

## Chapter One

### The Mutilated Corpse

Dark, viscous pools of blood glistened in the yellow light of the sputtering gas lamps mounted on the walls. In the middle of the room lay the mutilated corpse of a fat, middle-aged man. The blood had finished gushing from his ripped flesh hours ago, leaving his skin pale and waxy. He now looked like a hideous mutilated doll. Spatters of dark red decorated the walls where his arteries had sprayed blood, soaking into the flock wallpaper and dripping from the expensive paintings, ruining them forever. Large, bloody handprints marked the glass of the shop door where the man had tried to escape, or maybe just seek help, but it had been too late. His blood was already spouting from his lacerated throat, filling his lungs, drowning him in his own bodily fluids.

Jim Kerrigan, standing in an open doorway at the back of the shop, stared involuntarily at the grisly scene before him. Hypnotised by the carnage, he jumped when his younger brother bumped into him from behind.

“Jim!” the ten-year-old boy said, coughing, and wiping the soot from his eyes. “Why’ve you stopped?”

“Keep your voice down!” Jim said. “He might still be here.”

“Who might still be here?”

“I dunno,” Jim said, his voice dropping low now. “I dunno.”

George wiped the last of the soot from his eyes and stretched to look over Jim’s shoulder. He drew in his breath at the sight of the slaughtered body on the shop floor, and gripped his brother’s arm.

“Do you think he’s dead?”

“Course he’s dead!” Jim hissed.

“Somethin’ got him bad. Look at him.”

“I know,” Jim said. He turned to look at his brother. “Stay here, I’m going to have a look around.”

“Don’t go in there, we should go back. The coppers’ll be here soon,” George replied, tugging at Jim’s filthy shirtsleeve.

“Just stay here and keep your mouth shut. I’m just going to have a look, that’s all.”

Jim pushed his brother down into a sitting position on the flagstone floor and turned back to face the shop. He pushed the door open a little wider so he could see the whole room from where he stood.

More blood, splattered on the walls, the shelves of *objets d’art*, the antique books, the glass vials and coloured vessels, the wall hangings of bright colours and intricate patterns, blood *everywhere*.

Jim took a few cautious steps into the shop, carefully avoiding the deep red pools of congealing gore. He looked back at George, framed by the doorway of dark oak, his eyes wide and riveted upon his brother. Jim put his finger to his lips, silently imploring him to keep quiet, and turned back to face the shop. Quietly, slowly, he gingerly stepped round and over the dark expanses of blood, making his way to the body by the front door.

Jim looked down at the man’s fleshy, waxen face, his eyes wide open in terror, and his red, pudgy lips parted in a grimace of fear exposing his yellowing, chipped teeth. Jim knew him, recognised him from a couple of days ago when Mulready had brought him down here. They had not gone into the shop straight away; Mulready had taken him round the back first, pointed to the chimney stack, crumbling away at the

top, allowing him to climb down and get inside. Then he took Jim back out onto the street and they went inside and admired the expensive, unusual antique items on display. Mulready pointed at certain pieces, giving him a little nudge in the small of his back, *that one, nick that one!*

Jim and Mulready had dressed up for their trip into town but none of their worn, tattered clothing could disguise their poverty row origins in the Dials. The shop owner had watched them carefully from the moment they entered. After a few minutes it became obvious they were buying nothing, and the fat, middle-aged man hustled them out of his shop, threatening them with the police.

“Fat old shit!” Mulready hissed back out on the street. “Yer’ll show ’im tonight. What yer can’t nick, smash up, smash the place to smithereens. That’ll teach ’im.”

Jim looked around. Nothing to nick now, everything covered in blood and gore like that.

“Jim!” George hissed from the doorway.

“What, what is it?” Jim said, looking back down at the murdered shop proprietor.

“I want to go. Please, let’s go!”

Jim waved his hand absently towards his little brother. “In a minute.”

Something about the dead man’s posture unsettled the young boy. His arms were outstretched beside him as if he had been crucified, and his legs stretched wide apart. Jim doubted that he could have fallen down into that position. Had his killer arranged his victim like that?

Something had torn at the man’s throat, leaving a gaping, ragged wound. How the shopkeeper had managed to live long enough to attempt an escape from his attacker as the blood had gushed from his neck was a mystery. The splashes and pools of blood indicated that he had put up a strong fight.

Jim looked at the man’s face again. He had seen dead bodies before, drunks passed out in the street, worn out by a life of hardship, their frail bodies killed by the cold of the night. Once he had seen a man who had starved to death. He had been lying in a back alley, his body so wasted and thin Jim could have encircled one of the man’s legs with his hand. His eyes bulged from his yellowing skin stretched tight over his skull, the cheeks sunken and hollow, the lips drawn back from his teeth.

But he had never seen anyone who had died so violently. The expression of fear etched so vividly on the man’s face unnerved Jim more than the blood. The way his eyes stared in terror straight at him.

No, not straight at him, but past him. Jim turned and looked behind him. A large painting hung on the wall, sprayed with blood like the others. In it a winged, demonic figure hurtled towards the earth shrouded in cloud. Jim wasn’t sure if the demon was flying or simply falling to earth. All around stars penetrated the inky blackness of the night.

“Jim!”

“What?”

“Somebody’s comin’!”

Jim could hear the voices now, the footsteps on the street coming closer. He looked around the room, panic gripping him instantly. If he were to be found here, with the dead body . . .

He scuttled to the back of the shop, quickly and silently running around the pools of blood. A quick glance behind told him how close he was to being discovered;

the light steadily growing outside the dirty shop front windows, no doubt policemen approaching with their lamps.

