

The Lazarus Curse (Part III)

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

- **Jules du Plessis** - French emigre.
- **Kerr Avon** - Scholar of the Occult
- **Captain Richard Blake** - Temporarily landed.
- **Daniel 'Brown'** - An old shipmate of Captain Blake.
- **Sir Henry Percy** - The Wizard Earl of Northumberland.
- **Lady Elizabeth Carey** - aka Prudence Skipworth
- **John Cavell** - ex-Master at Arms to Sir Henry Percy
- **Mary Lewes** - Of Selsey Manor

Introit.

A traveller came to town, or at least to Petworth. The olive complexion of a man whose family origins set him far to the south east of rural England. He was travelling to London upon business for his family and was intrigued to hear the gossip in the tavern. The chatter of the tables in the bar was that of a '*Blake; Richard Blake; Captain Richard Blake.*' The traveller was intrigued. Tales of kidnap attempts of the Lady Dorothy thwarted by the deft hand of Blake and his compatriots. Surely it was not be the same man ...?

A question to the gossipers and the Landlord soon revealed that the man named Blake was stying at the House barely a few hundred yards distant. A note was sent, an enquiry, a wait patiently made. Finally the tavern door opened and Richard Blake stepped in. It took but a moment to spy the man staring at him from a lone table, beer tankard half raised to his lips. The tankard dropped as he leapt to his feet, and Blake strode forward arm outstretched.

"Daniel!" Cried Blake

"Captain ... I mean Richard! So long! What chance guides us here!"

Another tankard was ordered and they sat, for they were old friends separated some years back after adventures of their own upon the high seas.

Captain Richard Blake you all know from tales already told upon this stage, but **Daniel Brown**, once crew for Blake as a reliable man for the voyages of the Kestrel in times past, and separated again as their paths diverged. Old shipmates, old friends, newly acquainted. Of their tall tales look to our other plays. Of this one it is enough to say they are well acquainted with a trust that comes from years before, and both are enjoyed to meet a reliable friend once again.

After beers are supped and Daniel Brown is introduced to Jules du Plessis and Kerr Avon they to the House, there for Daniel to meet Lord Henry Percy.

Act 1 Scene 1 - Common Thieves, Uncommon Introductions.

Introductions were made, and Lord Percy was comfortable that Blake vouched for Daniel Brown.

Thereafter he was to business. To everyone's surprise it was not immediately about the vial that resided within the tower upon his estate. No, there had been common thievery, albeit Lord Percy believed it to be by his Master at Arms, the despicable John Carrell, since he fled the scene (adventures passim). He guided them all to the library where a number of glass cabinets were shattered, and items were strewn about. He highlighted the missing item as a single locket that had been resting upon a velvet cloth (itself from Venice).

He explained further that it matched the locket he himself wore and enabled him to find his wife should the need ever arise, through the Magickal arts. However, she forswore to wear it while at the House having little fear that she might be in danger. Alas, he explained, should one of the Magical Arts obtain the locket, it would be possible that nefarious evil might be dealt upon her by one with knowledge. He needed some he trusted to pursue Carell to retrieve the locket before it fell into the wrong hands. He would have done it himself, but he was called to Court to attend The Queen most urgently and departed soon. While there was a sense of urgency, he had some respect now for Avon, du Plessis, Blake, et al.

He explained the mechanism and some working that he would make, such that the locket might move similarly to the magick Avon had previously used to track the white worms infesting the Bristol marshes that last month. A pendulum (the locket) and a representation of the ground for example a map, however crudely drawn, and thence its swings would give direction and even locality.

Blake was intrigued. A simple locket or two, to find others lest they go astray. Would Percy consider creating such for Blake and his love Emma in Bristol as some recompense for saving Lady Dorothy, and indeed this pursuit? Percy was surprised and explained it took many months to undertake such enchantment, but perhaps, yes, he would do so as appreciation for the fending off of the kidnappers and the traitor Carell.

