Some of my students say you're pretty popular with the girls."

"Oh." I suddenly caught up. "Oh, no. No." Shaking my head vigorously.

"I hear you have a reputation," she said, still grinning.

"A reputation, perhaps. But no time." I was starting to blush again. "I haven't had time for *that* for a long while."

She half-stood, bent forward across the table, and kissed me on the top of my head. "Bless you, Rupe, you're a sweet lad."

"Thank you," I said, hoping nobody I knew was in the pub.

"Anyway," she said, sitting down again. "Escape Group 9."

"Yes." I'd almost forgotten about them. I had also, at some point in the last couple of minutes while my attention was elsewhere, managed to drink all my beer without noticing, which was probably for the best. I looked at the bits of grey scum in the bottom of my glass. "Well, the Board are right."

She tipped her head to one side, a gesture I'd learned to interpret as Araminta-speak for a question which did not need to be asked. You just had to work out for yourself what the question was.

"All right. Look. Four people – room-mates perhaps – take it upon themselves to try a blitz. They have a plan. They keep it to themselves, keep security tight, trust each other and no one else. *Nine* groups, all working on the same plan, would need an organising committee, access to workshops, secure caches of food and clothing, a whole infrastructure aside and apart from the people who were going to make the actual escape attempts." I waved a hand in the air. "Another two or three dozen people who wouldn't be leaving. They should still be here, and we can't find them, or any mention of them. Good grief, they should be going around *boasting* about it."

"Maybe Groups 1 to 8 *were* the infrastructure," she suggested. "Maybe the whole organisation just took itself out in groups of four."

I'd thought of that already, but the idea still made me scowl. "You can't maintain security in a group that large. It's impossible. Four is the classic scenario."

"So you compartmentalise the operation, break it up into groups of four –"

I was shaking my head. "I can't convince myself that it would

work. It's just too damn big, Araminta. If the first eight Groups made it, that's thirty-two home runs. The biggest mass-blitz in the Campus's history. They must have had a blazing good gag to get that many people out." Especially if they used Runway Four; that wouldn't just have been a good gag, it would have been a miracle.

She tipped her head to the other side.

I sighed. "What Rossiter and the rest of the Board are so exercised about is what the first eight Escape Groups imply. They imply that somewhere out there is a runway capable of taking at least thirty-two people out of here. Do you understand?"

Araminta smiled.

"It's been four months since the Fall, and we're still clearing boobytraps and digging out rogue Security men who don't want to believe it's all over. We still haven't got anyone near the Far Fences, and we probably won't this year, not without losing people. And here we are with Escape Group 9 and their friends and their foolproof way of getting out."

"You could still find thirty-two bodies somewhere out there in those woods on the other side of the river," she pointed out.

I shook my head. Somehow, I knew. Thirty-two people had escaped from the Campus, and we needed to know how they had done it.

"The thing that really worries me," I said, "is that we can't be certain Group 9 was the last group."

THE JOB WAS not exciting, and I had not wanted it; I was bright enough to know that it would turn out to be a poison chalice. But I had wound up coordinating intelligence during the Fall, and when it was all over I had carried on doing that, but on a larger scale. Most of the Board members didn't have a very high opinion of my work. One of them had called me the worst Professor of Intelligence the Campus had ever had. I was good enough that his comment found its way back to me, though.

Part of the problem was that we just couldn't trust the few members of the Intelligence Faculty who were left alive, so I'd had to rebuild it from scratch, mostly with people who immediately

changed their minds when they discovered that intelligence work was less like a John Buchan novel and more like being a particularly nosy village postmaster.

I had also wound up in charge of Security, and again that had to be rebuilt from the ground up, purged root and branch of Old Board sympathisers. My one great success, although to be fair it only looked like a success to me, and then only on good days, was in setting up a force of Sergeants to enforce civil law.

The other part of the problem was the Old Board, and what they had done, and what we were going to do with them, and that was what really gave me the nightmares.

