



The Gryphon Chronicles, Book 1: THE LOST HEIR

Jake is a scrappy orphaned pickpocket living by his wits on the streets of Victorian London.

Lately he's started seeing ghosts, and discovers he can move solid objects with his mind! He has no idea why.

Next thing he knows, a Sinister Gentleman and his minions come hunting him. On the run for his life, Jake is plunged headlong into a mysterious world full of magic and deadly peril. A world that holds the secret to who he really is: the

long-lost heir of an aristocratic family—with magical powers!

But with treacherous enemies closing in, it will take all of his wily street instincts and the help of his friends—both human and magical— to solve the mystery of what happened to his parents, and defeat the foes who never wanted the Lost Heir of Griffon to be found . . .

“A wonderful novel in the same vein as Harry Potter ...A magical storyline with non-stop action and fairy-tale creatures blended with the reality that was Queen Victoria's England.”

~ The Reading Café

E.G. FOLEY

THE GRYPHON CHRONICLES, BOOK ONE:

THE LOST HEIR



Blood will tell.
—Old English Proverb

PROLOGUE

An Urgent Message

Chains clanked in the darkness as the creature paced and prowled its cell, letting out another throaty snarl.

Full eleven years, the beast had been a prisoner in this dungeon, and every day its anger grew — but never before to this ferocious pitch, as it heard what its captors were scheming. Their voices echoed down the stone chute from somewhere above.

The traitor and the witch.

“The boy must die.”

“Don’t be so impatient, Waldrick! Think of his powers! A lad like that is too useful to waste. Just capture him, and we will make him serve us.”

“No, Fionnula! The risk is too great! He could destroy everything we’ve worked for. Don’t you understand that?”

The beast roared in protest.

“Shut up down there!” the hag hollered. “Waldrick, did you forget to feed the monster?”

“Of course not. I threw a goat down to it yesterday — just the way it likes its prey, alive and kicking. Vicious thing.”

“What does it want, then? Sometimes I swear that thing can understand us.”

“Who cares? It’s just a stupid animal,” he said.

“That happens to be about a thousand years old,” the witch muttered with considerably more respect.

The creature’s golden eyes gleamed with intelligence and futile vengeance in the shadows. But the co-conspirators in the stone-carved lair above forgot about the beast once more and returned to the topic at hand.

“If you bring the boy back to me alive, my lord, I might be able to transfer his powers to you.”

“Or to yourself?” he countered suspiciously.

“Don’t be tedious! Why should I need more magic? You know who I am. While you, poor dear, were robbed. It’s only fitting you should take from *him* what was stolen from *you*.”

“Tempting...”

The beast could hear the earl’s boot-heels thumping slowly across the stone floor above as he paced in thought.

“Very tempting, indeed. But still not worth it,” he concluded after a moment. “No matter what happens, the past must stay hidden, and you had better assist me in this, after all I’ve done for you — ”

“Calm yourself! And don’t even think about threatening me. There’s no need to get

yourself into a snit,” she huffed. “If you want him dead, then dead the boy will be. But we have one small problem.”

“What’s that?”

“Not even my Seeing Bowl will show me where he is. The Kinderveil is still protecting him.”

“Is it? Well, if he is still cloaked by that old spell, at least the others won’t be able to find him, either. Even better, until it fully dissolves, his powers won’t be at full strength yet — and I say, we’d better kill him while we still can. Before long, he may be too powerful, if he’s anything like his father.”

“Well, how are we going to find him, then? Half the magical world is already out looking for the brat!”

“Don’t worry, the only one I need to find is Guardian Derek Stone. Poor, disgraced has-been,” he added with a sneer. “The Order is sure to send a messenger to summon the *great* warrior just as soon as they get a lead on where the boy is. Then Stone will rush to Jacob’s side to protect him. But we’ll beat him to the punch.”

“How?”

“Simple,” he said. “Intercept the message.” With that, the heavy door above creaked shut as the earl marched off to carry out his treacherous plan. The creature threw back its head and roared in useless fury.

As if the boy could hear.



Swift as a shooting star, a tiny shape no larger than a hummingbird zipped across the glowing face of Big Ben, then disappeared into the night sky in a trail of golden sparkles.

The fairy Gladwin flew at top speed to bring the Guardian his orders. Strapped across her back, the scrolled message she carried was only as big as a matchstick, but the news it bore was huge. The boy was alive!

The Lost Heir of Griffon had finally been spotted!

The sighting was confirmed. Captain Lydia Brackwater of the Thames water nymphs, of all people, had come face to face with him. Which was rather ironic, Gladwin thought, considering it was Lydia and her sisters who had lost the boy in the first place. Ah, but the watery folk could be shifty, unreliable. If you wanted something done right, ask a fairy, she thought stoutly.