Then to everyone's surprise a servant tapped upon the door and entered to whisper in his Lord's ear and pass a note. A lady waited without requesting his Lordship's attention upon a most urgent matter. To everyone's surprise, Percy insisted she be shown to their very room rather than another, for he was interested that they meet her for he clearly recognised the name.

Blake was most surprised to see the womanly traveller due upon the coach to London that morning that he had met briefly the previous day at the tavern, trying to ascertain to what lady the Catholic threat was made. He knew her as Prudence Skipworth.

Blake was all the more surprised when Lord Percy bowed, and she returned such a bow, and he addressed her as Lady Carey!

In a surprise to all Lady Elizabeth Carey announced she had been following Jack Welling, the Catholic man they had lately run into at the Tavern, and who had fled in confusion around the attempted abduction. Confusion and, presumably, guilt. Luckily, before our heroes had wandered into the Tavern she had already ascertained Welling was off to London to an address where he was to visit '*well connected friends*'. Lady Carey was intent on pursuit of Welling to identify his contacts

in Court presumably with Catholic sympathies. However, she could hardly pass up the opportunity to make her presence known to Lord Percy, after all it was his village. Similarly, once she had become aware that Blake and his colleagues were guests of Lord Percy and had thwarted a kidnap attempt the previous day she was all the more interested in meeting them.

After introductions, discussion, etc., she requested to borrow a few horses for herself and retinue (maid, and a couple of trusted gentlemen) upon which to ride to London in pursuit of Welling. Lord Percy was most happy to oblige, and with a polite few words to all, she departed.

After Lady Carey had departed, it was agreed by all to pursue Carell for he had but a few hours start, and was probably easy to track, especially with the paired locket lent by Lord Percy.

Act 2 Scene 1 - Pursuit.

No time to waste upon the trail lest it go cold, the four were away. With Blake surprisingly knowledgeable of the countryside, (more, he admitted, coastal countryside, but they'd make do) it was short work to spy the land and follow the tracks taking the best ground, cutting corners and curves in the road where able. They allowed a gentle jog upon the horses, the optimum speed to cover distance without tiring for no one expected a man fleeing his traitorous acts to take such action, so with every pace they gained upon him and his likely exhausted horse.

That, and the locket. They stopped every few miles for a few minutes to examine track and locket as it dangled above a compassed sketch map and then proceeded on, the locket swings showing they slowly closed upon its twin's location. The route took them mostly west and following the road, with some diversions to bypass villages and busy coaching taverns.

It was dusk when they passed a hunched old crone carrying a back load of sticks tied with rope, muttering and cursing to herself as the light faded. As they passed, she looked up and spat, not so much at them, but where they'd passed.

"They're hanging 'em on the hill - Alice, too. An' the child. <spit>".

At this, there was some reining in of horses and expressions of bewilderment from all but Kerr Avon. He waved all to silence and looked back the way they had come, but there was no old crone upon the road. But there was a hill, nearby, rising slightly against the pale sky. Avon gestured them forward slowly, at a slow walk, looking forward and back.

"Walk on," he hissed to his compatriots, for it was as if he sensed something.

Emerging from the twilight just yards on a crone, a bundle of sticks upon her back, she hobbled.

"Ho, Madam Crone,"

Avon called out tentatively as he pulled up his horse, but she spat as she passed him and snapped back.

"They're hanging 'em on the hill - Alice, too. An' the child!"

As she passed them she spat at the back legs of the horses, they all twisted in their saddles, but there was no crone to be seen.

Kerr Avon drew his hand across his mouth to taste blood. He realised he had gotten his lip so focused upon the crone. He looked up at Richard Blake. “

Twice.” Then looked about and motioned all on slow now.

Again an Old Crone appeared ahead in the gloom, walking on at the dusty roadside, bowed by the large bundle of sticks and wood upon her back, clothed grey on brown, unseeing and bowed under her load until she passed the four on horseback. Her headscarf hood moved a little as she wheezed by. She spat upon the ground off the road before her words cast barely in the dimming light.

