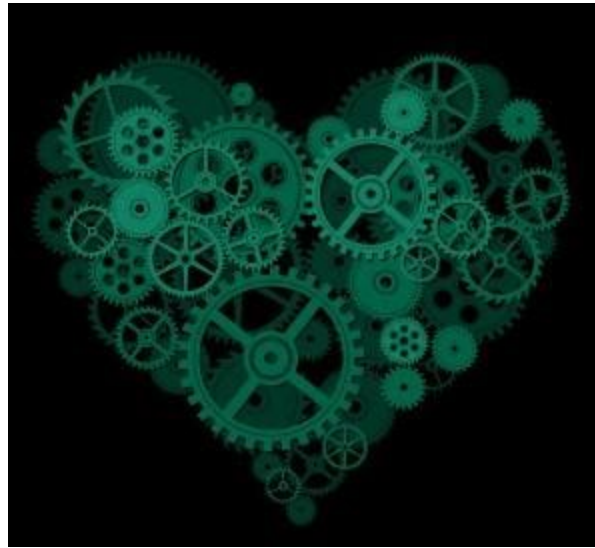


The Calibrated Heart



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Cast of Characters

Dr. Geoffrey Ellis	...	Handsome ambitious doctor/scientist age 30 to 45
Wilson Bauer	...	Good looking, wealthy man of leisure age 30 to 40
Chulsey Tibble	...	Scruffy looking criminal sort age 40 to 55
Trevor Dunlevy	...	Scruffy looking, not as sinister as Chulsey, 40 to 55
Diane Bauer	...	Beautiful niece of Wilson 25 to 30 (she is half East Indian and half caucasian)
Detective Eaton	...	age 35 to 45
Landlord	...	55 to 65 – can possibly be played by Wilson

ACT I

SCENE 1

At rise:

(Dr. Geoffrey Ellis's lab, early evening. It is filled with steampunk contraptions. Bookshelves overflowing with books and shelves with bottles. At the center of the lab is a lab table. The base is a dark wood color with doors and drawers. The table top is black. In the center of the lab table is a severed hand. It is gray and lifeless. Dr. Ellis enters followed by his good friend Wilson. Dr. Ellis is wearing a leather apron over a lab coat. He is putting on gloves as he enters. A pair of steampunk goggles are sitting atop his head.)

DR. ELLIS

I am truly sorry about that Wilson. I got carried away with my work and lost all track of time. How long were you out there?

(Dr. Ellis busies himself at the back of the lab. Wilson is taking off his coat and has not yet noticed the severed hand)

WILSON

Long enough to get your neighbor excited about all my infernal banging and shouting to be let in, I'm afraid. She threatened to call the police on me!

DR. ELLIS

Yes, well, she still might. We haven't...

WILSON

Good lord Geoffry what in heaven's name are you up to now! (Wilson is startled by the severed hand)

DR. ELLIS

What? Oh. That.

WILSON

Yes. That!

DR. ELLIS

I'm certain I mentioned it when last we spoke.

WILSON

I'm certain you didn't.

DR. ELLIS

I can assure you, it's not queer as all that, Wilson. My research has merely progressed to the use of cadavers.

WILSON

Yes, well, are there any more "progressions" beyond this that I should be made aware of?

(Dr. Ellis is clearly annoyed with Wilson's discomfort but is turned away from Wilson so that Wilson doesn't take notice. He doesn't respond)

It's not likely is it, that I will walk in here some day and find you working on a living human being.

(Dr. Ellis does not respond)

Geoffry?

DR. ELLIS

Do I really have to remind you Wilson, that the entire concept behind my work is to revitalize dead tissue that has necrotized due to gangrene or frostbite. To regenerate it. So yes, if you continue to visit me in my lab, it's highly likely that someday you will find me in here working on a living patient.

WILSON

Yes, well I suppose that's true. Forgive me, I was just taken aback at the sight of....it.

DR. ELLIS

Yes it is rather wretched isn't it? But wait until you see this!