In any case, young Jacob Everton was in more danger than he knew. He needed protection — the best the Order could provide. She raced on.

Far below, where Waterloo Bridge straddled a meander of the Thames, London shimmered with the lights of a spring night. Carriages with high-stepping horses rolled through the cobbled streets of the theatre district. Gentlemen in top hats escorted ladies in satin bustle-gowns to operas, fancy dinners, concerts, plays.

Here and there, through mansion windows, brilliant chandeliers lit up glittering ballrooms, where elegant couples waltzed and whirled — and most of them had no inkling of all the enchantment tucked into the byways and corners of their world.

Humans, Gladwin thought with a snort. Shaking her head to herself, she zoomed away from the city. The air tasted sweeter over the countryside. Instead of roofs and chimneys and a

maze of cramped streets, she now looked down on stone-walled meadows, where cows and sheep had bedded down for the night.

Frogs sang in the ponds. Owls hooted in the great, old trees, and the road was a pale ribbon winding through the gentle hills.

She sped toward the distant hilltop, where Guardian Derek Stone was believed to be encamped among the lonely ruins of an old abbey. Along the way, she noticed a thatched-roof tavern by the roadside and paused.

He had better not be in there, she thought, hovering over it with a frown. It did rather seem like the sort of disreputable place where the wandering warrior might like to get into a brawl. Rumor had it the tragedy surrounding this boy's parents had made the Guardian even meaner and more dangerous...

Deciding to hope for the best, Gladwin flew on. A few minutes later, she descended on a cautious angle over the treetops, approaching the hollowed stone shell of the ancient cathedral. Her iridescent wings beating at half-speed to slow her pace, she buzzed lower, gazing down at medieval columns tumbled to the ground and overgrown with weeds. Then she saw the place where Derek Stone had set up camp, but the Guardian was not at home.

"Oh, crocodile!" she whispered. Scowling, she alighted on the log where his worn leather knapsack leaned across from the extinguished campfire. *Humph! I knew he was in that pub! Well, he'd better get back soon.* She adjusted the message across her back, then folded her arms with a feisty little huff and proceeded to keep a lookout, marching back and forth along the log.

Fortunately, (because fairies are not known for their patience), she did not have long to wait. *About time!* Hearing someone approach, she turned, expecting to see the Guardian...but the man who stepped out of the shadows was not Derek Stone.

She gasped and with a flick of her wings darted for cover inside the hollow log. She peeped out through a knotty hole in the wood. *Who — what is that? A giant?*

Well, not that big, but almost.

The meaty bruiser marching into Derek's camp had a boxer's flattened nose and a bald head like a cannonball. Spotting her fairy trail still fading, he sneered in her direction. "Come out, little courier! You carry a message of interest to our master!"

Oh, no! Gladwin gulped, spotting a second man walking toward the log, and a third. *Ambushed.* Worse, a whiff of sulfur warned her they were servitors — magically created servants. *Not good.* Her heart began to pound.

An experienced messenger for the Order of the Yew Tree, however, she kept her wits about her. *I've got to get out of here.* Gliding silently through the dark tunnel of the old hollow log, she came out the other end and stayed low to the ground, weaving among the weeds and wildflowers.

Suddenly the tall grass parted and she nearly ran straight into a pair of giant knees looming right in front of her. "She's 'ere!" the ruffian boomed, trying to use his coat like a butterfly net, swiping at her.

She dodged aside in the nick of time.

She found herself surrounded, flying every which way for her life. She dove to the right, close enough to feel the breeze as another tried to catch her in his hat.

She flew a few inches higher on a diagonal. The next grab caught at her foot and sent her tumbling in a midair somersault. But she quickly righted herself and flew on, shaking her head to clear away the dizziness.

Only one clear path remained open: straight ahead. She raced forward at top speed, too

fast even for a Guardian's supernatural reflexes to catch her, but then — disaster.

Too late, she saw the spider web ahead.

She couldn't stop in time! She let out a cry, but the next thing she knew, she was trapped in a net of horrid, sticky strands.

Her arms were caught; she tried to kick free, but she was hopelessly glued. Then she looked up in dread as the hulking builder of the web crept toward her.

Brown and hairy with white spots, fat and bulbous in the moonlight, the huge spider fixed its many cold eyes eagerly upon her. "Heh, heh, fairy blood is fizzy-sweet like root-beer!"