“Ey’re ‘angen ‘em on th’ hill - Alice, an’ too. An’ the chile’ ...!”

And there was a throaty rasp and she spat as she passed.

“Oh Crone,” cried Kerr Avon, “what name of the child? And of Alice?”

As he twisted upon his saddle to watch her back. But she spoke no other words and was lost in the gloom but moments later.

“Should we pursue?” asked du Plessis.

Kerr Avon shook his head.

“She is already gone.” He said, “Thrice.”

And when the other looked puzzled, he explained

“A phantasm of the night and a long ride. A ... a phantasm, from some time past. Some terrible event. Three times. I suspect she is gone to us now, however we ride this road.”

Blake looked around.

“But Kerr, there is the hill.” He trailed off as the clouds skidding across the sky momentarily parted to light the low hill off the road in silver moonlight.

“Ah. Yes.” Replied Kerr Avon. “The hill. She did mention a hill, and conveniently, there is one.”

Act 2 Scene 2 - The Hill

Up to the Hill. Up the hill, three dead and blasted trees, but as they approached amongst the silvery slivers of the scudding moon, a tableau was played.

Dangling from one tree, a body hung, a woman from her flapping skirts. About the base, two men, one with a book, talking. In the wind, their voices carried whispering as far as the wind thereof. Some could barely make out, others not.

“...but she was not yet the last... and “...the child was to be found...”

An approach was made through the undergrowth, unobserved by some. Theirs, Blake, strode forward calling out for attention, but as the clouds slid across the moon, the figures and the

woman hung were gone from the tree. But as the clouds flew, the light faded and returned, and the voices came from the second tree, moonlight glistening from the pools about. And again the same words as the body dangled and swayed in the wind.

“...bey she nay the last... and “...tha’ child’s t’be found...”.

“Twice”. Kerr Avon whispered in the wind-blown noise of the trees.

And as the moon hid again and the second tree’s tableau was gone, hence to the final tree. A hanged woman. Two figures below in moonlight, a hint of lantern below. And this time all just observed as she swung, skirts flapping, head twisted at that angle.

“...boy, shenee thest...” and “...thatchel’s toby fund...”

Avon, Blake, Brown, and du Plessis shook their heads and wriggled fingers in their ears as the wind drove away the words, unsure of what they heard. As the moonlight faded so did the phantasms and they were gone. Kerr Avon made a studious tick in a notebook against a word in his swirling hand that simply said ‘Thrice’.

After the visions, an investigation of the rocky uplift within the trees seemed right. A rough loop of stones, with crude steps of heavy stone cut up to that, backed by a larger stone set upright. Perhaps once a dwelling, albeit very small. Too small. All stones about worn or weathered.

With lanterns and moonlight, they peered about the rocks and stones, but to little avail until a glint was spied between the largest stone upright and opposite the last slabs as steps..

Prising and groping, it was but minutes to turn up a ring of gold, albeit bright and scratched as if of ages. And indeed it appeared a band of gold as if a wedding, but from hundreds of years old.

It was then that as they glanced about, in a clear moonlit moment of scudding cloud, something was lit in a moment at the base of the steps to this small stand of stones. Awful standing tall, horned, clawed, and hoofed, it stood as a man yet fully twice the height, reaching and striking forward in the moment before the clouds obscured again.

Despite consternation, as a moment later the clouds parted, it was gone, never there, but upon investigation by lantern light two large hoof prints with none leading to or from.

Shaken, but old ring retrieved, it was decided to be time to continue their pursuit as a priority and returned to the road.

Act 2 Scene 3 - Ruins

It was not far or long for Carell had stopped moving. From the road, all now in darkness, a faint glimmer of a fire interrupted could be seen in the distance. Leaving the horses, they approached on foot finding overgrown ruins of some previous large buildings now little but rotting arches and collapsing walls with rooms open to the elements.