(Dr. Ellis attaches wires to the severed end of the hand. He then brings over a wooden box with all kinds of vacuum tubes and meters on it. He hooks the wires to the box and turns a crank on the box. He pulls his goggles over his eyes and motions Wilson to step back, who is already standing as far back from the hand as he can)

DR. ELLIS

Shield your eyes Wilson.

(Wilson shields his eyes and Dr. Ellis flips a switch on the box and it comes to life. The sound of electricity crackling can be heard. There is a sizzle then a pop and the box stops running. Wilson un-shields his eyes just in time to see the hand flex)

WILSON

Lord preserve us...what have you done Geoffrey.

DR. ELLIS

Touch it.

WILSON

What?

DR. ELLIS

You heard me. Touch it. It's fine, really. It can't hurt you.

WILSON

I'd rather not. I should be leaving.

(Wilson turns to leave but Dr. Ellis intercepts him. He takes off his goggles and standing behind Wilson, slowly walks him up to the lab table. He has one arm wrapped around Wilson's chest and is slowly leading him closer to the lab table. Reluctantly, Wilson allows himself to be led to the table. With some resistance Dr. Ellis takes Wilson's hand and presses it into the severed hand. The severed hand flexes and grips Wilson's hand tightly. Wilson cries out but Ellis holds him still. Dr. Ellis has his body pressed tightly against Wilson's, his face is just inches from Wilson's face. There is a look of sheer terror on Wilson's face but he is somewhat calmed by Dr. Ellis's embrace. *A sub story to the play is that Wilson is gay and attracted to Dr. Ellis but knows that there is no chance since Dr. Ellis is heterosexual. Dr. Ellis knows this and toys with it to his advantage*)

DR. ELLIS

It's alright Wilson. The effect is temporary, I'm sincerely sorry to say. The stimulation will pass and the hand will return to its former state.

(Wilson lets out a whimper as he struggles to maintain his composure. The hand suddenly releases its grip)

DR. ELLIS

See? Now that wasn't so bad was it?

(Dr. Ellis has remained standing close to Wilson holding out his hand. Wilson becomes self conscious about the closeness and nervously pulls away.)

WILSON

That was truly sensational Dr. Ellis.

(Wilson takes out a kerchief and wipes his hand over and over again. He starts to use it to wipe his brow but then tosses the kerchief away and wipes his brow with his arm)

DR. ELLIS

Oh. I've made you angry. You only address me by title when you are angry and want to put me at arm's length. It's quite hurtful Wilson. I wonder if you know that?

WILSON

This is extremely disturbing Geoffrey. I don't know that I condone this.

DR. ELLIS

Condone it? What a ridiculous comment. I wonder what you mean by that!
(His tone has changed slightly. He does not like being judged)

WILSON

These works are not the purview of man Geoffrey. You are toying with something far greater than yourself and I fear for you. I fear for us all.

DR. ELLIS

You disappoint me Wilson. I took you to be a learned man. An intellectual...a libertine.

(Wilson takes the last statement to be an inference to his sexuality and is uncomfortable with it. He pulls himself together and prepares to leave)

WILSON

I've had enough. I must be going.

(Dr. Ellis cuts him off)

DR. ELLIS

Wilson. Please. Don't rush off in a huff. I'm sorry. (he pulls Wilson in close to him. The effect is intimate. Almost sexual) I know this is far too much to take in all at once. I assure you, I am not trying to raise Lazarus. That hand is still very much dead. I know that it can be frightening at first sight but it has no soul, no consciousness. It is merely electrical impulses and muscle memory. Look.

(He takes Wilson's hand and presses on one of the nerves at the wrist that causes him to involuntarily flex his hand)

See? Reflex. Nothing more. Now you go on home and have yourself a good hot bath and I will look you up next week for dinner.