Jim darted through the doorway into the back of the shop, quietly pulling the door to behind him. George stood in front of him hopping from one filthy, bare foot to the other, casting agitated glances at the door behind him.

“Can we go now?” he said.

“Sshh!” Jim hissed, his finger to his mouth. “Be quiet will you!”

He turned back to the door and knelt down on the cold flagstones, and put his eye to the keyhole. The two shadowy figures stood at the door, one of them fumbling with the lock, cursing as he struggled to release it. Finally he managed to open the door, and the two men entered the shop.

“There,” said the one, “just like I said.”

The other man let out an exclamation of surprise at the grisly scene before him.

“Who is it? Who’s there?” George whispered, still silently bouncing from foot to foot behind Jim as though he desperately needed to pee.

“It’s a couple o’ peelers,” Jim whispered. He turned to look at his agitated little brother and said, “Keep still, before they hear you, and come and throw both of us in stir.”

George stopped his jigging and stood stock still, a look of terror on his grimy face. Satisfied he would have no more trouble from his little brother, Jim turned his attention back to the policemen in the shop.

The two constables now circled the mutilated corpse, stepping over and around the congealing pools of deep crimson, drawing ever closer to the object of their morbid fascination. Neither of them spoke; the clip of their shoes on the cold hard floor and the rustle of their uniforms as they moved were the only sounds they made. Their movements had a careful, awesome reverence about them, as though they were in a cathedral, and they were approaching the altar.

Suddenly one of the constables stopped and turned to look at his companion.

“D’you reckon ’e’s still ’ere?” he said. He was tall, and thin, and towered over his colleague, whose face was forever to be insulted by his large, protruding nose.

Jim nicknamed them Lanky and Beaky.

“Who?” Beaky replied.

“Why, the blighter who did this, who do you think?”

Beaky drew himself up to his full height, which wasn’t much, and puffed out his chest and said, “No, he scarpered pretty sharpish like, when he saw me.”

“You saw ’im? Did you get a good look at ’im? I hear they’ve been after ’im a long time now, he’s been halfway across the world murdering innocent people in their beds at night, and you got a look at ’im . . .”

“Well maybe not a good look,” said Beaky, his shoulders drooping slightly now.

“And maybe you didn’t see ’im at all, because maybe he’d long gone by the time you got here,” Lanky said, laughing. “Don’t go telling Inspector Behrends you’ve been seeing something when you ain’t, or else he’ll have you back looking for toshers in the sewers underneath Mayfair again.”

“Not bloody likely,” he said, and shuddered at the thought.

They both looked at the butchered corpse again.

“They say he’s killed people everywhere, all across the world. Always antique collectors, and people selling curios and artefacts, like. And they say the victims’ bodies are always drained of blood.”

“What’s ’e doin’, you reckon? What’s brought ’im over ’ere? Ain’t it bad enough we got Jack the Ripper? We don’t need another one.”

“No, this one’s different, they say.”

“Why, because he ain’t interested in dolly-mops? He might have an ’igher class of victim but he still kills ’em.”

“No, because he drinks their blood, that’s why. I’ve heard that most of ’em have not a drop of blood left in their body, an’ not a drop spilt on the floor either.”

Beaky shuddered. “Didn’t get much of a drink this time, did he?”

Lanky played the light of his lamp across the blood-bespattered walls of the shop and over the congealing pools of blood.

“Looks like Mr Antrobus put up a fight, an’ didn’t give him a chance to have a drink like,” he said.

The bell on the shop door jingled as another figure entered, his sharp intake of breath when he saw the carnage audible to Jim in the rear. He shifted position slightly, trying to get a better view of the newcomer. He pressed his face against the door, his eye against the keyhole, straining to see.

The man was dressed up for an evening out, at the theatre perhaps. He was portly and his face held the dour expression of one who is harassed and overworked. His bald head shone a little under the yellow glare of the sputtering gas lamps.

“Figgis, Cotton,” he said, “I hope the two of you have left the scene of the crime undisturbed, as I instructed.”

“Yes sir,” said Lanky. “Left exactly as we found it sir, just as you said.”

Inspector Behrends, as Jim assumed the newcomer to be, stepped carefully around the puddles of blood until he reached the corpse. He looked for a long time at the man’s face, seemingly studying it.

“Do you think it’s ’im sir?” Beaky said.

“And who might you be talking about, Constable Figgis?”

“Why, ’im what’s been murderin’ poor folks in their bed at night all over the world an’ drinking their blood.”

“Really Figgis, if you spent more time concentrating on police work and less reading those penny dreadfuls then I might not be so inclined to send you down the sewers looking for missing valuables so often.”

“Hmmp!” Beaky spluttered, taking a step back.

“Be careful, you blundering buffoon!” Behrends shouted, but it was too late.

Beaky stepped back into a large, dark expanse of blood and slipped. Arms and legs flailing wildly, he fell on his back and slithered across the slippery floor. Shouting in disgust and horror, he began thrashing about frantically in an attempt to get back on his feet, but only managed to cover more of himself in the dead man’s blood.

Jim clapped a hand over his mouth, stifling a giggle. He hated the police, and enjoyed seeing Beaky’s mortification.

“Constable Figgis, pull yourself together,” Inspector Behrends shouted.

Beaky finally stopped his frantic writhing and looked up, large, round white eyes peering out from his blood red face.

Behrends squatted over the corpse now saying, almost absently, “Figgis, I’ll have you disciplined for compromising the crime scene. You’re a disgrace to the force.”

