

5-2002

# Opium Illusion

Katrina S. Blasingame

Follow this and additional works at: [http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/uhp\\_theses](http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/uhp_theses)

---

## Recommended Citation

Blasingame, Katrina S., "Opium Illusion" (2002). *Honors Theses*. Paper 152.

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at OpenSIUC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of OpenSIUC. For more information, please contact [opensiuc@lib.siu.edu](mailto:opensiuc@lib.siu.edu).

# OPIUM ILLUSION

by

Katrina S. Blasingame

"I can't bleedin' believe it." Jibri swore as he adjusted the dial of the microfilm reader to move more rapidly through the reel. He snorted as a sharp 'shush' answered him, resounding through the painfully small and ill-lit library room. *Room? More like a glorified closet.* "Sorry," Jibri muttered insincerely to the other proverbial ghouls. *At least, that's what we would be mistaken for if anyone ever saw us in the light of day.*

Jibri turned his attention back to the blur of black and yellow-white before him. His eyes unfocused and his stomach did an odd little flip-flop. *Leave it me to get motion sick from looking through microfilm.* Jibri slowed the now spinning, blurred print so he could check the date at which he had arrived. *August 1...the first murder happened on August 31—which means that the first report won't be in 'til the next day. OK, now we're getting somewhere. September 1 is the day I need.* Jibri started the microfilm speeding by again trying to pay attention to how far it had gone while attempting not to lose the contents of his stomach.

Several moments later, he found the beginning of the September 1<sup>st</sup> paper and slowly began to scan through it. *Why aren't there any headlines on these things?* Jibri smirked to himself, laughing a bit under his breath. *One would think with a murder spree of such gory detail, there would have been at least one headline.* Images of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as it was portrayed in movies flipped through his head in a mosaic of top hats, canes, and newsies on the street corners holding up broadsheets and shouting "ANOTHER MURDER IN WHITECHAPEL! RIPPER STRIKES AGAIN! READ ALL ABOUT IT!" *Buy a paper, sir?* Jibri giggled harder. *Amazing the types of tangents, an attention span challenged product of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century pop culture can take.* He scrolled down a bit more seeing something that looked promising in the blurry black and yellow-white glow.

ANOTHER MURDER IN WHITECHAPEL

Appeared demurely in the middle of a page littered with borderlines and excruciatingly small type of the *London Times* page. *Ah, ha!* Jibri squinted trying to read the fine print.

---

“Another murder of the foulest kind was committed in the neighborhood of Whitechapel in the early hours of yesterday morning, but by whom and with what motive is at present a complete mystery. At a quarter to 4 o’clock Police-constable Neill, 97 J, when in Back’s-row, Whitechapel, came upon the body of a woman lying on a part of the footway, and on stooping to raise her up in the belief that she was drunk he discovered that her throat was cut almost from ear to ear. She she was dead but still warm....”

*Yada, yada...this is so not, what I was expecting to find.* Jibri bent in his chair to reach the satchel lying open on the floor at his feet. He moved books and papers out of the way as well as disks and the odd gum wrapper in an attempt to find his wallet in the chaos of his bag. Finally, after much swearing under his breath and nasty looks from the other students in the dark room, Jibri’s fingers closed on a rectangular object that felt as if it were made out of leather. *Bloody bugger, I’ve got you now.* He pulled the object out: his wallet. *It’s so very American. Oh, well.* It was black with red and orange flames attached to a long chain. *But that’s what happens when you’re American—American tastes and all—mostly dull. Mind though, the Brits and all have much more entertaining and expressive slang.* He pulled the copy card that he had bought just this morning out of his wallet, inserted it into the machine, and started the process of copying this page of the *London Times*. *Not as if this segment is in anyway what I was looking for. I wonder why the details are so—blasé.* The page came out of the machine, if it were possible, even more unreadable than what was projected on the screen. *Well, bugger a mongoose in a Dorchester alley. This is not helping in the least.*

Jibri put his head to the wall and gently began to bang it against it. *Head, wall. Lather, rinse, repeat. Head, wall. Why is this being so difficult? All I want to do is know if he was telling the truth. Is that so much to ask?* Evidently, it was because Jibri had spent the entire day in the Kilrush library looking up information on Jack the Ripper instead of out on the Inis Cathaigh a.k.a. Scattery Island taking photographs for his dissertation or on the Cliffs of Moher checking out O'Brien's Tower. *No, instead I'm in here searching for information that I will not be able to find on a killer no one can even agree upon. Why? Because I'm a sucker for a pretty face and conspiracy theories.* Jibri finished looking through the microfilm he had grabbed and printed out the pages with information on the Whitechapel murders and packed out his trash to get on with *his* research.

*But none of this is particularly useful. There is no information from the Inquests or from the doctors. What is going on?* Jibri thought as he scanned through the last article. *Think about this you stupid git. The London Times was more of an upper-class newspaper. What were the newspapers printed in the East End? That's a silly idea. Like the Kilrush library is going to have microfilm of little East End papers that probably haven't existed in a hundred years. Grrr...* Jibri was feeling the urge to reintroduce his head to the wall again. *Let's take a more basic idea. Go find a book on the Ripper murders. Surely, a book on the murders will have a bit more in the way of the information that you're looking for, right?* Somehow, Jibri didn't think so, but—*At least then I might have more of a specific direction to go in.* Jibri headed toward the computers so he could look up the call numbers.

\*\*\*\*\*

*I am beginning to hate libraries with a fiery passion.* Jibri thought as he sat on the floor in the middle of one of the stacks scanning the bottom row of books. *This is ridiculous. That book should be right there! How many other people in Kilrush are going to want to read a book about Jack the*

*Ripper?* Jibri sighed exasperatedly leaning his head back to rest on the shelf behind him.

