The Curious Case of the Chemist

The rain fell in relentless sheets, turning the narrow alley behind Price's Chemist into a river of filth. Nathaniel Grey moved quickly, his coat collar drawn high against the chill, lantern light glimmering at his side. Mr Drake followed close behind, his face pale beneath the flickering glow.

'There!' Drake cried, pointing towards the end of the alley where shards of glass lay glittering like ice.

Grey crouched to examine the ground. 'Broken bottles,' he murmured. 'Freshly smashed - and see here, footprints!

Then came the sudden scrape of a boot on stone. Both men turned as a dark figure bolted from the shadows, coat whipping in the wind.

Grey reacted at once, racing forward. 'Stop!' he called. The man glanced back but kept running, his boots slapping against the wet cobbles. Grey lunged, seized the fleeing man's sleeve, and wrenched him round. They struggled briefly before the lantern's light caught the fugitive's face.

'Mr Price,' Grey said evenly.

Price's breath came hard. 'You've no idea what you're interfering with,' he spat.

'Then enlighten me,' Grey replied. 'A chemist's shop reeking of chloroform, bottles hastily destroyed, and now an attempted escape. It paints a rather curious picture.'

Price's eyes darted down the alley, searching for escape. With a sudden lunge, he struck out, sending the lantern crashing to the ground. The light hissed and died, leaving only rain and shadow.

Grey held fast. 'Enough,' he said sharply.

Price stilled, his breath ragged. 'You don't understand,' he muttered. 'This isn't about the bottles.'

Grey's grip tightened. 'Then you can explain it at the station.'
He turned him towards the faint glow of the street, the rain washing the grime from the man's face. Somewhere behind them, a door creaked open and then shut again. Grey glanced back, frowning.

'Come, Drake,' he said quietly. 'I fear this is only the beginning.'