(Dr. Ellis leans in as if to kiss Wilson but turns him around at the last minute and ushers him out of the lab. Once Wilson is gone, he walks over to a cupboard and pulls out a bottle of wine and pours himself a glass. He then walks over to his desk. He cranks a wheel on a box and it pulses to life. There is an object on his desk draped by a cloth. He removes the cloth to reveal a severed head. The head's eyes are closed. It is a ghoulish gray color but is wearing a jaunty hat)

DR. ELLIS

Wilson was positively dreary this evening, wasn't he, Giles?

(Dr. Ellis presses a button and the severed head expels a grunt)

HEAD

UUggh

DR. ELLIS

Yes, I know. The poor love sick school girl. I must admit I find his pining attention a bit flattering but the mere thought of...well, you know...it puts me off entirely. How about you Giles? In your animated state did you share the same sexual proclivities as our sweet Wilson? Were you an Androphile in your animated state?

(He pushes the button again)

HEAD

UUggh

DR. ELLIS

Now there's no need to be rude about it Giles. And what about all that nonsense about me toying with something greater than myself. If you ask me, I think it's our dear Wilson who wishes to do the toying if you get what I mean!

(This time Dr. Ellis pushes the button multiple times so multiple grunts are emitted, sounding like a laugh)

HEAD

UUggh, UUggh, UUggh,

DR. ELLIS

Yes, that was a clever turn wasn't it? Thank you Giles. Unlike my dear Wilson you've always appreciated a good joke.

(Dr. Ellis isn't laughing. He stands up)

DR. ELLIS

I wish it were a laughing matter Giles, but it isn't. These small frightened minds run for their silly superstitions the moment they are too ignorant to understand something. It is a magnificent world we live in Giles...and we have only just begun to discover its secrets.

(He raises his glass to Giles and then downs it)

End of scene

SCENE 2

At rise:

Basement of Dr. Ellis' building. The setting is sparse. There is a tangle of pipes and vents. There is a steampunk communication device next to a dumbwaiter up stage center. Chulsey and Trevor enter stage left. They are carrying what appears to be a body wrapped in a canvas bag.

CHULSEY

C'mon Trevor! For Christ' sake, will you lift your part!

TREVOR

I'm doing my best Chulsey. It's not fair. You always take the lightest half.

CHULSEY

The lightest half? What are you talking about. I have the bleeding head you imbecile. The kind, Mr. Corpse here must have been a bleeding genius what with the size and heft of this noggin.

(They get the body center stage in front of the dumb waiter and let it drop with a heavy thud. The head makes a particularly stomach turning crack as it hits)

CHULSEY

Alright then, let's get blockhead here packed up. Let's go feet first.

TREVOR

I hate this part.

(Over the course of their conversation they begin folding the body into a compact size that will fit the dumbwaiter. Trevor steps on the body's stomach and pries the legs up. There is a sickening crunch of bones and snapping tendons as he does so. He screws up his face as he positions himself behind the legs and pushes down on them. There is more snapping and cracking. The legs are bent once more at the knee and pressed down on. This time Chulsey joins in and together they press down until the body is quite compact.)

CHULSEY

I'm getting too old for this Trevor. I'm telling you, if it wasn't for me ailing mother I'd ave hung it up long ago.

TREVOR

Why Chulsey...I'm touched. I had no idea you were caring for an ailing mother.

CHULSEY

What's that? Caring for her? The old witch can rot in hell for all I care.

TREVOR

But you said...

CHULSEY

I'm paying off her bleeding debts is what I'm doing. The ungrateful old witch gambled me into a life of servitude is what she did.

TREVOR

Ah, the sins of the mother so to speak.

(With the last bit of effort Trevor sits on the body and the sound of gas escaping is heard.)

TREVOR

And I particularly hate that part.

(He begins coughing and hacking at the stench)

There is truly nothing as foul as the stench of the dearly departed.

CHULSEY

(Rather gallantly)

Dearly departed or merely farted it would seem. My deepest apologies old friend but, that was me.

TREVOR

Talking out your arse again eh? At least it's sweeter than your breath.