Again he examined the dead man for several moments while Beaky made a few unsuccessful attempts to get back onto his feet.

Lanky walked over to the Inspector and stood by him. "Any ideas sir?" he said.

"Only one, Cotton," the Inspector replied. "I hate to say this, but if this is indeed the same killer who has been on a murder spree in New York and Paris, then I begin to feel that we are a little out of our depth. Perhaps it is time I paid Caxton Tempest a visit and sought his counsel."

As Behrends spoke, Beaky had kept up a continual litany of grunts and exclamations as he tried to stand up. Every time he seemed to be about to gain his feet once more he slipped again, until he looked like a blood-soaked corpse himself.

"Cotton, help your colleague up will you?" Behrends said.

Jim watched as Behrends continued examining the corpse, his mind racing at the thought of the great Caxton Tempest becoming involved in this murder case. He had heard of Tempest and his adventures many times, of his explorations in Africa and his exploits in the army. It was said he could speak every language in the world, that he was as skilled with a sword as a man with a gun, and that he could outfight an army of thugs and murderers all by himself. Slum Lassie Sal claimed to have seen him once, striding through Regent's Park. She said he was tall and handsome, and everything a girl could wish for in a man, that she felt fair faint as he had walked past her. Beside him had walked Johnny Chen, the only Chinaman in London to be allowed service in the private rooms of the Café Royal in Regent Street. Sal had said Johnny Chen was handsome too, in an Oriental way if that was your preference.

Finishing his examination of the corpse, Behrends stood up and watched Lanky carefully help Beaky struggle to his feet, with much spluttering and uttering of curses.

"Careful, careful," he said.

With a colourful oath Beaky once more fell onto the blood-smeared floor, this time taking Lanky with him. The two constables wrestled each other for a while, cursing and swearing, until Lanky was just as covered in blood as his colleague.

Jim looked away, sticking his fist in his mouth, his whole body shaking with silent laughter, sure that at any moment a great guffaw would escape him and reveal their presence behind the door. After a few moments he managed to compose himself and pressed his face against the door once more, staring through the keyhole.

And saw Behrends pointing directly at him.

"We may have the murderer yet," he was saying. "Look, the footprints lead that way."

Jim looked down at his shoes. There was blood on the soles, bloody footprints on the floor where he had walked.

He leapt to his feet and ran to George, still standing motionless behind him.

"C'mon," he said, bundling George ahead of him to the open fireplace they had made their illegal entry through. "Quick, start climbing, they're coming."

"Are they gonna throw us in stir, Jim?" he said, fat tears rolling down his face, cutting a clean path through the soot on his cheeks.

"Not if you get up that chimney," Jim said, pushing his brother up the filthy, dark flue. He pushed at George's bottom as he began climbing, soot getting into his eyes and mouth, making him cough and splutter. George's feet flailed around Jim's head, threatening to give him a good kicking. Jim grabbed his feet and gave him a firm push up. The young boy managed to gain a foothold and began climbing unaided.

Jim started climbing next, feeling his way up the rough, jagged stone. Another few feet and he would be in complete darkness. He heard the door below opening,

heard them coming in to the room and exclaiming at the mess they found, the clouds of soot spewing from the fireplace.

Just another few feet and then they would be on the rooftops, able to make their escape into the night. Just another few feet . . .

And then Jim lost a foothold. He scrambled for a handhold as he began his fall, the jagged edges of the chimney ripping the skin off his hands and tearing at his fingernails, until he finally landed with a sickening thump in the fireplace.

“Come here, we’ve got you now,” said Lanky, grabbing him with bloodstained hands and dragging him into the middle of the room.

Disoriented, blind and retching from the clouds of soot swirling around him, Jim lay on the flagged floor. He rubbed at his eyes and saw the feet of his captors surrounding him. Slowly he looked up.

Inspector Behrends looked down at him.

## Chapter Two Down in the Cellar

Lying on his back on the cold, hard floor, Jim looked up through the swirling clouds of soot at Inspector Behrends. Behrends stood over Jim, his fists on his hips, staring back at the teenage boy.

Jim coughed and a small cloud of soot billowed from his mouth. Behind him he could hear Lanky and Beaky laughing and clapping their hands, singing, "We got him, we got him!"

"Who are you, boy?" Behrends said.

"Jim Kerrigan, sir," he replied.

"And what were you doing in the chimney, Jim Kerrigan?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You were creating an awful lot of disturbance doing nothing. Are those your footprints on the shop floor?"

Jim opened his mouth to say no, but the look in Behrends' eyes made him think again.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"And what were you up to in the shop then, my young lad?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Nothing, sir," Behrends repeated. His chubby, dour face twitched a little, as though it might be about to break into a smile, and he said, "Go on, be off with you."

The Inspector turned and walked back to the corpse. As Jim struggled to his feet, Lanky and Beaky ceased their celebrations and turned as one, a look of indignation on both their faces.

"What?" said Lanky. "You're letting him go?"

"You can't do that," said Beaky. "We've caught him dead to rights, he's the murderer. Caught him dead to rights, we have."

"Figgis, Cotton, if you two believe this young lad capable of scouring the world for victims to kill and drain of blood then you are even more imbecilic than I first thought," said Inspector Behrends, casting a vicious glance at the two bloody, dirt encrusted policemen hovering by the fireplace. "You will both report to me in the morning for your new duties. I'm taking you off the beat as you both seem incapable of a sensible thought or action between you."

After taking a moment to enjoy the two constables' embarrassment, Jim made to leave through the shop entrance.