As they approached a fire could be seen with several men standing looking bored. Another atop an open first floor idly looked down upon them instead of watching out, although what use he might was questionable as he was dazzled by the light and smoke of the fire. Beside the fire a fine coach

and four was tied up, the driver in seat atop patiently waiting and beside that two men argued with angry gestures and raised voices. One of them was clearly John Carell.

Creeping through the ruins and undergrowth until close enough to be ready to loose pistols and charge, it was clear the four other men were naught but hired help, albeit heavily armed, for they showed little interest in the argument. The sign of men getting coin by the day.

The argument between Carell and the other man, apparently the leader of this stage and called 'Tobias' during the argument, was fierce. Carell could be overheard trying to explain that the locket was almost as good if not better than having the Lady herself, should it be usable by a wise man, for Carell clearly had some notion of its use in the hands of Lord Percy. However, Tobias was not convinced and was significantly unsettled by the absence of the Lady herself and the loss of men at the kidnap attempt, and the disappearance of their contact 'Jack Welling' to London before the kidnap was resolved.

Blake sneaked from ruin to bush, eventually slipping right up to the back of the coach unnoticed. Meanwhile, Brown and du Plessis readied themselves amongst the ruins, as close as they could get with cover and broken ground allowing.

A pistol shot boomed out in the night, hammering into one of the men, as men with swords charged from the night, taking but a moment to aim and fire again. Meanwhile, Blake climbed atop the coach and wrestled with the driver, eventually throwing him off, letting loose with pistols and encouraging the horses as best he could to move off, hoping the loss of the carriage would cause consternation.

However he need not have worried for du Plessis and Brown were making mixed work of the men at ground level with pistol and sword.

It was a few minutes but the 'hired help' were no match for the combined experience of Brown and du Plessis for several went down while another fled into the night. Finally, the wounded Carell was brought down by Blake and the stolen locket retrieved.

The camp now theirs, and men either dead or dying, they interrogated Carell and others with some vigour. Reluctantly, it came out that while Carell and his men in Petworth were to bring the kidnapped Lady here, and thence she would be taken south to Selsey upon the coast to be taken somewhere by boat. Selsey Manor was mentioned, but thereafter Carell's knowledge of the wider plan became vague, for it was quickly clear he was not the man behind it all. Mention was made of 'The Duke' and a name 'Boswell', but little more.

It was decided to take the coach and return to Petworth with the captives and the locket and leave interrogation of Carell to Lord Percy, or whomever he knew might best make such an investigation. The implications were, perhaps, obvious...

A busy night gone they made their weary way back along the miles towards Petworth, relieved that by good fortune (and magical natures) they had caught up with John Carell before he had gone too much further.

Upon arrival at Petworth House, Lord Percy was there to greet them. He did not bother to look at Carell and simply gestured to his men to take him away. He was chained and dragged away towards the cellars, all excuses, pleading, and begging falling upon deaf ears.

Lazarus Curse - Part III (cont.)

Act 3 Scene 1 - Staffing

The morning came and Kerr Avon was much concerned that Sir Percy did not have a reliable Master at Arms. After due consideration and recourse to his Travel Papers, he recalled an old friend Robert Stoner lived in the next village. Stoner was a Guard Captain with some history with Avon's family. Perhaps Robert might have had a name or suggestion.

Robert Stoner and Kerr met as he sent a note with not of Lord Percy's servants that morning and Stoner rode to Petworth later that day. After some consideration, Stoner suggested his old number two in several campaigns, one Barnaby Laken. Barnaby live in the county still, and he might have been without employ although had been in work elsewhere, and had a family and small holding several villages away. Not a young man, his experience of a life in arms and a desire for a more stable age might well persuade him.

Such recommendations were enough for Lord Percy to request Laken's attendance at Petworth House and he was duly sent for, albeit it might have taken several days for him to attend. In the meantime, Kerr Avon cast a horoscope with the information he had of Laken, and it looked positive for all the aspects that might have been needed of a good Master of Arms.