(Together they lift the body into the dumb waiter)

CHULSEY

(Dusting himself off)

There you go Trevor, give old doctor blood and guts a jingle so we can be done with this god forsaken place. This place gives me the heebies.

TREVOR

Chulsey, we just spent the evening poking around a graveyard and this place gives you the heebies?

CHULSEY

It's all these strange contraptions that I find unsettling. It ain't Christian you know? If you ask me, no good will come of it.

TREVOR

It's the way of the future my friend. Science will solve all of life's problems, you just wait and see. I heard say that someday man will travel to the moon.

CHULSEY

Hell that's not so special. All I need is a kiss from the green fairy and I'm there.

(They both laugh and congratulate one another on the cleverness of the joke)

TREVOR

(walks over to a steampunk phone and cranks a handle then speaks into a mouthpiece very loudly)

Good evening Dr. Ellis, it's me, Trevor. What's that? Shouting? Am I? Yes, so sorry, you did tell me about that. I'll speak in my normal voice.

(clears his throat and then proceeds in a loud voice)

We have another delivery for you. Yes, it's all loaded up. What's that? Yes sir. That'll be fine sir. We'll be here waiting for you.

(There is the sound of wheels turning and clanking gears as the body is raised in the dumb waiter)

CHULSEY

What do you mean we'll be waiting here? Is the good Dr. come to see us?

TREVOR

Yes. What do you suppose that's about?

CHULSEY

Hah! I knew it! Didn't I tell you Trevor?

TREVOR

Tell me what?

CHULSEY

That the good doctor's blood thirst would get the better of him.

TREVOR

What are you talking about?

CHULSEY

Look, well for starters, he has us bringing him dead animals, right? It's all about science and helping people he says. Then the next thing you know he's asking us to go by University and purchase bodies for him.

TREVOR

Cadavers.

CHULSEY

Yeah, whatever. Mark my words Trevor, he's going to ask us to bring him something else.

TREVOR

Like what? I'm guessing dead humans is pretty much the extent of it.

CHULSEY

You just wait. You'll see.

TREVOR

(A bit panicked at a new thought that has just occurred to him)

Hold on now. He might be on to us.

CHULSEY

On to us?

TREVOR

Yes, on to us. We're supposed to be getting these bodies from University not the graveyard. He may have found out and he's going to demand his money back.

CHULSEY

You disappoint me Trevor. You're always going on about being an educated man.

TREVOR

Three years of Uni before drink did me in.

CHULSEY

Trust me Trevor, good ol' Dr. Blood and guts knows we aren't getting these bodies from university. And even if he doesn't, I can assure you he doesn't give a rat's arse where they come from. His like is only interested in getting what he wants. He's made up his mind that whatever he's up to is more important, more riches or more holier than you or me. So it don't really matter where they come from. As long as he's getting his bodies, he's happy. And now, he's coming down here to tell us he wants something else. Don't you see? It was all a test to see how far we would go.

TREVOR

(Cautiously) And just how far would we go?

CHULSEY

I can truthfully say that I have not yet plumbed the depths of that dark sea Trev old boy. I've come close though. I thought I'd reached it a year or two ago when I was down on my luck and was propositioned by a retired Dutch slave trader and his hermaphrodite concubine. Prior to that I would have bet good money that I couldn't go through with anything of that nature but it truly is amazing how much you can endure just by keeping your eyes shut. And then at one point he...I mean she....

TREVOR

That's enough thank you. You've made your point. Now getting back to the original question, what do you suppose he wants?

CHULSEY

I don't know. Maybe he's going to ask us to bring him living people from the insane asylum.

(Trevor shudders and backs away from Chulsey. Dr. Ellis enters)

DR. ELLIS

Ah, Chulsey, Trevor, good evening gentleman. Thank you for waiting. Here is your payment. I added a little extra for your effort.

(Chulsey turns and gives a knowing look to Trevor)

CHULSEY

Why thank you doctor. That's very kind. It's a pleasure doing business with you. How are your studies going, doctor?

DR. ELLIS

Studies?