*Evidently, there is at least one other. Bloody hell.*

He opened his eyes a little thinking maybe—just *maybe* the book would suddenly appear before him. Nothing. He leaned his head back again resisting the urge to beat it against the wood shelves. He scanned up the bookcase in front of him to the ceiling and stopped. *What's that?* On top of the ceiling height shelves was a bit of green sticking over the edge. Jibri stood; squinting to try to ascertain what exactly could be up on the shelf. *If it's something growing—I think that, I may have to return my "I Love Kilrush" card. That's just icky.* He couldn't tell what it was; he was just at too bad an angle.

Jibri grabbed the stack's stool and climbed up knowing that he was *still* going to be too short to reach it—whatever *it* was. He *reached*—his fingers were just about an inch away from the horrid green thing. *What am I doing anyway? I don't know what it is—do I really want to touch it?* Jibri shook his head. He grabbed a tall book off the shelf, stepped to the side of the stool furthest away from the mysterious green object, and, using the book, scooted it off the top of the bookcase. There was a loud *thud* that Jibri was vaguely surprised didn't incite some angry shushing noises from the older individuals sitting at the tables nearby. He looked at where it had fallen and was suddenly terribly happy no one had seen his moment of prissy derangement. *A book, it was a book?* Jibri had the urge to kick himself hard. *Go figure, a book on a bookshelf in a library, which is by definition a house for books. How embarrassing—I wonder what book it is.* Jibri jumped down and picked up the book. *Complete Jack the Ripper by Rumbelow—I don't know whether to be deeply disturbed or happy since it's the book I was looking for. This is just too of the strange.*

Jibri had opened the book to look at the table of contents when he felt something strange on the back of the book. *Okay, if this is a dead mouse or something equally nasty I want my*

*membership revoked. He turned it over carefully, bracing himself for a desiccated mouse corpse or a dried up roach carapace. But, it wasn't. It was a small folded piece of paper that looked as if it were made to be some sort of improvised envelope. Er? Jibri carefully disengaged it from the back of the green book and gingerly opened the package. Inside the paper lay a small eight-sided mirror. Why is there a feng shui mirror doing attached to a book on Jack the Ripper? This continues to become curiouser and curiouser. Oh, hell.*

Panic suddenly gripped Jibri's throat as he heard an odd sound like laughter and silver bells. A sound that he had heard only last night in the dark smoky common room of Crotty's Pub. *That is way too weird and so scarily coincidental that I'd rather not think about it. I think—I want to be absent now.* He quickly pocketed the mirror, grabbed his bag off the floor, and hurried toward the circulation desk to check out the book. *What the bleedin' hell is going on here?* He wondered feeling eyes trained on his back. Jibri was shaking as he handed the book and his library card to the cute little teenage girl across the counter, trying not to whip around and confront whatever was staring at him. *Like it's really there anyway, old man.* But something in him told him that it was there and it was very much real. He smiled hesitantly, trying not to show his paranoia, as he took the objects back from her and hurried out of the small building.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Jibri was sitting in his usual corner of Crotty's Pub. It was late—it always seemed to be late when he came back from Inis Cathaigh. That would have nothing to do with the fact that I constantly have to chase people out of the ruins so I can photograph the area properly. Cripes. He lifted his drink and took a deep draught. My friends would never believe this—drinking Batham's Bitter. Hoisting real ale at the pub with the boys. He looked around ironically. Not that there are really any other guys around at this time of night to drink with, not that they really would want to drink*

with the Yank anyway. *He smiled to himself and shuffled the stack of slick photographs in front of him looking more closely at some with a magnifying glass.* That's not true and you know it. If the people in this burg were anymore helpful and friendly, you'd die of sugar shock. They love having you here and throw their daughters at you—at least they did until they found out that it would never come to anything other than sighs on the girls parts. So, instead they throw their sons at you. When appropriate, of course. Funny, really.

*An odd blur caught his attention in one of the photos of the Poulhabrone he had taken the day before. The blur looked as if it were hiding behind one of the standing stones, looking directly into the camera.* Now that's odd. I suppose it could be a wisp of fog, it was awfully foggy that morning. *Jibri shook his head and set the picture into the "look at this closer later" pile.* Like when I can get back to Berkeley and get some time with that program that can enhance details so they don't just look like pixels.

*Something moved in Jibri's peripheral vision, making him jump a little in reaction. Er? He turned his head to look in the direction of the motion that had caught his attention and was surprised to see a lovely, delicate and terribly young looking androgynous individual gliding towards him from across the room. Oh my, oh yum. Would you like a cookie, dear? What are you? Male? Female? 'Cone-head. No cone-head. Didn't matter.'* Yes, that's good. *Quote Jimmy Buffet while admiring a beautiful specimen of something of an indeterminate sex. You've been staring at photographs way too long. The person in question pulled out the chair opposite Jibri and sat down with not so much as a 'By your leave.'* "Good evening," *Jibri said looking at the individual cautiously, shuffling his photographs in one pile and slipping them into his satchel.* He looks like a china doll. All pale skin, silvery blue eyes, and red lips. "Is there something that I can help you with?" *Upon closer inspection, Jibri was nearly positive that his intruder was male. He appeared to be no more*



than his early twenties and was dressed in modified Chinese dress, which lent to the confusion over his sex. The tunic he wore reached to mid-thigh, but was made of that blinding scarlet that only the Chinese had ever discovered how to make. The black pants he wore underneath were of a more modern cut: wide and flowing about his slender legs like so many kids' garments did now. Over his tunic, in total contrast to the entire oriental feel of his costume, he wore a massive grey cardigan-type sweater. His shoulder length hair was loose, but there was a hint of metal and a soft chime when the boy shook his head at Jibri's question. Since when does Kilrush have anybody of Chinese descent living here? Jibri wondered staring into eyes like pools of stars, his fingers itching to run through that hair that looked like black satin. And living would be the optional word in this instance wouldn't it?