It was the next day when all were rested that Lord Percy revealed he was now late in his call to Court, and must depart. However, he requested that his friends now follow up the final steps of the trail as laid out by Carell, to see where it ended upon the south coast, for clearly it would have been difficult to follow immediately where extraction by ship was implied.

Of Carell nothing was said, but Lord Percy did mention Selsey Manor, and the Hamlet of Selsey near Selsey Bill. There he noted a Lady of the Manor by name Lewes, but further information was scarce for now. He did not expand upon the source of these additional pieces of information, but all could guess what bargaining might have gone on in the cellars. Of that, it was early days, and none present wished to dwell upon such thoughts.

Act 3 Scene 2 - Chichester

Barely a day's ride away lay Chichester, a small market town with easy access, but mostly of a marshy nature. This was an excellent staging post for the final step to Selsey Manor, so all time was made there, with a stop overnight at the Old Parson Tavern, well used by travellers.

It was into the Tavern they walked, asking about rooms. Barely one room was available, at least until Richard Blake announced himself.

"Blake?"

"Yes"

"Richard Blake?"

"Yes"

"Captain Richard Blake?"

"Yes"

"The pirate?"

"Y - No! I'm a privateer. I have a letter from the Queen!"

By chance, Tod the owner was an old sea dog and heard the tales told by the seafarers passing through. He immediately ordered the occupant of another room to be turfed out for Captain Richard Blake to be accommodated. Blake was very pleased. As were the others, for they could at least share the room Blake was to take before he was recognised, albeit it was above the Tavern room itself and rather noisy. But all was well, so there was food, drink and sleep.

Act 3 Scene 3 - Selsey Manor

he next day, well prepared, they set out for Selsey Manor. Alas after some miles covered, halfway they estimated, it was clear that Richard Blake's horse was becoming lame, and he had to return to Chichester walking to change. Nearly an hour and a half went by before he returned upon a new horse. Most fortunate there was another available, and they had not progressed even further.

They pressed on, and along the track they spied a branch, with Selsey in the distance ahead and a cluster of buildings off the track and southeast. Obviously, the Manor. With nonchalance, they took the branching, the horses walking on towards the Manor, to all appearances riders well-travelled.

As they topped a rise in the track they spied a small manor house and outbuildings, low-walled meadow and yard about the house with a few figures about: one or two crossing the yard with the air of working men, a couple lounging at the back door, perhaps more than that.

As they approached, a plan was hatched - Du Plessis would be a Catholic fleeing England, from Bristol he was directed here by his old acquaintance the Rev Hütter. Brown was his paid man, the other two were his escort.

Jules du Plessis introduced himself as 'Retien du Merteuil', a Catholic fleeing persecution in England back to his native France, and asked for a word with the Master of the House. The young man he spoke to had wandered across the yard from the back door, and was clearly no farm worker, carrying an unobtrusive sword, and looking like a rough for there was no honest English dirt under his fingernails. The man agreed to ask, but insisted they all stay at the gate to the yard. He called someone over and passed the message, then waited nearby.

It was a short time indeed when an older woman emerged. The impromptu messenger walked back and du Plessis was conducted to the back door and within to some sort of morning room. The lady introduced herself as Mary Lewes, the Lady of the manor since her husband's death some years before.

They undertook a guarded conversation for some while, until Du Plessis managed to convince her of his identity, his religion, and that he was fleeing England, and was sent by a secret Catholic ring in Bristol led by one Reverend Hütter. As all good lies are mostly the truth she seemed convinced and sufficiently so to dispatch a man with dogs back up the track to ascertain whether they were followed.

Meanwhile, outside a plan of invasion was hatched - if horses were taken to stables then one would accompany, if not then perhaps there would be lameness and folks called over. Someone

would make it into the house and detain the important Catholics hiding there. The man who originally spoke with them was engaged in conversation to ease expectations.