"WELL, YOU SHOULD have let me know you were coming," said Harry. "I'd have had a reception ready. Cheese and wine. A band. Stuff like that."

I dropped the file on one of the stainless steel dissecting tables. It made a slapping sound that echoed off the room's white-tiled walls. I'd waved the file at Rossiter earlier in the afternoon, without knowing which one I had taken from the pile in front of me on the table; it was three centimetres thick and bound in red with a blue Top Secret stripe and the designation *MG42* on the cover.

Harry leaned over to look at the file. "Oh," he said. He nodded. "Ah." He looked at me with an indescribably sad expression.

"I want you to tell me this is all just idle speculation," I said, tapping the folder with a fingertip.

"This is all just idle speculation," he said without missing a beat.

"Shit." I turned and leaned back against the table.

"What else would you like me to tell you?" he inquired.

"That you're wrong."

He shook his head. "No can do, old son. Sorry."

The Old Board had left us, like a coming-of-age present, fifty-seven mass graves for our delight and delectation. Thirty-two thousand bodies, in great pits scattered about the Campus. Some of them were very old, perhaps over a hundred years old. Most were very recent, the grass and weeds still not properly established on the earth covering them, traces of the Old Board trying to erase their past.

Mass Grave 42 was one of the smaller ones, in the grounds of the Hospital. It contained the complete bodies of fifty-one people and enough body parts to construct about thirty more. It had been so fresh that you could still see the spade-marks in the earth.

The Medical Faculty had been the last to fall. The Faculty Members had fought down to the last man. The last few survivors had barricaded themselves into the Hospital and then dynamited the building around themselves. The ruins had burned for days. When MG42 was found, I had thought it might contain the bodies of prisoners tortured at the Hospital. That would have been bad enough. But I was wrong. It was worse.

Harry ran a hand through his thinning hair. "It's just so sad," he said, nodding at the folder. He put his hands in the pockets of his white coat and turned away. "There were always rumours, but I never believed them. Which shows you how wrong a chap can be."

The wall at the far end of the room was entirely composed of large metal squares. Each one had a chunky chrome pull-handle. Harry chose one at random and pulled it, swinging the door open. He reached inside and pulled the tray out on its runners. On the tray was a long cloth-covered object. Harry turned the cloth back; underneath was the naked body of a young woman with a shaved head. There were peculiar meaty-lipped slits down her sides, from just under the armpits to just above the hips. Her face was a mass of torn meat, and her body was puffed up and discoloured by decay and silvered with frost.

I leafed through the file. "Gills."

"Female, approximately twenty-five years of age," Harry said. "Hair shaved, hazel eyes. Height five feet six inches, weight eight stone seven ounces." I glanced down at the file. He was quoting the autopsy report from memory. I wondered what his nightmares must be like. "Structures on either side of her body which on dissection proved to be rudimentary gills, surgically implanted roughly eighteen months before her death." He looked at the girl's ruined face for a moment longer, then covered her again. "Cause of death, a single pistol shot to the back of the head." He pushed the tray back into the fridge, closed the door, and turned to look at me. "Her lungs were full of fluid, but there were none of the usual post-

mortem signs of drowning; they must have had her breathing water for months."

"That's not possible," I said.

"If you thought that, you wouldn't be here," he said. He went over to one of the benches against the far wall of the room and started to move some glassware about.

I leafed through the file again. "Richard refuses to believe this."

"Well, I don't blame him." Harry turned to face me. In his hands were two beakers with half an inch or so of pale amber liquid in them. "Drink?"

I nodded, and he came over and handed me one of the beakers. I sipped at the liquid. It made me cough. "What on earth is this?"

"I'm not supposed to tell anybody."

I put the beaker down on the table, next to the MG42 folder. "Harry, where did you get this stuff?"

"Somebody out in Science City makes it."

The day was just going from bad to worse; every time I talked to someone my problems multiplied. On the other hand, the whisky wasn't half bad.