"No," he spoke. Definitely a 'he,' that voice is something very few female throats could produce: all smooth and low, sounding like a pool of deep water looks. "I wanted only to meet you. I have seen you often on the Cliffs and at the monastery. I wanted to know you better." He stopped and smiled softly, inclining his head to the side as if he were hearing something that Jibri was not. "I am Jiang En-Rui. Most simply call me 'Rui.'"

Jibri found himself responding to that innocent smile with a smile of his own. "I'm Jibril MacKeogh. Everyone calls me Jibri." Rui looked at him oddly for a moment. "What? You're looking at me as if I had grown a fourth head."

The smile reappeared and a startling laugh found its way from between his lips. The laugh sounded like tiny silver bells or like the chimes that sounded when he moved his head. "Not a 'fourth head.' Just such a—peculiar combination."

*"What can I say? My parents had a strong whimsical streak." Jibri shrugged took a drink of his beer. "Gabriel was just too normal for them—hence, Jibril. It's the Islamic version of Gabriel." That same silver bell laugh floated towards Jibri across the table. "What's so funny?"*

*"It occurred to me that there is a family here with your surname—MacKeogh. Are they your parents?" Rui earnestness was endearing, but Jibri couldn't help the laugh that erupted from him.*

*"No, I'm from California. Those are my grandparents on my mum's side. Mum went to school in the States and married a guy from Sacramento." Rui cocked an eyebrow at that. "I did use to spend the summers with my grandparents here. It's actually why I'm here now. I was always drawn to Inis Cathaigh, O'Brien's Tower, the Poulabrone, and the Burrone." Jibri paused for breath and another sip of his beer. "They are the focus of my dissertation."*

*Rui's eyes widened at that. "What makes these places so fascinating that they have become the subject of such an important paper?"*

*Jibri smiled sheepishly, twisting the onyx ring on his right hand. "Well, I know this sounds crazy, but—I had an odd experience near the Burrone when I was about eleven." He shifted a little in his chair and contemplated going up to the bar to get another drink. It was late, no one was around. The bar was empty. Kellan had given him free range of the bar. As long as you pay your tab at some point. "Are you thirsty? I could get us another drink?" Jibri stood glass in hand. Rui gave him a quizzical look that stopped him in mid-step. "What?"*

*"You are very good at avoiding that of which you do not wish to speak." Rui dropped his eyes and worried at a thread on his sleeve. "Please. Tell me of your experience."*

*There was something so familiar in that voice. There was something so familiar in fact that Jibri sat back down without consciously choosing to do so. "Well, it's all kind of bleary." Jibri*

*stopped a moment to collect his thoughts and caught that oddly questioning look in Rui's eyes again.*

*"What? Bleary? I know it's supposed to be blurry, but it wasn't blurry. I can see the images fine in my head, but the edges of it are fuzzy—sort of like a dream. Hence—bleary. I think that it describes the feeling better."*

*Rui only nodded still gazing at him questioningly. "Well, I was spending the summer with my grandparents. I usually spent my summers in Kilrush. They live a short distance from the closest reaches of the Burron. One day, I decided to go check out the forest. I had wandered for a short time when I meet this woman in the woods. She looked to be in her mid-twenties: red hair, blue eyes, very Irish. She said her name was Mary. I thought she was one of the neighbor's daughters home from University. She told me to follow her, that I must be famished. She led me through the woods to a small cottage in a clearing. There were two men there. One, Mary said, was her husband. The other, she said, was a friend. Both of the other men looked as if they might have been Chinese, but I don't remember them. They are blurry. After tea, Mary gave me a present."*

*Jibri held up his right hand to show Rui the black band on his finger. "She told me about the magical properties of stones and that onyx was a protection stone. Mary told me never to take this ring off—that it would protect me and keep me safe. She walked with me back to the edge of the Burron and left me to find my way back to my grandparents. I thought I had only been gone for a few hours and that I was going to be late for dinner. I didn't want Nana to be angry, so I hurried home. When I got there, I was told that I had been missing for three days."*

*Jibri stopped, twining the ring about on his finger. The looks on their faces when he had told them that he thought he had only been gone a short time—I never saw them so distraught. And, when I showed them the ring that Mary had given me—they seemed relieved. They said that the ring meant that nothing was going to come steal me away in the night. Jibri chuckled to himself.*

There were so afraid that I was a change-child. I wonder if Mary and her friends were ghosts, the *sidhe*, or what? Well, hopefully, I will find some sort of evidence—or else my dissertation is going to make one very large sucking noise.