"Where do you think you're going?" Behrends said, blocking his path to the front door.

"You said I could go, sir."

"Yes I did, but not by the front door. That mode of entrance and exit is reserved for honest people. You can leave the way you came."

Jim hesitated for a moment, and then turned and ran past Lanky and Beaky, and began climbing the inside of the chimney once more.

Soon he was clambering out of the crumbling open top of the chimney, and into the cool night breeze. The young boy collapsed on his back on the roof, gasping for air after the confines of the chimney. Gulping down great lungfuls of the night air, his field of vision filled with stars shimmering against the velvet blackness of the night sky, he began laughing at his lucky escape. The memory of Lanky and Beaky struggling to extricate themselves from each other, slipping and sliding on the blood wet floor, made him laugh even harder.

A sound behind him cut short his laughter, and he jumped to his feet, ready to fight whoever was sneaking up on him.

“Jim!” George said, his grimy face split wide open by a smile of delight, though his eyes still looked red and puffy from the tears he had been crying. “I thought for sure they’d got you, thought I ain’t never gonna see you again.”

Jim relaxed, laughing again.

“Ain’t I told you before, George, there ain’t nobody can hurt a Kerrigan, especially a couple o’ peelers. You knew I weren’t gonna leave you up here by yourself, didn’t you?”

“I . . . I suppose,” said George, sniffing.

Jim reached out a dirty hand and ruffled his brother’s equally dirty hair.

“C’mon,” he said. “Let’s get back.”

The two boys ran across the rooftop, shinned their way down to street level and began running through the late-night, deserted London streets. As they ran, Jim told his younger brother of his encounter with Inspector Behrends, and mention of the mysterious Caxton Tempest. He embellished the story in the telling so that soon he was fighting off the peelers with his bare hands, and only narrowly escaping arrest and a spell in jail. George listened to it all with the unquestioning trust of a little brother, knowing that every word Jim told him was the absolute truth.

They ran and ran, Jim slowing down occasionally when he saw his young brother flagging, unable to keep up the pace. Sometimes they would walk for a spell, and then begin running again when their breathlessness had eased. Jim told George about Lanky and Beaky, and he threw himself on the ground imitating their thrashing about, and George fell down too, helpless with laughter.

And then they ran again.

Soon the affluence of inner-city London disappeared, and the streets closed in on them, becoming darker and dirtier. Here all manner of life still carried on, even at such a late hour. The dirty windows of illegal drinking dens blazed with yellow light and raucous noise, drunkards wandered the streets looking for their next cheap drink and the dolly-mops stood on the street corners, waiting for their next pick-up.

The two boys slowed their pace now, not wanting to attract too much attention. They walked past a young woman sitting on the dirty, wet ground, clasping a baby to her chest. She glanced at Jim and George, and then looked away again, knowing it would be a waste of time to beg money from the likes of them.

They walked on, past the open slaughterhouses discharging their stinking effluent out onto the streets to mingle with the dirty river of sludge flowing down the main thoroughfares. A filthy, decrepit old drunk staggered towards them, his ragged clothes hanging from his wasted body.

“Spare a ha’penny for a drink?” he said, his voice a hoarse whisper.

Jim took hold of George’s hand and they ran around the old man, and on deeper into the rabbit warren of narrow alleyways and courtyards that was their home. Finally, down an alleyway that was so narrow a full grown man had to turn sideways to walk down it, the two boys entered a courtyard of dark, decrepit, wooden houses, two storeys high and leaning inwards at a precipitous angle. In the middle of the courtyard stood a single, rusty standpipe, dripping water. This standpipe was the only source of water for all the residents of the courtyard.

The brothers entered a doorway and started down a flight of rickety steps into the cellar. They were brought to a halt by a shout from above them.

“Kerrigan! C’mere you useless little toe-rag.”

Jim turned and began a slow, reluctant ascent of the stairs, George following him.

Marchek Mulready shuffled out of his room, a battered cigarette dangling from his lips and a tin mug of cheap gin in his hand. He looked at the two boys through eyes narrowed down to tight slits, and smiled a greedy, toothless smile.

“Where is it, then?” he said. “Where’s the loot?”

“I ain’t got nothing,” Jim said.

“What?” Mulready said, the toothless smile disappearing as if he had been slapped across the face. “You ain’t got nothin’! What do yer mean, you ain’t got nothin’?”

George moved closer to Jim, searched out his hand with his, and held on tight.

“The shopkeeper, he were already dead when we got there, he’d been done in something nasty, like.”

Mulready shuffled a bit closer and took a gulp of his gin.

“That should have made it easier for yer to nick stuff then, shouldn’t it?”

“But the coppers came before I had chance.”

“Coppers, eh?”

“And there was blood everywhere, all over everything, there weren’t no use nicking nothing.”

“Blood, eh? Blood everywhere?”

“Yeah, and then another copper turned up, and he almost caught me an’ all.”

Mulready finished the last of his drink and then hurled the tin mug at Jim’s head, shouting, “You lying little toe-rag! You got scared, didn’t yer? There weren’t no coppers, there weren’t no dead bodies, you just got scared!”

The old man lashed out and grabbed Jim by the arm, pulling him to the ground. He gave him a couple of vicious punches to the head, cracking his skull against the hard, earthen floor. Jim curled himself up into a ball, protecting his head with his arms.

“Stop it, stop it!” George shouted.

“You stay where you are, less’n you want more of the same,” Mulready snarled at the young boy. He leant down over Jim, prying his arms from his head with tobacco-stained hands, and pushed his face up against the boy’s, his foul, sickly sweet breath making Jim gag.