Harry sipped his drink. "There was a chap with wings, did you read about that?" I nodded, and he shook his head at the thought of it. "Never seen anything like it. I can't believe he could ever have got off the ground, but you should see him. Breastbone like the keel of a boat to anchor the flight muscles. Pectorals like steel cables. And it wasn't surgical implantation, either, like that poor girl. He was *born* that way. His bones were hollow. How did they *do* that?" He shook his head again. "There were others..." He shrugged. "I can't even begin to guess what they were trying to do with them. I've got Anna Glasgow doing a priority search for the Faculty's notes."

"I wouldn't mind having some of that priority search time for my own stuff, Harry."

"This is really important," he told me. "We need those notes. I don't know what the Medical Faculty thought it was up to, but if these poor boys and girls are anything to judge by, it was something really fundamental."

"Something that materially advances our situation?"

He looked at me. "I don't blame you for being bitter," he said.

"But there's more to life than politics."

"You might mention that to the Board."

He snorted. "I've been thinking of using it as a letterhead. Refill?"

"I haven't finished this one yet."

"Ah." He went back to the workbench and poured himself another drink from a two-litre specimen jar.

"I didn't put it in my report," he said, coming back to the table, "but the way I see it is that they were trying to destroy the evidence. The bodies on the top layer had been doused with acid, but the ones on the bottom were more or less undamaged. You remember how the Hospital chimney was pouring smoke during the Fall? I reckon a lot of bodies were just piled into the incinerator, and when they overran its capacity they had to dig this big grave. Christ only knows what went up in smoke." He looked at me. "Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"You look a bit pale."

"It's the smell."

"Yes, well, we keep losing power, and the freezers... well." He gave a nervous little laugh. "I'd tell you that you stop noticing the smell after a while, but you don't."

"I'll try and get someone to take care of it."

He took another drink. "It's good of you, but I know you have too much to do already."

"I'll try to sort something out. Who else knows about this?"

"The autopsies? Just me and the boys and girls."

'The boys and girls' were five medical students who had volunteered to help Harry. They had all been carefully vetted, but they still existed under an almost-tangible stigma, and they lived in a fortified Residence with armed guards. The Medical Faculty had had an appalling and well-deserved reputation and more enemies than anyone could count.

"They wouldn't have told anyone else, would they?" I asked.

"I told them not to say anything."

"And you trust them."

Harry drained his beaker. "No, I don't. But they all think they're living under a stay of execution, so I think they'll probably do whatever I tell them. What are you so worried about?"

I picked up the MG42 folder and tucked it under my arm. "If this gets out, there'll be a pogrom. We'll have members of the Old Board dragged out of custody and hanged from lamp standards."

He put the beaker down on the dissection table. "That's what's going to happen anyway, isn't it?"

I almost started to tell him that it was important to have everything done legally. A fair trial, witnesses for prosecution and defence, the accused having their day in court. But I knew he didn't want to hear about that. Behind his spectacles, Harry's eyes were bloodshot, and his face was grey with exhaustion. He was doing a job nobody else had wanted to do, and the New Board had worked him almost to death at it.

"People are starting to get ill," he told me. "No one's eating properly. *You're* not; I can tell just by looking at you. There's a flu outbreak down by 223."

"Richard mentioned it."

"Yes, well *Richard* won't give me staff to go there and try to do something about it. There's real malnutrition down there; people are going to die."

"I'll have to investigate this, you realise," I said, nodding at my beaker.

"I think, compared to some of the things I've seen in this room, that this is pretty small beer," he said. "Excuse the pun."

"We can't afford to be sloppy," I told him.

He gave a forced little smile. "Well, *that* sounds familiar."

If anyone else had compared me to the Old Board like that, I would have thumped them, or at the very least favoured them with some very harsh language. But of all of us, Harry had been brought face to face in the most basic way with the madness the Old Board had embraced, and some of it defied rational explanation.

I said, "It's going to be all right, Harry."

He snorted. "It's never going to be *all right*."

"It's going to be all right," I said again. "You wait and see." He was right about one thing, though. The Old Board were going to get a fair trial. And then we were going to hang every single one of them.

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