*"For the rest of the summer, at the monastery, the Tower, the Poulnabrone, the Burron—if I was near any of these places. I would see Mary again. Watching me. She never came close, but occasionally she would have someone—or something—with her. I could never tell who or what it was." Jibri stopped and took a deep breath. "That's why I'm here. And I just realized that I have babbled this entire time about something so bizarre that you probably a.) don't believe me or b.) I have frightened you and you would like to be absent now." Jibri smiled reassuringly. "I do apologize if I have frightened you or made you think that you need to capture me with a net and send me to the closest sanitarium."*

*Rui shook his head a bit, eyes large in the darkness. "No apology needed. I ramble often times myself."*

*"So we're the babble-twins of Kilrush, eh?"*

*Rui's startling laugh broke through the darkness again. "Indeed."*

*Jibri relaxed into his chair, forgetting that he had been planning on getting another drink. He felt so comfortable speaking with this man-child—Like you have room to talk. Are you so very ancient that someone only a few years younger makes you feel so very old? Jibri shook his head. And since when did I start considering myself old? Da always taught you that age means nothing in the grand scheme of the universe. 'If you don't grow up by the time you're fifty, then you don't have to.' Jibri looked closely at Rui. It must be his overall air of innocence that makes you feel old. You haven't been that innocent since you were too small to remember. "So," Jibri spoke trying to*

*drown the thoughts running through his alcohol dulled brain. "Why are you here? Are you a student? Is your family from here? Insert your favorite questions and answers here please."*

*Rui's eyes widened in what seemed to be panic to Jibri, it was as if Jibri had skirted the edges of some great secret. A secret Rui wanted to remain a secret. Then, the panic left his eyes and the tension that was held within his small frame melted away. He relaxed, put his hands in his pockets, and brought out a bright orange ball of tinfoil. Rui opened it and took a piece of chocolate from the silvery interior. Jibri caught the faint scent of orange. "I would like to share with you something of an esoteric and unbelievable nature, just as you have done." Rui stopped for a moment, placing the treat in his mouth and savoring it for a moment. Rui held out the package after a moment as if realizing that it was rude not to have offered to share sooner. Jibri only shook his head in response. "I wish to tell you of the origin of one of your great mysteries." He stopped again, this time seeming to long for the drama of suspense. After a moment, he continued. "It is the origin of one Jack the Ripper."*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Jibri dropped his bag to the ground, joining it as his knees gave way. The grass felt so soft. The breeze coming off the Estuary so cool... *Where am I again?* Jibri looked around and was vaguely surprised to find he was sitting at the ruins of the St. Senan's monastery. *This place keeps calling me. Ever since, I was small.* There was something wrong though—it was so quiet. *Where is everyone?* For the first time since Jibri had been in Kilrush and coming out to Inis Cathaigh it had been teeming with people—tourists, but now... *There isn't a soul about and it seems as if this place is more haunted than usual.* Jibri shook his head. *It's just the end of the tourist season. School has started. Vacations are over. That's why it seems so deserted, because it is.**

*How could that young man last night have been in town and I not have known about it? Jibri* picked himself up off the ground and brushed himself off. He removed his camera and tripod from his pack and began the task of setting up the camera to take pictures he wanted for his dissertation. *He isn't local, but no one has said anything about anyone else being here from out of town except me—and I'm not exactly an out-of-towner. Nana would have said something, if no one else had. She definitely would have told me about someone as attractive as Rui.* Jibri smiled ruefully to himself, checking that there was a fresh role of film in the camera's chamber. *She probably would have been setting up a date between us and then started to plan for a handfasting near Samhain in case things went well.* Jibri set the camera timer to take a picture every five minutes. He leaned his back against one of the less crumbly circle-cross gravestones and slid down its face to sit cross-legged at its base. He leaned his head against the cool stone and shivered as the cold from the ground seeped through his clothing, his mind returning to what Rui had said the night before. *The origin of Jack the Ripper... and I thought that I had some odd thoughts in my head.* Jibri closed his eyes listening to the faint hum and click as the timer counted down the minutes and seconds. It lulled him, relaxed him, and soon Jibri was dozing in the last rays of the early Fall sunset.

\*\*\*\*\*

*He wandered down the dark, meandering alley, stepping over refuse and the odd body. Where the bodies were living or dead, he did not stop to discover. He was intent on his destination and would not be deterred. Even though, it is wrong. It is depraved. It makes me less than a human being. But it helps so much, helps so in discovery, in thought, in conclusion...He came nearer to his destination. A plain worn door along a shabby wall, the establishment's shingle hung down, Chinese lettering confusing the unwary. Near the bottom in very small, cramped script, the legend "Opium*

*Illusion" could be read. Not that most of the people coming here can read anyway, but it is awfully nice of them to have the name here for those that can.*

*He knocked the proper rhythm on the door and was rewarded by it opening slowly. A tiny Chinese man stood there, age having turned his face into a mass of wrinkles. "Good evening, Abberline. Is this business or a pleasure jaunt?" The man asked in accentless English. Now, if only our own citizens could speak this well.*

*"Pleasure, Rui, merely pleasure," he said as he stepped over the threshold. Something made the skin on the back of his neck crawl, like something was there that should not have been—something that was not entirely sane. You're being ridiculous. There is nothing here but other lost souls that resemble you. He followed the old man back to his accustomed bench and received the packet of drugs from him thankfully. He filled his pipe and lit its contents, inhaling deeply.*

*He was held fast within the arms of the drug when he saw something odd wandering about in the den. At first, he thought that it was just a hallucination. Who didn't hallucinate? But—it didn't seem right somehow...It was a young oriental of indeterminate sex. Maybe it's Rui's grandchild or something. He was just about to dismiss the child when he noticed that the child seemed to float through the air—quite literally. His feet were inches above the worn wooden surface. And the youth's clothes, icy blue silk tunic and black pants, looked as if they were from another era. This has surely got to be a hallucination. But the child was approaching him, seemingly unaware that every move that he made was being watched. The child leant near to him, his eyes reflecting icy blue then melting into gold and red, his breath smelling of wild flowers, his hair smelling of the forest. "Pay me no mind." The child, no—boy, said in a sweet voice with a slight affectation. "I will not harm you." The boy leaned closer, his lips touching his throat. There was a sharp sting*