"I say! Good boy, now. There's a nice spider. Let's not do anything hasty," she said with a gulp. "Won't you please free me from your web? I am not a fly, as you can see, and I-I really must be going." She shrieked when it hopped closer, much too agile on its eight long legs. "Stay back! I'm in the service of the Queen, I'll have you know!"

"Yummy yum!" the spider twittered in its clinkety arachnid voice.

But just as it opened its pincer fangs to bite her, the spider froze at the sound of a deep, cultured voice. "Now, now, Malwort, we discussed this. You are not to drink her. Fairies aren't food."

"Yesssss, Master." The disappointed spider backed away to a slightly safer distance.

With her cheek stuck on a strand of web, Gladwin could not turn her head to see who had spoken until the gentleman strolled into view. He wore a splendid long coat, despite the balmy temperature of the spring night. He swept off his top hat politely, revealing brown hair sculpted into waves by a shiny, crusted helmet of Macassar oil. "My, my. A royal garden fairy. What an honor," he said with a bow.

Ladies probably thought he was handsome, but his icy smile sent a chill all the way down to Gladwin's wingtips, and as he stared at her, his cold gray eyes held a faraway look, as though he were distracted, listening to some mad waltz forever playing in his head.

"Tasty morsel?" the spider whined.

"Of course. Excellent work, Malwort! You really are the cleverest spider in England." He tossed a large, stunned horsefly to the spider.

"Thaaaank you, oh, thank you, master!" Malwort ran off to fetch the fly, then huddled in the corner to devour it.

Gladwin winced. She looked at the sinister gentleman again and found him studying her intently, the moonlight gleaming on his ivory-handled walking stick. "Ah, you look surprised. My little pet there," he said. "Talking spider. Arachno-sapiens. They're very rare," he added with an arrogant little wave of his hand. "I acquired him in my travels."

He stepped closer and leaned down, inspecting her prettiest feature: her wings.

She was rather vain of them, in truth.

"Do forgive me for staring, little one." He let out a wistful sigh. "It's been a long time since I've seen one of your people. Beautiful thing. I shall enjoy adding you to my collection."

Collection? Gladwin looked at him in dread.

"Oxley, keep an eye out for the Guardian," he ordered the bald giant with a quick glance over his shoulder. "We must be gone before Stone arrives. Wouldn't want things to get — messy now, would we?"

"Aye, milord." The muscleman trudged off to watch the road for the dark and dangerous Derek Stone.

"Who are you? What do you want with me?" Gladwin demanded, but he just shook his head at her.

"I'm sorry, dear heart, but I don't speak bumblebee. I have no idea what you're saying,

and to be honest — I really don't care."

Gladwin scowled, but kept trying to fight free. Whoever he was, if he could not understand the fairy tongue, that meant he was an ordinary human and had no magic of his own.

"There, there, don't fret," he chided. "I'm not going to harm you. I just want to help you...with this heavy burden. Surely it's too much for you to carry, tiny as you are. I'll take *that*, if you don't mind."

"No!" She shook her head frantically as his giant hand came toward her, encased in a fine leather glove. He reached down with thumb and forefinger, and plucked the scroll away from where it was snugly secured between her wings. "Give that back!" *Oh, this is terrible!* thought Gladwin. "Help! Help! Derek Stone! Where are you?"

But there still was no sign of the once-heroic knight.

Guardian Derek Stone, in fact, was slumped on a barstool in the tavern, just as she had feared, nursing his pint of ale, and growling at anyone who came too close to him. The raucous music and the cheering around the farmers' arm-wrestling match nearby made it hard for him to hear the faint warning instinct beginning to sound the alarm in the back of his mind.

He was trying so hard to sense the boy's location, though he wasn't even sure his Guardian finding-instinct worked anymore. If only the rumor were true — if the kid was really alive, then maybe he wasn't an utter failure, despite how he had failed his dear friends, poor Jacob and Elizabeth. But it was no use.

The Kinderveil's powerful spell that protected all magical children from birth still clung on, cloaking their son's whereabouts. Meanwhile, his own dark, inward searching made Derek Stone oblivious to the disaster befalling the tiny fairy back at his camp.

Gladwin's heart pounded as she realized she was on her own in this.

She could do nothing but watch in helpless fury as the wicked stranger unrolled the message and read it. "So, it *is* true!" he murmured to himself. "My brother's brat survived, after all. I hardly believed it myself until this moment. Well! I have to see young Jacob for myself before he dies. Time to go!" he barked at his men.

Without warning, he pulled a jar out of his greatcoat pocket and scooped Gladwin into it, along with the sticky strands of spider web still hanging off her.