It was agreed that du Plessis could stay for the couple of days it would take to arrange a boat to take him to the continent for a suitable fee (he convinced her equally that he had money to pay). Du Plessis also insisted that his 'man', Daniel Brown be allowed to accompany, but claimed the other two, Blake and Avon were but hired men for protection on the journey and may be dismissed once he had paid them.

Du Plessis headed back to the group outside the gate to the yard. Under the cover of sorting saddlebags and counting money he explained the situation within, and suggested he and Brown would grab Mary and whomever of the family was reachable.

Upon returning into the house he discovered Mary Lewes had departed the room, and searched the ground floor hurriedly for her.

Meanwhile Brown had been leading two of the horses to the stables with one of the stable boys.

When all the conversations with the man at the gate came to an end, and Blake was forced to pull his pistol on him and the other two who were approaching. A standoff ensued with Blake threatening to shoot the first man to move, for he was, lest they may be reluctant to admit it, *The Captain Richard Blake*.

Meanwhile within du Plessis found Mary Lewes in the kitchen talking with the cook. Du Plessis burst in, and at sword point to the staff, took her prisoner. Alas the interruption of her son-in-law Thomas was interrupted in itself by Brown's arrival, and he barged Thomas to the floor. Thomas crashed off the kitchen furniture and his head met something with a resounding crack. Thomas lay still, and there was blood.

With the captives from within du Plessis and Brown emerged to the standoff without. The various guardsmen had been separating to outflank Blake and Avon, but the emergence of du Plessis with Mary Lewis and a semi-conscious Thomas forced their hand, and they visibly prepared to leap to her defence. Without hesitation, du Plessis shouted he would kill her first and then them all, and stabbed her in the thigh with his dagger as a demonstration of his intent. She screamed, and they were mortified. The standoff disintegrated, and both Thomas and Mary Lewes were taken after the rest of the stables were freed and driven off, bar two for the prisoners, and they departed.

Later, that same evening.

Night upon the road. North of Chichester and camped for the night for they were slowed by the prisoners, it was Blake's watch. A pair of red eyes and a disturbance in the undergrowth attracted his eye. He woke du Plessis to stand in and went after the eyes, slipping from bush to tree to hush. Three times he approached the places it appeared in silhouette in the moonlight. Each time it seemed bigger, and some concern gripped him. Was it natural? What was it? Eventually, it had vanished and did not return, and du Plessis stated he saw and heard nothing, nor did Blake find spore, prints, or hints of it. The day dawned, and they headed on, early, for Petworth.

Act 3 Scene 4 - Petworth Return



ord Percy was to head for London on the morrow. The prisoners were taken away to the cellars to be dealt with at Lord Percy's leisure.

Blake mentioned the previous night's sight of the large Black dog to Avon and Lord Percy, as they were men of study. His description raised some concern, and Lord Percy agreed he would look into it on his return. Kerr Avon similarly but in the absence of his own books not to hand, it would have to wait until he returned to Bristol, hopefully with Blake.

Thereafter Lord Percy departed for London, with a promise he would update Walsingham of their trials as needed.

Kerr Avon recalled the letter he received some time ago from his ward Kally, that pertained to matters at home. His mother's old house, now in the hands of his nephew, Gabriell Peterwix, (through some process of law, inheritance, last wills and testaments, and statement from the Queen relayed through Jon Dee's assistant in a handwritten note Avon had never seen), where he stayed with his ward Kally and nephew Gabriell, who generously allowed Avon to undertake his researches in several rooms and a basement. Kerr had never paid much attention to the running of the house for he was away much of the time, or working on the arcane knowledge, and he was confident that his nephew Gabriell was a good man. Very confident. So what could possibly go wrong?

The letter described events at the house that sounded most concerning. He shook his head and decided to return immediately. Was the house was near Bristol, Blake, Du Plessis and Brown agreed to accompany him, at least as far as Bristol.

After a night's rest, they set out the next day...

Here ends another session.