*accompanied by silver bell laughter, and then oblivion took him away from the world of the conscious for a time...*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Whirl, click.* Jibri woke with a start. He listened for the hum of the timer and realized that he couldn't hear it. He couldn't see his camera or tripod either. The night covered him. He was alone. *I need to get back to the mainland.* Was Jibri's only panicked thought. He stood slowly, feeling every stretch of cold muscle, every complaint of swollen joint. *Ah, you are getting crotchety, old man. Developing rheumatoid arthritis from a few hours on the ground. Ta.* He stumbled his way to his gear and packed it up more by feel than by sight. The wind blew off the Estuary—brittle and cold. The wind carried a sound with it, a sound that seemed to continue to follow him whether he was awake or asleep—the sound of bell-like laughter. Jibri strained his eyes to see into the shadows and dark that surrounded him in the cemetery, his heart beating wildly. Near where the old oratory was, he saw bright eyes the color of molten rock reflecting back the moon's light to him. Eyes which never left him, following him as he scrambled for the tiny canoe that he had left on shore, drawing nearer and nearer 'til they seemed almost upon him, then disappearing as they came to the water's edge.

*'I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone there will be nothing. Only I will remain.'*

Jibri looked back over the peak of the canoe's hull at where the eyes had disappeared repeating the mantra against fear to himself—using its words to keep his feet and then his arms moving 'til he was clear of the shore. *What the hell was that?* Jibri shivered as he rowed back



towards land, keeping his eyes trained on where the eyes had been, expecting at any moment to see them reappear on shore. *Or to float over the water at me...I know those eyes. They were the same as that thing's eyes in my dream.* Jibri forced himself to take a deep breath and to row in a more controlled manner rather than haphazardly. *What was that dream?*

\*\*\*\*\*

*He held the handkerchief over his mouth and nose, trying valiantly not to lose what little food, he had managed to get down this morning. What is that smell? He looked down at the corpse that lay on the ground. The blood pooled beneath it, soaking into the tattered soiled cloth of worn skirts. He watched as the flies gathered around the blood and covered the face of the once-woman. She hasn't been dead that long. He thought wrapping his uniform coat tighter about his body. It's unseasonably cool—why does she smell as if she has been rotting for a week in the heat. He bent down to examine more closely the angry red wound that stretched across her throat. The edges looked clean and neat—not ragged or dirty. Whatever did this, and I emphasize the what in this, used a clean weapon with a sharp edge. One of his minions scurried over, looking very green, face covered in a handkerchief much as his own was. The cub started to babble at a high rate of speed. He listened offhandedly, still thinking about the body in front of him.*

*"Daniel," he said bringing the young man's rambling to an abrupt stop. "Daniel, I know that this is upsetting, but please try and control yourself." He looked straight into the young man's eyes as he spoke and saw the recognition in his expression. You are not the only one disturbed by this murder. You are not the only one that realizes that this is peculiar, even for Whitechapel. You are not alone. It was oddly comforting to share this understanding with Daniel. It means that I am not alone either.*

*He bent down to examine the woman's hands, trying to see if there were any clues on this woman anywhere. What kind of monster would do this to anyone? He thought remembering the preliminary findings of the doctor who had been on scene just a few moments ago. To cut someone up—to carve them up like they were butchering an animal, it's absolutely inhuman. Something shiny caught his attention, drawing his eyes to the woman's wrist. Dangling from the hem of her sleeve were several strands of silk thread—ice blue silk: a color and fabric that was as rare in London as orchids. It was a color he had only ever seen once in his many years in the city. No. This cannot be possible. He was a hallucination. He wasn't real. He was part of the opium whispering in my head. No. His head began to spin and sing. The scent of rotting flesh was strong in his nostrils. The scarlet of blood on the white-brown of pavement and dirt was vivid before his eyes. And, there—there in the shadows, only half tangible was the smiling corpse-face of the boy from the 'Illusion. His mouth was full of long sharp fangs; his eyes were that sickly red-gold that looked like the dying sun or molten metal. He stared at the ghastly face as it continued to smile and only registered the sound of shrill screams after a time. I wish whoever was screaming would stop. They are going to send that thing fleeing into the dark again. As a hand shook his shoulder roughly, he realized that the screams were coming from his own throat...*

\*\*\*\*\*

*Ow. That didn't feel good. Jibri opened his eyes and found himself lying on the floor next to his bed. How the smeg did I get down here? He wondered as he sat up, feeling his sore muscles complain bitterly from rowing home last night and a dull throb in his shoulder where he must have connected with the floor when he fell out of bed. That dream—it was so real...Jibri's stomach chose that moment to let him know how real it had considered it, sending him running towards the privy.*

*Ick.* Jibri thought as he sat back down on his bed cautiously. *Between dark dreams and falling asleep on Inis Cathaigh in the damp, it's no wonder that I feel like a three day old corpse—* Jibri's stomach rolled again. *Good job, old son. Pick that visual and send you stomach into a tumult again. Blah.* His head pounded in time to his heart increasing Jibri's feeling of vertigo. He lay back down on the bed when it seemed like the floor was coming too close. *Maybe I should go back to sleep for awhile...Sleep good. Feathery goodness—also of the good.* He wriggled deeper into the feather bed and pulled the comforter over his chilled body. Jibri was just about ready to curl back into a ball and pretend the world did not exist when that luridly pale face appeared in his mind's eye again. *Maybe sleep isn't good. Work good. Play in the Dark Room, develop pictures—best plan I've had since I horked.* Jibri levered himself back into a sitting position, running his hands through his hair trying vainly to smooth it into some semblance of tame. He stood up shakily, grabbing up his Lab clothes from the clean laundry basket in the corner.