“Yer can’t fool old Mulready, can yer boy? There weren’t no dead body, were there? There weren’t no coppers. There were just you, wettin’ yer pants, ’cos yer were too scared to go thieving. I’ve got plenty o’ lads to go thieving for me, Kerrigan, just ’cos yer used to be the best, don’t mean I won’t replace yer in a flash.”

He looked over at George, crying now, and said, “Maybe I should send yer little brother out on a job. ’Bout time he cut his teeth on his own, ain’t it?”

“Leave them alone.”

Mulready turned around slowly, still holding Jim’s arms in a vice-like grip. A plain, thin-looking woman stood in Mulready’s doorway, holding a tattered, worn shawl about her shoulders. She looked tired and hungry, beaten down by years of hardship, yet she still carried about her a certain presence, as though once she had been beautiful, and had known that, and lived in simple enjoyment of it.

“Stay out of this, Slum Lassie Sal, it ain’t none of your business,” growled the old man.

“Of course it’s my business,” she said. “You choose to run this den of little thieves and ragamuffins and mudlarks. You give them shelter and food, not enough, mind, and that’s the Lord’s truth. But they’re yours, Lord pity them, and that makes

you their father, of a sorts. And if you're their father, then that makes me their mother, seen as how you count me as your wife. And so, as their mother, I'm saying, leave them alone."

Mulready took a long moment looking at the woman he called his wife, and then he hauled Jim to his feet and gave him a kick, sending him tumbling down the cellar steps.

"G'warn with yer," he snarled, and stalked back into his room. Sal gave George a last pitying look, and then followed the old man.

George, crying softly, turned and ran down the cellar steps, and helped Jim get to his feet.

"I'm okay," he said, wiping a sliver of blood from his lips. They walked together into the damp, dark cellar, which they shared with several other children, and over to a corner where they had a sheet that they slept on. The only light came from a single sputtering oil lamp, which threw flickering shadows across the room, barely lighting it.

The two boys huddled down together, wrapping the sheet around them for warmth.

"Did 'e 'it yer hard, Jim?" said a voice from the gloom.

"No, not too hard."

"He's been drinkin'," said another. "It's always worse when he drinks."

"Him and Slum Lassie Sal were arguin' earlier," said the first boy. "Shoutin' and screamin' at each other."

"I dunno why she stays here, it's not like she has to. She's tapped, s'got to be."

George snuffled and sniffed underneath the sheet, still crying. Jim put a protective arm around him.

"Don't worry," he whispered. "We'll be out of here one day soon. Just you wait and see."

"I want to go now," George said, gulping back more tears. "Why can't we go now, tonight?"

"You know why, we ain't got enough money yet. Just a little while longer, just 'til we got a bit more."

"But he'll find out, I know he will. He'll find out you been stealing from him, an' holdin' stuff back for yourself, an' he'll kill you."

"No he won't, he's too stupid, too drunk all the time."

"But what if he finds it? What if he finds the money?"

"Sshh," Jim whispered. "We don't want nobody to know about that, do we? It's our secret, remember? We don't even tell the others, okay?"

"But what if—?"

"He ain't gonna find it, nobody ain't. I've hidden it good and proper. Okay?"

"Okay," said George.

"An' what are we gonna do with the money, George? What are we gonna do when we've got enough?"

"We're gonna buy a barrow," George said.

"Yeah, that's right. An' what are we gonna do with the barrow?"

"We're gonna sell fruit and veg to all the fine ladies and gents."

"That's right, an' fresh fish, too. 'Come an' get your fresh fish, freshly caught this mornin', cheapest fish in all London', that's what you'll be saying. Calling it out across the streets first thing in the mornin'. An' all the pretty ladies will be coming up and buying the fish an' what have you, an' they'll be lookin' at you an' sayin' how

handsome you are, like, an' 'would you care to come back for a cup of tea in my living room?' they'll say."

George giggled.

"An' we'll be the finest pair of costermongers London's ever seen," Jim said.

"An' what are we gonna do then?" George said, although he already knew the answer.

"We're gonna get ourselves a little shop, so we won't be costermongers no more, we'll be proper shopkeepers."

"I'd like that," George said, snuggling up closer to his brother, trying to keep warm.

"So would I," Jim said. "So would I."

### Chapter Three Murmur

Eliza pulled her bright red shawl tighter around her shoulders to ward off the coolness of the evening. She had made up her mind to pull one more trick and then she would finish for the night and go back to her doss. Tonight was too cold to be standing around outside, shivering in the damp air coming off the Thames. She'd had enough of watching the dockers and bargemen stagger past in their groups, singing their bawdy songs set to salvation music and occasionally shouting drunken obscenities at her. She ignored the groups; it was the solitary traveller she was after: the jolly Jack tar on shore leave, eager for some drink and some fun, after too many months spent at sea. Or, better still, the gentleman slummer, prowling the East End in search of cheap booze and cheaper sex.

The sailors were easy to spot, some of them wobbling down the street, not yet having found their land legs, and looking for all the world as though they were already drunk. The gentleman slummer stood out too, his well-dressed figure marking him out as a stranger. Eliza would hang around outside one of the local drinking dens, where they sold cheap booze and asked no questions, until she found a likely dupe. As her unsuspecting prey approached the pub, intent on satisfying his craving for alcohol, Eliza would step up to him, entwining her arm through his, asking her poor, gullible victim if he would buy a girl a drink.