TREVOR

Your research. How is your research going?

DR. ELLIS

Oh, yes, glad you brought that up. That's why I wanted to speak with you. My research isn't going as well as I had hoped. I think the problem is that the tissue I am working with has already progressed too far into autolysis to be regenerated. It would appear that there is a point of cellular deterioration that is irreversible. It would be like trying to stitch together.....

CHULSEY

Brilliant, absolutely brilliant. I don't know why I didn't think of that myself. Right Trevor? The autolysis has gone too far! And how do you propose we remedy this doctor?

DR. ELLIS

(A bit taken aback)

Yes, well, I've been giving it some thought and...think my experiments might yield better results if the tissue hasn't progressed to such a state of decay.

CHULSEY

Yes. Well if I'm following you doctor, I think you already said that. So you want us to...

(Chulsey moves in closely to Dr. Ellis in an effort to prompt him to say what he means)

DR. ELLIS

It's all very complicated.

(Dr. Ellis backs away from Chulsey)

CHULSEY

Let me see if I can help explain it better. You need dead people...

TREVOR

Cadavers

DR. ELLIS

No not cadavers really.

CHULSEY

Right, so as I was saying, you need dead people who haven't been dead all that long. Have I got that right, Doctor?

DR. ELLIS

Yes that's right. Thank you Chulsey. That explains it very succinctly.

CHULSEY

Does the good doctor have any suggestions as to where we might find this kind of ...what would you call it...specimen? Right, specimen. Do you know where we might get one of those?

DR. ELLIS

Well yes. As I said, I have been giving this some thought and it occurred to me that hospital might present the best opportunity.

CHULSEY

Ah yes...Hospital of course. That makes perfect sense. And they have a place do they, where you can go in and order yourself up a newly dead specimen is that right? Made to order so to speak. Yes, I'd like one middle aged man, died of dropsy if you've got any, and not more than a day old you hear? The last one you sold me was a week if it was a day. Ha, ha.

DR. ELLIS

(Angered)

Don't be so vulgar. It is a legitimate request for the highest possible purpose.

CHULSEY

(Snapping)

Don't get sharp with me Doctor. I'll make light of it if I feel like it.

(Getting a grip on himself)

Now, let's get back to business shall we? How would you suggest we go about getting you what you need?

DR. ELLIS

(Realizing he is no match for Chulsey)

Yes, well, it is my understanding that there are patients in hospital who cannot afford the proper care to extend their lives and who are given a pauper's grave when they pass. They have no friends or family to provide a proper burial. I think it would be proper that these individuals pay their debt to society by donating their bodies to science. You will inform the hospital administrator that I will pay for their...

CHULSEY

For their care? You'll pay for their care?

DR. ELLIS

Well no. Not their care really. But their final expenses so to speak.

CHULSEY

(All through this exchange Chulsey knows full well where Dr. Ellis is going with this but he is purposely presenting the more magnanimous perspective in order to illustrate his point for Trevor)

Ah yes. Of course, I see, sorry to interrupt. Please continue.

DR. ELLIS

...right...where was I? Oh yes, and the terminally ill. I thought you might speak to the families and ask if they would be willing to donate their loved one's body to science. With the payment we would make, it would be an opportunity for the deceased to provide for their loved ones.

CHULSEY

Yes, about that. It is a very sensitive subject to discuss. What in your estimation would be the proper amount for such a noble contribution?

DR. ELLIS

I think triple what we were paying to the Universities would be appropriate.

CHULSEY

(Very pleased)

Yes. I would say that should do handsomely. That will go a long way toward easing their suffering. Very kind of you sir. Very kind of you indeed. Don't you agree Trevor?

TREVOR

What? Oh, yes, yes, very generous.

CHULSEY

Now on the subject of our services Dr. Ellis.

DR. ELLIS

Yes?

CHULSEY

Well, I don't have to tell you, discussing such issues with family and loved ones is a bit dodgy right? I suspect some families will take exception to the offer, no matter how much money we offer.