As Jibri started the shower water running, he set the threadbare jeans and thermal that acted as his Lab clothes on the sink's counter. He glanced up at himself in the mirror and was surprised by what he saw. Blond curls cascading around his ears, sharp blue eyes gazing guilelessly back at him, instead of the dark hair and eyes that he had expected. *When did I start thinking that I was dark haired and dark eyed?* Jibri knew that he was blond and blue—angelic his parents would have said, so when did he begin to see himself in his mind's eye as dark hair and dark eyed? *It must have started with the dreams. In the dreams, when I see my reflection, I see dark and dark. I just never thought of it before...*Jibri hurried out into his bedroom and grabbed up one of his smaller cameras that he knew still had a few pictures left in it. He set it up in front of the mirror so he was certain that he could take a picture of his reflection. *This is ridiculous. You realize that don't you? Do you actually think that you are going to be able to take a picture of your*

*image from the dreams? They are just part of your unconscious. It's a combination of the nonsense that Rui filled your head with and all the pop culture there is in reference to Jack the Ripper.* Jibri shook his head. *Oh, well. What's the worse that happens? I have a picture of myself in my knickers?* He started the camera taking the remaining pictures in quick succession.

When the camera had rewound, he took the camera back to its home among the rest of his equipment, removing the film and placing it in the pile with the rest of the film to be developed. He went back to the privy, stripped off the ruined remnants of yesterday's clothes, and stepped into the shower. Jibri leaned his head against the wall letting the near scorching water cascade down his bruised skin and aching muscles. The tension released from his body slowly and he was soon able to think about the dreams—*Why do you keep referring to them as dreams? Those aren't dreams. They're nightmares.* Correction. He was soon able to think about his recent nightmares and the odd conversation that he had had with Rui.

\*\*\*\*\*

*"The origin of Jack the Ripper?" Jibri asked looking at Rui speculatively. "But no one even knows who he was. How can you possibly know his origins?" The fine hairs on the back of Jibri's neck were standing on end. He was far too cold suddenly. His stomach did an odd little flip. Just the way they did when he was in the presence of the supernatural or something that couldn't possibly be true but none-the-less was true was said. Not good. This is a bad sign.*

*"I know because I—my ancestor was there." The hesitation, the tripping over the first person pronoun did not go unnoticed by Jibri, but he did not question the slip. If he was there, I really do not want to know. I do not want to know if he is a ghost, an immortal, something else. I DO NOT WANT TO KNOW. "His real name was Bei Yeyin-feng. He was a nature spirit—sometimes considered a god. There are many names for what he was...kami, sidhe, but shen was*

*what he was commonly called by the people of his homeland." Rui smiled sadly for a moment, making Jibri want to comfort him. Whatever the truth of this is—it hurts Rui to remember, to relate this. "Feng was a shen of the air. He lived as an intangible being, as a wisp of smoke or fog. He fed on the smoke of sacrifices or the smoke of incense. One day, he was floating through a town he had not been to in centuries. It had grown and was now a prosperous city, but there were people in this town that he did not recognize. They were not of his people. They called themselves 'English.' He pursued a few of them for a time and eventually followed one into a place that had the most intoxicating smoke..." Rui's eyes became distant and a look of longing came over his features. "He—fell asleep in the place. When he awoke, he was in an Opium Den in London." A single tear fell from Rui's eye. "He did not know where he was or what had happened. When he tried to live, to feed—he couldn't. The p-p-pollution made it impossible for him to exist as he was accustomed. The pollution infected everything that he tried to consume—everything except that same intoxicating smoke that had brought him to London. I-it drove him mad...he became a monster..."*

\*\*\*\*\*

Jibri stood in the Dark Room developing the most recent pictures he had taken, still mulling over all that had happened in the past few days. *This guy has got to be messing with me. This had got to be some sort of prank to make me feel like a total wanker for being here, working on my dissertation.* That didn't coincide with the evidence at hand though. *No one here knows the real center of my paper. They all think that I'm doing some sort of art and archaeological survey of the pre and post Viking invasion ruins in the area.* Jibri snorted. *Now, if they knew that I was studying the paranormal occurrences associated with Inis Cathaigh, O'Brien's Tower, the Poul nabrone, and the Burron—then, they might be trying to make me feel the fool. But no one knows except my dissertation advisor and he approved of it...This kept getting more and more confusing.*

This had to be some kind of mind game, yet everything in his mind screamed that it was true. It screamed that Rui was telling the truth—*And that would have nothing to do with his pretty face would it?* His face, Rui's face—it was the face of the monster in his nightmares. The same cheekbones, the same delicate wrists, the same innocence—Rui was the monster. *That's silly, you bloody moron. Rui can't possibly be the monster. He would have to be like a hundred and fifty years old.* Yet, Jibri remembered their conversation. Rui had said that Bei Yeyin-feng had already existed for centuries as it was. *But that would mean that Rui was Bei Yeyin-feng.* The image of the wrinkled little man at the 'Opium Illusion' swam before his eyes as he removed a picture from the set solution and hung it on the line to dry. *The proprietor was named Rui—oh, boy. Why would a monster take the name of the one that he might blame for bringing him to this place and subsequently turning him into a killing machine?*

Jibri sat down heavily on the bench. *My head suddenly really hurts.* His head once again throbbed to the beat of his heart and vertigo threatened to claim him. *Rui must be the monster in my nightmare.* Jibri massaged his temples, easing the pain in his head a bit. *So Rui's the monster in my nightmare. That does not mean that he is some sort of centuries old hungry ghost. I just inserted him into the dreamscape. Yeah, that's right. He's just a kid with a vivid imagination and the ability to make stupid gits believe what he says.* But something in Jibri was screaming at him that this was not the answer, this was not the truth...*And what would that truth be? Eh?*

