

The Purple Poison –

Tabitha Sparkes ©

I pace in the library, my stomach churning as I replay the evenings events, sorrow engraved into my skin. It all happened so quick.

He collapsed and fell off the balcony, a drink in hand.

My papa ran over to my brother's corpse, tears raining down as blood pooled onto the driveway. Annabeth followed, her ballgown soaking up the blood as she knelt down beside Arthur, her late husband.

They would never reach November 21st 1887, their one year wedding anniversary.

As the commotion outside starts to die down, I peak my head around the door, making sure my papa has his back turned and no one is watching me. Seizing the opportunity, I slip out, walking along the wall until I can duck into the servants staircase, the stone steps different to the carpet laden ones that I walk upon every day. Stopping by the window, I watch like a hawk, as the newly-widowed Annabeth steps into her carriage. They don't leave instantly, the constable start talking into the carriage. Tearing my eyes from the window, I continue to head up the stairs, pushing open the door once I get two flights higher. Stepping out into the carpeted hallway, I head off in the direction of the bedrooms, Arthur's being my destination.

But there is only one thing I want from his room, one thing that I want to keep before she takes it all away. I know that Arthur would want me to have it. He read it to me so many times, and it was one of his favourites.

Stepping around all the creaky floorboards like they are land mines, I walk across the hallway of the manor house, careful to not arouse suspicion. Slowly I get to Arthur's room, twisting open the door knob with my gloved hands. I take one last glance out, making sure no one sees me, before entering his room, a chilling feeling tingling along my spine.

His room is dark, the curtains drawn blocking out any slither of moon light. I reach for the oil lamp, illuminating the room with a simple strike of the match. Creeping forward into the room, tears start to well in my eyes as memories start to choke me, the realisation he will never laugh or play with me again fuelling the dolefulness. My gloves get soaked with the tears as I brush them away, refocusing on my goal of getting the book.

Walking over to the bookcase, I scour the shelves, looking for the familiar cover. He was never the most organized person, but this book was his prized possession. He would never lose it. But after I scan it again and again, and it doesn't materialise, nausea pools into my stomach. An eerie feeling settles amongst the cobwebs, reaching their spidery arms towards me. Maybe he was reading it before he came downstairs?

I turn around, the oil lamp being my lighthouse as I look for where the book could be. The red spine binding catches my eye as if it was the pool of blood, laying there on the windowsill. I approach it slowly, not wanting for it to slip from my sight.

Horses hooves pound restlessly against the ground as carriages start to pull away, carrying the guests with them. Yet Annabeth's stays there, condolences probably piling up.

With a scowl on my face, I turn my attention back to the book. A Study in Scarlett. Somewhere Arthur has all of the newspaper stories, collected like trophies. But the book was the most important one, at least to me. Flipping over the cover, I read the message he had written on the first page;

*For Fliza
to keep you out of trouble*

A smile dawns on my face as I remember the first time he read it to me, how I wouldn't walk around the house alone. It turns into a grimace, as a pungent, bitter smell dances from the pages, wafting around the room. Why on earth would the book smell of that? I close the book, thinking of a way to get rid of the smell, when I notice a new vase of flowers Annabeth must have put there.

Wolfsbane.

My eyes widen as theories fly through my head, noticing her wedding ring hidden behind the pot. Grasping the book, I rush out of the room, with only one place fleeting in mind.

When Arthur first started reading Sherlock stories in the newspaper, he became obsessed with crime and wanted to become a private detective. Earlier this year, when the Whitechapel murders happened, he was sure

he could solve it, even sending in ideas to the constables. Because he was passionate, her repurposed the old nurse's room to be his office. But he also kept his experiments in there.

Pushing open the laboratory door, the oil lamp illuminates the room. Placing it down on the central table, I ferret at the piles of books for the one I want.

His book on poisons.

I pull it out the pile, ignoring the crash as books cascade to the floor, flicking through the pages looking for wolfsbane. I stop at the page with the pretty, purple, poisonous petals, their beauty almost seducing me.

Scanning through the page for information, my eyes land on one paragraph.

The smell is pungent, with a earthiness undertone. Small doses can cause death with symptoms such as dizziness, muscle weakness, nausea and chest pain.

Slamming the book shut, my chest squeezes tight as I tightly grasp both books, leaving the oil lamp perched on the desk. I burst out of the laboratory, running down the stairs with my skirt flowing out behind me, my curled hair losing pins.

“Wait!” I cry, stopping the constable just before he closes the door.

“What can I help you with?” He says, frustration twisting the meaning of his polite words.

“My brother.” I state, out of breath, holding out the books to him. “He was poisoned.”