Distracted by her gaudy clothes and seductive manner, he would not notice the figure behind him, the cosh raised high, until it was too late. Eliza and Bill would then quickly divest their unconscious victim of all his valuables, and leave him lying in the street as they went and looked for their next dupe.

Seventeen-year-old Eliza had been playing this dangerous game for eight months now, ever since she had arrived in London after running away from her home in Salford. She had run away from home before, but not far enough. Her father always found her after a few weeks, and took her back and beat her with a rope. The last time he had locked her in her room for a week, feeding her nothing but bread and water, and sitting with her every night, reading to her from the Bible. She promised herself that the next time she ran away she would go far enough that she would never be found.

So she came down to London, and for a while she tried to make an honest living selling flowers. But the hardship of life on the streets ground her down, and soon she was immersed in a life of petty crime, and living in doss-houses and padding-kens.

And then she met Bill. He was a professional beggar; knew more ways of parting a person from their money than she would have imagined possible. When she met him it was midwinter, and he was using the 'shivering dodge'. She accompanied him once, watching from the sidelines as he went through his performance. And what a performance it was; wearing the thinnest of clothes he shook and shivered and silently implored the well-dressed passers-by for their assistance. He did well by it, too. But he decided to give up on that particular dodge; knew one beggar who used it too much, and now he couldn't stop trembling, even on the hottest of summer days.

So Bill and Eliza decided to team up. No more begging, Bill decided. He'd heard of easier ways of getting money, quicker too. All it needed was for Eliza to tart herself up a little, and for Bill to use a bit of muscle. Couldn't be safer. Easy money.

Eliza rubbed her hands together and blew on them. It was getting colder now; she was definitely calling it a night.

But then she felt something snaking around her ankles. She looked down and there was a cat, jet-black, twisting and turning between her feet, rubbing its sleek body up against her legs.

“Hello,” she said, bending down to stroke it. The cat responded to her attention by rubbing its head against her hands, purring deeply now, still twisting and turning, and flicking its tail from side to side.

There were many cats in the neighbourhood, but none like this one. It looked groomed and well fed, and . . . what was that around its neck? She fingered the leather collar with its strange symbols and signs printed on it. Eliza had never seen a cat wearing a collar before.

“Ah, I see you’ve met my friend, Lucifer.”

Eliza jumped at the sound of the voice, a gasp of surprise escaping from her lips, and looked up. A tall, thin stranger stood in front of her. He wore a long, black overcoat and a black chimneystack hat. The hat cast a shroud of darkness across his face, apart from his eyes, which flashed green at her from under the brim. His voice sounded strange to the young girl, as though he were speaking from a bottomless chasm, his voice echoing from unfathomable depths.

“You scared me,” she said. She stood up, but still the stranger towered over her.

“Don’t be scared, such a pretty young thing, don’t be scared,” he whispered, stepping closer, and reaching out a gloved hand to caress her face.

She could see Bill now, appearing spirit-like from the darkness behind the stranger, raising his arm with the cosh, bringing it down.

In one swift movement the stranger turned and fastened his long, gloved fingers around Bill’s arm, and pulled him to the floor. As Eliza watched, suddenly frozen with fear, the stranger stooped over her companion, enveloping him in his black overcoat. The cat shrieked and hissed, arching its back, its fur sticking from its body in sharp little spikes. Bill’s hand reached out to Eliza from underneath the stranger, the fingers stiffening claw-like in a desperate, silent plea for help. As she watched, paralysed with fear, the skin on Bill’s hand began to dry and shrivel up, tightening across the bones until every last ridge and knuckle was plain to see, finally cracking and turning to dust.

The stranger stood once more, turning to look at Eliza. Behind him lay Bill’s emaciated, desiccated corpse.

“What . . . what do you want? I ain’t got no money.”

“I’m not after your money, young girl. I’ve had more than enough of the riches of this world to satisfy me several lifetimes over. Oh no, it’s not your money I want.”

Eliza took a step back, and another, until she backed into a wall. The dark figure moved closer, his gloved hand caressing her face once more. She flinched at each soft touch of his fingers upon her cheek.

“I’ll scream,” she said, breathless with fear, and knowing that she had lost the power to scream, that somehow he had already taken this from her.

“But why?” he whispered. “There’s no need to scream, no need at all.” He stooped over her now, like a bird of prey, his fetid, freezing breath already sucking the life from her.

“Please . . . please, don’t.”

Eliza felt herself slipping, fading away, succumbing beneath his power. She felt herself falling to the ground, only to be caught in the stranger’s arms. He gathered her up, his touch as tender as a lover’s embrace, and kissed her gently on the mouth.

She lifted up her hands, trying to ward off the freezing winter invading her body, and knocked away the stranger's hat, revealing his cadaverous face and greedy, sunken eyes.

"Who . . . who are you?" she said, breathless with fear, and . . . excitement.

"I'm a warrior, in charge of thirty legions and more. I'm a duke. I'm a philosopher. Stop trembling child, soon your trial will be over, and you will live forever."

With the tenderness of a father comforting his sick child, the stranger stroked Eliza's hair, pushing it back from her face.

"What . . . what's your name?" she said.

"My name?" the stranger said. "My name is Murmur."

And he kissed her again, sucking the life from her body, her flesh drying up and cracking, and falling from her bones like dust.

"Read all about it!"

The newsvendor held the large sheet newspaper in front of him, various headlines emblazoned in bold on it.

"Ghastly murder in city antique shop!"

Jim and George ran across the street to the newsvendor, who looked down at the two dirty, scruffy boys with undisguised suspicion.