\*\*\*\*\*

A short time later, Jibri sat cross-legged on his bed, a large disk-like object lying across his knees. A photograph lying on the bedspread next to him. *I shouldn't be doing this. I shouldn't be trying to access this. This is dangerous. I know it's dangerous.* The words kept flitting through his head, repeating like a mantra—like he was trying to talk himself out of the act which he was already

prepared to perform. Looking down at the picture, seeing frighteningly familiar black eyes and dark brown hair and uniform coat, Jibri mouth went dry and his throat closed. *But, I have to know.*

Jibri focused his eyes on the disk. It was obsidian, an obsidian mirror. *A scrying mirror.* It had been his Nana's to be completely truthful. She had given it to him years ago. She taught him how to use it, how to see the past or the potential future through its inky darkness. And, she had taught him of the consequences of its use—how the things that live within the Void where time is born and returns could trick you and take you into their realm. She taught him about the possibility of becoming lost in the visions of past or future, how tempting they could be. Especially, the visions of the future—they were the most tempting because you could see all possibilities and every detail of the possibility. *Are you certain that you need to know outweighs all the hazards?*

*Yes.* A part of Jibri that he wasn't certain that he had ever heard before hissed. *This is important. This is necessary. This will answer all the questions that you have ever had—about your memories, your experiences, your nightmares. Everything.* Jibri, decided on his path, gazed into the blackness, slowly calming his mind as his Nana had taught him. The exterior stillness brings inner stillness...

\*\*\*\*\*

*The woman moved before him in hurried steps. The prey knows when the hunter is near. Her foot caught every now and then on the uneven paving stones. Sometimes when she stepped over the curbs and gutters, she would trip on the tattered hem of her skirt. It was at least three inches too long for the woman's frame causing her clumsiness. He purposely chose the moment she was stepping over a drunk and unconscious body to click his heels on the stones.*

*The woman started, half turned, and saw him. Her eyes were large in her face. Her panic and fear were palatable, scenting the air deliciously. She picked up her skirts and tried to move*

*more quickly under their burdensome weight. But it is futile to run from me. You cannot run from Death. No matter whom you are or where you go, Death will find you. She will wait in the shadows bidding her time until you are least prepared and then she will have you in her embrace. He hastened his steps to match her pace, following her at the same distance as before, matching step for step.*

*She turned down a narrow thoroughfare, scraping her arm along the rough brick of the wall. She ran, evidently deciding that potential survival was worth the loss of dignity. He followed her, still matching her steps and pace. They emerged in an open paved court, buildings surrounding it on all side. She stopped near one of the walls, searching vainly for an escape or a weapon. He came near to her, cornering her by the use of her own fear. "I don' wanna die." She whispered into the damp, cold night. Her breath making little clouds of fog that seemed vaguely familiar to him. I miss fog. "Please, sir, don' kill me. I have nothin' wort stealin'. I'm a workin' girl, I am."*

*He felt his face stretch into a smile, felt the tips of his fangs prick his lips. He looked her in the eyes and could see the fear grow considerably at just the barest glimpse of what his illusion hid. He knew that she could see his bared fangs, his otherworldly eyes, the cast of his features. "Who says that I am here to steal any of your meager possessions?" She relaxed the tiniest of fractions and ceased to clutch her hands to the obviously hidden pockets in her skirts. "I am interested in something much more primal." Her fear had lessened some and she actually looked curious at his statement. "I'm interested in your life." Everything was blood...*

\*\*\*\*\*

Jibri fell back onto the bed gasping for air, still experiencing the sensations from the vision. The way the woman's flesh had cut like tissue paper. The way her blood had tasted as he had drunk it. *No. Not me, that creature.* The face he had so often seen in his nightmares and in real life in the



past few days loomed before him. *Rui. He was telling the truth. The murder was a preternatural creature. The monster is Rui.* Jibri's heart finally began to slow and his limbs felt languid from the strain of the vision. His stomach reminding him, once again, that it did not like all the gore he had been experiencing over the last few days. *Not that I've been that thrilled by it either.* Jibri set the obsidian disk on the bedside table to ensure that it was not damaged.

*I really think I do need that nap now.* Jibri thought as pulled the covers over his aching limbs. *I've been spending too much time with achy limbs and joints. As well as the grumpy stomach. Can this be over? Or at least can we forgo the physical discomfort?* Jibri shut his eyes with that thought and resolutely forgot everything that he had witnessed in the last few days and that the rest of the world even existed.

\*\*\*\*\*

*He watched as Rui finished packing a satchel of various herbs and charms and grabbed up a long sword. He turned to other man in the room whose back was to him as he finished creating a binding charm to ensure the creature's docility after capture. "Zhen," he said grabbing the slight man's shoulder when he had finished. "You have to make certain that you keep Feng away from Mary." The youth, looking like a very young version of Jaing En-rui, nodded his head.*

*"I will keep her here. Feng would not soil his home with such an act." Zhen's eyes became thoughtful. "Although, Mary said that someone was living with her in her boarding room. A girl she had brought with her here." His forehead wrinkled as he thought. "Her name was Sue, I think." Zhen's eyes widened in sudden panic. "If Feng is killing prostitutes that he has come into contact with here, then Sue will be in danger also. You have to go to Mary's room and warn her." Zhen scribbled something that looked like an address down on a scrap of paper and handed it to him. He turned to leave, but Zhen's hand on his forearm halted his departure. "Inspector Abberline, Feng*

*has already killed so many. Truly, it is not his fault. Save the girl. Stop him and put an end to his madness."*