DR. ELLIS

Your point?

CHULSEY

Might we see an equitable increase in our compensation for services?

DR. ELLIS

(Stares at Chulsey long and hard. He knows that Chulsey has been pocketing all the money that was supposedly going to university for the cadavers but Chulsey does not waiver)

Yes. I see. Of course. I'll provide a 10% increase in the amount I'm paying you and Trevor. Now I have to go.

(Dr. Ellis turns and begins to leave)

CHULSEY

One more thing doctor.

DR. ELLIS

Yes?

CHULSEY

How long dead do you want them?

DR. ELLIS

How long dead do I...oh I see, yes, good question. No more than 48 hours I would say.

CHULSEY

Good to know doctor. Good to know. Good day now.

DR. ELLIS

Good day.

(Doctor leaves)

CHULSEY

Imagine the cheek of that tosser?

TREVOR

Chulsey, a ten percent increase is less than what we were getting for the University bodies.

CHULSEY

What are you going on about?

TREVOR

The 10% increase Dr. Ellis is giving us, it's nothing. When we were getting him bodies from the graveyard we were pocketing the full take but now we have to pay the hospital and families so that means we'll be getting less.

CHULSEY

And what makes you think we are going to settle for that? We're going to cut out the middleman just like we did with university.

TREVOR

Cut out the middleman? If we cut out the middleman, how are we going to get the dead bodies? The ones we dig up are at least a week old what with their funerals and such.

CHULSEY

We are going to make them.

TREVOR

Make them? How do you make a dead b...oh,.... I see.

CHULSEY

Do you?

TREVOR

No Chuls, I can't do that.

CHULSEY

Good, you do get it. Now stop your waffling. I'll do it myself. But I still need your help for other things.

TREVOR

What sorts of things?

CHULSEY

The kinds of things that don't involve killing.

(Trevor doesn't respond)

CHULSEY

Look don't be so naff Trevor. We're a team. It's not like we're going to go out there just killing folks willy nilly.

TREVOR

We're not?

CHULSEY

No not at all. We,...I mean I, will make sure that I only pick people who deserve it, like cheats and thieves and...

(Chulsey turns away from Trevor. His eyes dart around as he takes in the magnitude of what they are proposing)

TREVOR

What 's wrong Chulsey? Why'd you stop?

CHULSEY

I don't know Trevor. It may be too much for me. I don't know if I can do it.

TREVOR

Praise the heavens for small miracles. For a minute there I thought you had gone full barmy on me!

CHULSEY

Where would I start?

TREVOR

Start?

CHULSEY

I have a list as long as my arm of folks that wronged me! More if I include the just plain dodgy. Don't you see? I can be rid of the lot and get paid for it! I don't know that I can get my head around it. How did I come to deserve such a blessing? And what if good ol' doctor blood and guts finishes his work before I've finished mine?

TREVOR

You're off your trolley.

CHULSEY

What's that?

TREVOR

You said you had a list of those who wronged you. And you're going to off them? Why now? Why not settle your accounts

CHULSEY

Oh no. That wouldn't have been right. You can't kill a person out of true passion.

TREVOR

Actually I think that's the rare instance it might be okay.

CHULSEY

No sir. Maybe the law will forgive you your trespasses but not your maker. But this here is a job and it's just a convenience of timing is all it is.

TREVOR

Well I want no part of it.

(Trevor begins to leave. Chulsey grabs him and flings him against the wall with almost superhuman strength. He holds Trevor against the wall by the throat)

CHULSEY

I'll not let you ruin this for me Trevor. I can promise you that. You wouldn't want to be put at the top of my list would you?

(Trevor doesn't respond. Chulsey loosens his grip)
Now I told you already, I'll do the dirty work. I just need you to help me transport the bodies. Now seeing as I'm doing most of the work, my cut is 80 to your 20 are we clear.

(Trevor nods and Chulsey releases him)
Now let's go celebrate over a drink and we can have a look at that list of mine.