"What do you want?" he asked them.

"Was this the murder that happened last night?" Jim said.

"Yeah. What's it to you?"

"Does it mention anything in the paper about Caxton Tempest?"

"It might do. Like I said, what's it to you?"

"Oh, nothing," Jim said.

"If you're that interested why don't you buy yourself a paper, 'stead of wasting my time asking me lots of foolish questions. Oh, but then I guess," he said, bending down to the two boys, "you ain't got the money to buy a paper, and even if you had, you wouldn't be able to read it anyway."

"Jim doesn't need to read your stupid paper," George shouted, "'cos he was there when it happened."

"Go on, scarper!" the newsvendor shouted, aiming a kick at the boys' bottoms as they turned and ran, giggling.

"Read all about it! Mutilated corpse found in city antique shop!"

Jim and George ran down the West End streets, dodging round the ladies and gentlemen out for a walk in all their finery, giggling and laughing, shouting insults at each other and pulling faces at the passers-by. A policeman blew his whistle at them, but they simply stuck their tongues out at him and carried on running. The policeman decided they were not worth his time bothering with and carried on his beat. Soon they came to a halt and found a side street to sit down in, still laughing and playfully punching each other.

And then Jim said they needed a plan.

"We ain't got no money from last night, so we need to make some today, if we're ever gonna buy that barrow."

"What are we gonna do?" said George.

"I dunno," said Jim, thinking. "We could do a spot of pickpocketing, I suppose, but it's a risky business, and the chances are we won't get much."

Jim pulled from his pocket the small, sharp knife he kept for pickpocketing. He would pretend to stumble against someone, as though he were about to faint, and

quickly slice open the man's pocket with his knife, and remove the contents. It was quite often some time later that his victim would realise what had happened, and Jim would be long gone by then. The big disadvantage with pickpocketing was that you had to get up close to your victim, and they would get a very good look at you.

Jim turned the knife over and over in his hands, watching the blade flash in the sunlight. Then he put it away again.

"Nah, pickpocketing's no good, too dangerous. Everybody's getting wise to it."

He sat in thought for a moment, furrowing his brow as he concentrated. Then he clicked his fingers and a wide smile crept across his face.

"I got it," he said. "C'mon, let's go."

He hauled his brother to his feet and they started running again, up and down the streets, Jim turning his head this way and that, always on the lookout.

Until he found what he wanted.

"Matches! Matches for sale! Come and get yer matches!"

The young lad, about Jim's age, his cap set at a jaunty angle on his head, strode up and down the pavement, holding a box of matches in the air as he shouted. A wooden tray containing more boxes hung from his neck and lay against his chest. Draped around his neck also was a sign advertising his goods – Bryant and May's Alpine Vesuvians.

As Jim watched, a man stopped to buy a box from the young match seller.

"Brimstone matches these are sir," said the young boy. "Not even a bloody good gust of wind'll blow one of these things out."

After the man had gone Jim and George approached the young lad. They sized each other up for a few moments in silence.

The match seller said, "What do you want?"

"How'd you like to earn some extra money today?" Jim said.

"Yeah, course I would," the boy replied, still suspicious though.

Jim explained his plan, cajoling the initially reluctant boy until he was persuaded of Jim's moneymaking scheme.

They found another street where the young match seller had not been seen that day and gave George a couple of boxes of matches. Jim and the match seller found somewhere to hide while they watched George.

He walked out into the street and started shouting, "Matches for sale, come and get your matches!" all the while holding the two boxes in the air. He made sure to walk near dirty, muddy pools of water, and then artfully bumped into an old lady, dropping the matches into the puddles. Immediately he sat down on the pavement and began howling.

"Look at him go," said Jim. "Ain't he a good 'un?"

Flustered, the old lady began apologising, but George just howled even more, tears now rolling down his face. Soon a crowd had gathered around the pitiable-looking young boy and his ruined matches. So heart wrenching was the sight that the onlookers were compelled to give the poor little mite money to recompense him for his ruined goods, far more than he would have made by simply selling them. Then George began picking up the sodden matches, saying, "p'raps I can dry 'em out," and helped of course by one or two of the crowd, before carrying on his way.

A minute or two later he met with his two conspirators. They counted out their ill-gotten gains, and then moved on to other streets and repeated the trick again and again, using the same two boxes of now ruined matches. By the end of the morning they had made close to eighteen shillings.

“Blimey!” the match seller said, his eyes popping out of his head. “Me dad don’t make that much in a week!”

They began to split the money between them, but as none of them were very good with maths they managed to disagree about how it should be done. A furious argument developed into a full-blown fight between the two young lads, George pitching in with a few well-aimed kicks at the match seller’s shins. The coins had now scattered across the pavement, so George took the opportunity to collect as much as he could, and then run. Jim pushed his opponent over, who landed heavily on his tray of matches. The young boy ran as fast as he could, leaving the match seller shouting curses after his departing former companions in crime, but with enough coins scattered around him to give him a small profit on the morning’s work.

The two brothers ran deeper into the heart of the West End, past hansom cabs and horse-drawn trams, off the busy Holborn thoroughfare and down onto Great Russell Street. George stopped running to watch an organ grinder and his monkeys, all wearing waistcoats, and surrounded by a group of children.

Jim turned and was about to tell his brother to come on, when he saw Inspector Behrends, and walking beside him Caxton Tempest. Jim stood with his mouth open, forgetting that he had been about to speak, and watched Tempest as he approached.