*He left the 'Illusion with Rui in tow, limping heavily in the damp London cold. Rui looked so old and fragile, but had insisted on coming. Rui said that he would be unable to stop Feng "without the Inspector's help." When he had figured out that the creature that was killing those women was the same thing he had seen floating about in 'Illusion, he had gone to Rui to speak to him about it. Rui had looked concerned, having never seen the creature himself. For the next few nights, Rui and Zhen had searched for it in the building, leaving iron fillings in their wake to corner the creature. Rui had seen him and recognized him for what he was—a shen gone insane and transformed into a gaki—a hungry ghost. It all seemed like some sort of horrid fairytale to him, but after all that he had seen he believed Rui and Zhen. They had found the only woman left that they knew had been to the 'Illusion and who would be in danger. Mary. He looked at the address that Zhen had given him. 13 Miller Court. He turned and started them in that direction, slipping past the other officers without their notice. Odd that Zhen is so concerned for Mary, her being practically married to Joe and all. He looked back at Rui to make certain that the old man was still with him. Perhaps, Zhen is infatuated with Mary. She's certainly pretty enough. He shook his head, turning his thoughts back to the matter at hand.*

*They slipped up to the door of 13 Miller Court. No one had seen them. No one had heard them. Perfectly anonymous. He drew closer to the door and the broken window next to it. There was a thick scent in the air: coppery and salty and sweet all at the same moment—a scent that was disturbingly familiar... "It is the smell of fresh blood, Inspector." Rui spoke at his elbow startling him in the process. "We are too late. The woman is dead, but we still might be able to capture the gaki."*

*Rui pushed the door open on a scene that made a charnel house look heavenly. The fire was burning fiercely on the hearth—the fire a bright blue. The walls were red—covered in sticky blood. The body didn't even look like a body anymore. It looked like a stack of cast-offs from the butcher placed in special stacks for different purposes. The gorge rose in his throat at the scene and nearly escaped when he pulled his hand away from the wall by the door he had been leaning on and it was covered in the same sticky red as the majority of the room.*

*Rui was already throwing his bundles of herbs into the fire, chanting something in Chinese. The fire burned brighter and hotter, causing the room to become stifling. Whatever Rui had said or done, it got the creature's attention. It turned its molten eyes upon Rui and snarled. The blue firelight reflecting off its fangs, making them appear to glow. "What do you think that you can do to me, sorcerer? I am as much god as those that you worship. Do you think that you can bind a god?"*

*Rui spoke not a word to the creature in response, but resolutely finished his chant. He turned to the creature, sword in hand, every line of his face and body showing determination. "It is time for you to return to your world now, air shen. You are not a god. You are a child of the world as much as we. You are not a killer. You are a benefactor."*

*His tense muscles relaxed the tiniest bit. For a moment, he thought that Rui's words might be all that was required to calm the vampire and return it to its original form. He had been assured that his original form was that of a harmless air spirit. Then, it laughed. Its laugh belied its visage. Its laugh sounded like the tiny chimes that Rui and Zhen sometimes wore on their clothes. But that laugh was not pleasant. It was filled with malice.*

*The thing charged at Rui. Its hand reforming into a knife-like appendage. It slashed across the old man's throat. He ran towards Rui, catching him as he fell to the floor. Rui's glazing eyes*

*reflecting back the light, making them seem like pools of wet ink. "Finish," came a hiss of air from Rui's ruined throat. "Remember." Rui's hand came to rest on his hand. He grabbed the sword from Rui's failing grasp. He made his own charge towards the creature and struck it in the heart. As it collapsed to the floor, he forced its hands into the iron manacles that Rui had brought with him for the shen.*

*The fire still burned. He placed Rui's body in the fire, creating an impromptu pyre. "Goodbye, Rui. I will not forget." He turned from the fire to see the molten eyes of the monster trained on him cool into the icy blue he first remembered seeing. He gathered the ends of the manacles and drug the creature out into the night, closing the door behind them on the ghastly scene.*

*He snuck them back to the 'Illusion, barely missing one of the patrols at one point. He brought in the monster along with the now empty bag and sword of the deceased Rui. He locked the creature in a special room with no windows, all the seams sporting iron. He leaned against the door after he had closed it. Tomorrow, Zhen and Mary would take the creature to the Burrton. Hopefully, away from all the pollution of London, it might become the creature that Zhen and Rui had claimed it was. I will never see it though...*

\*\*\*\*\*

Jibri stumbled out of bed and headed down a path he had not gone down in more than a decade—a path that he amazingly could still follow even though it no longer existed for all intents and purposes. *Back down the rabbit hole, Alice.* He wound his way through trees and underbrush until he reached a small clearing he knew so well. "Mary! Zhen! Rui—Feng, whatever your true name is!" He shouted into the gathering gloom. "I'm here! I've found my way back to you! Please—appear!"

There was the sound of the underbrush all about the clearing rustling and moving, voices whispering to each other languages that didn't sound like they could be produced by a human throat. *Please, come to me. Surely, this journey has a meaning. Surely it means something. I am not mad. I know what I have seen and what I have felt. I am to be here. Please—collect me. I am your kin.* The whispering and rustling stopped. A chill wind picked up, whipping the trees branches around him. The leaves were leaving tiny welts on his face. Then—silence more deafening than the sound had been.

"We welcome you, brother." A lilting female voice said into the silence. Jibri turned to see Mary and Zhen standing near the edge of the clearing, only half tangible. Gentle fingertips touched Jibri's shoulder, startling him. Jibri turned to look at who had touched him. *Rui?* The youth smiled at him, his innocence overwhelming him again. *Not Rui, not truly. Rui, in honor of the alchemist.* "You are one of us." Mary spoke again, drawing Jibri's attention back to her. "Follow us. You must be famished."