He was leaving the British Museum with Inspector Behrends. They were so deep in conversation they did not see Jim, despite walking close enough that he could have reached out and touched the two men. Jim had never seen Tempest before, but he had no doubt that this was the great man. He was as handsome as Slum Lassie Sal had said he was, tall and powerful enough to dwarf the Inspector walking beside him.

George was still watching the monkeys. Jim punched him on the arm.

“That’s him!” said Jim. “I know it is, it’s got to be him!”

“Huh?” said George.

“Tempest, Caxton Tempest, I’ve just seen him. C’mon!”

He pulled at George’s arm, dragging him away from the entertainment. Despite his brother’s protestations, they began following Behrends and his companion.

They left Great Russell Street and began walking down Drury Lane. The two men walked quickly and the brothers occasionally had to break into a trot to keep up with them. Tempest led them into the quieter London streets, where he stopped and talked to the Inspector.

Jim drew as close as he dared to the two men, straining to hear the words passing between them.

“Of course, Mr Tempest,” Behrends said, “I’ll come right by to let you know anything I find out.”

“You can find me in the lecture hall of the African Association later this afternoon,” Tempest replied. “I’m delivering an address there, but we can talk afterwards and in some privacy. This sounds very serious indeed.”

The two men said their goodbyes and parted company. Jim shrank back into the shadows, pushing George behind him. Behrends pulled his heavy overcoat closer around himself as he walked, in an attempt to cut out the chill wind sweeping through the tiny street.

Jim decided to continue following Behrends. He had no interest in a lecture that Tempest might give and would not be allowed in such a prestigious establishment as the African Association anyway. But the Inspector was still investigating the murders, and Jim wanted to be there when he found his next clue.

Jim held George's hand tightly as they ran, afraid he might stray too far ahead and give them away. Every now and then George asked his older brother what they were doing, but Jim just shushed him and gave no answer.

Behrends finally halted in front of a dark, dismal-looking shop in a deserted, narrow alleyway. The shop appeared to be closed, but the Inspector tried the door anyway, to no avail. He looked at his pocket watch, and then up and down the street.

Jim watched the proceedings from a side street a safe distance away. Behind him he could hear George talking to himself, and turned to shush him.

"Found a cat," George whispered.

"Just keep quiet," Jim said.

He turned to look back at the Inspector, who again glanced up and down the cramped street and checked his watch. The shop looked dark and dilapidated, dirty windows partially obscuring the interior. Taking hold of George's hand again Jim crept closer, wanting to take a better look at the shop sign hanging lopsidedly over the door, when Behrends was joined by another man. He wore a long black overcoat and a black, chimneystack hat. For some unaccountable reason, Jim shuddered at the sight of him.

He shrank back as the man let Behrends into the shop.

Suddenly he felt something snaking around his ankles, sending a cold, tingling sensation running up his spine. He looked down and saw a black cat rubbing itself against his ankles, twisting and turning between his legs. Jim picked up the cat, cradling it against his chest. It scrutinised him for a second or two, the deep green of its eyes momentarily sending a shiver through him, and then began purring loudly. Jim gave the cat back to George.

"There you are," George said, tickling the cat under the chin. "I lost you, where'd you go?"

"What's this?" Jim said, tugging at a leather strap around the cat's neck, embellished with strange symbols and diagrams.

"Dunno," said George, tugging at the strap too.

The cat began to fidget and struggle, extricating itself from Jim's arms and climbing up onto his shoulders. George giggled as its tail swished past his face, tickling his nose.

A figure stepped silently from the shadows behind them, large, gnarled hands reaching out for the two boys. The man grabbed Jim and George by the scruffs of their necks and hauled them towards him, the cat leaping from Jim's shoulders and running away.

"Ello, lads."

Jim looked up at Marlow Crimps, his weathered, liver-spotted face leering back down at him. A large, black eye-patch covered his left eye and strands of greasy hair lay plastered against his forehead. Jim already felt faint from the stench of booze and rotting meat on Crimps' breath.

He struggled free from Crimps' grasp, gasping for air.

"Crimps," Jim said. "What are you doing here?"

Crimps cuffed Jim around the head.

"That's Mr Crimps ter you, yer cheeky sod."

"Sorry."

"An' I expect old Marchek'll want to know what yer doin' 'ere, playin' with the cute little pussycat, when yer should be out thievin'!"

"We were just—"

“Ah, don’t bother,” Crimps said, waving a dirty hand in dismissal. “S’trouble with you kids these days, no respect for yer elders. When I were your age I would’ve got a good beatin’ just for breathin’ out of place.”

He looked at the two brothers for a while, probing the inside of his mouth with his tongue. Finding a remnant of half masticated food stuck between his teeth he began chewing.

“Hunh,” he grunted. “Maybe I should give the two of yer a good wallopin’ anyway, just for the ’ell of it.”

“But we have been thievin’,” Jim said, producing the morning’s takings and presenting them to the filthy old man.

“Aahhh, good lads, good lads,” Crimps said, scooping the money out of Jim’s hands and hiding it away in secret pockets within his tattered, old waistcoat. “Marlow Crimps, ’e knew yer wouldn’t let ’im down, ’e did that. C’mon lads, old Mulready’s ’spectin’ me down at The White Swan, I’ll take yer both with me an’ we’ll show ’im what good lads yer’ve been, eh?”

He planted his dirty great hands on Jim’s and George’s shoulders and began guiding them back up the narrow street. Jim glanced back at the shop, at its dirty windows and crooked door, and the chipped, wooden sign hanging above it.

A single word had been scrawled in black paint across the dirty wood:  
Magick.