She flew up at once and rammed the lid furiously with her shoulder, but it was no use. She was trapped as he sealed the jar with a quick turn of the lid.

At least there were air-holes in it.

Then she was plunged into darkness as he put the jar in the pocket of his greatcoat. The world began to swing as he strode toward his carriage. "Come, men! We must get back to Town. Finally, I know where to look for the brat. Tomorrow, dawn, we'll start at the wharf and comb each city block north from there, until we find my so-called nephew. And when we do, we'll put an end to this foolish *rumor* that he's still alive."

His henchmen laughed at his ominous jest, but Gladwin pounded on the glass. "No! Leave him alone!" she cried in dread. "Hasn't the poor boy already been through enough?"

But they ignored her. Then she braced her hands on the glass to steady herself as the coach rolled into motion. She couldn't believe she had failed to deliver her message. What would become of the Lightriders' son? *Run, Jacob, if you want to live*, she thought. *Run and hide.*

They're coming for you next!

CHAPTER ONE

The Pickpocket

Harris the Pieman sold the best potpies in Covent Garden Market, famous for their flaky golden crust. His market stall was always thronged with hungry customers and surrounded by a cloud of the most delicious smells.

That morning, as usual, Mr. Harris was so busy collecting coins and wrapping up the beef or chicken potpies his customers demanded that he did not notice a very odd thing happening behind him.

A mincemeat pie had levitated itself off the top shelf of his shop for no apparent reason.

His customers also failed to observe this strange phenomenon, too busy jostling to be the next in line.

Quite unnoticed — minding its own business — the pie began floating toward the shop's back door, which had been left open to admit the cool morning air. Bobbing along, the escaping pie glided out the back door...and landed in the waiting hands of a boy.

An extraordinarily hungry boy of twelve, with a tangled forelock of dirty blond hair, sooty smudges on his cheeks, a devilish gleam in his blue eyes, and the survival instincts of a feral alley cat.

His name was Jake, and he'd had nothing to eat in two days except an apple core he'd snatched away from some hansom cabdriver's horse. But now...*ha!*

With a laugh under his breath, he plucked the pie out of the air, maneuvered it under his shabby coat, and ran.

Only one thought thudded in his mind, a very drumbeat from his stomach: *Eat, eat, eat!*

Blimey, he should have done this days ago, except the carrot-head had made him promise not to use his odd new powers to steal.

Of course, he knew it was wrong to take what didn't belong to him, but after a while, a lad's belly tended to win out over conscience.

Now, if he could just get rid of his conscience altogether, thought Jake, he could eat and wear and own whatever he liked, thanks to his unexpected new abilities.

Where they came from, what it meant, he did not know and could not afford to care.

So he could see ghosts.

So he could move things with his mind — though not very well yet — he was still learning. The whole thing had only started about a week ago.

But considering the advantages this new talent suddenly gave him as one of London's most notorious boy-thieves, he was not about to ask too many questions. All he knew was that his never-ending struggle to survive as an orphan on the streets of Queen Victoria's London had suddenly grown a whole lot easier.

With that, he dodged off into the colorful chaos of the endless market, and nobody paid him any mind.

Everywhere, from stalls and shops, barrows and hand-carts, the hawkers, hucksters, and peddlers sought to move their wares. There were bone-grubbers and lamplighters; floozies, flower-girls, and fortune-tellers; quacks proclaiming the amazing health benefits of potions they'd invented. Dilapidated gentlemen sold castoffs from the gentry, while a lady offered a litter of baby weasels that she said would grow into excellent pest removers, and help to eat the beetles in your house.

There were broomstick menders and candlestick makers; dealers in bonnets, braces, and bootlaces; secondhand sellers of every kind of useless junk imaginable.

More importantly, there was food, all sorts of glorious food. Vendors in open stalls were selling anything you could want to eat.

If you had the money.

Jake did not, nor did his many acquaintances running around the place — assorted ragtag orphans, beggar children, and junior pickpockets hard at work, ducking low as they wove through the crowd, grabbing whatever edibles opportunity granted and disappearing again before anyone noticed.

All the while, beneath the soaring steel beams of the market's great roof, the costermongers' familiar chants resounded:

"Hoy, turr-r-nips! Cabbages! Cabbages and turnips!"

"Sweet pears, eight a penny! Who'll buy my pears?"

"Cheery cherries, sound and round!"

"Pineapples from the glasshouse! Luxury for your table, madam? Favorite of the gentry!"

"Get your oranges 'ere, sweet and juicy!"

"War-nuts, roasted war-nuts!" a Cockney woman yelled out in a hoarse singsong.

Beside her, the dairymaids were selling milk straight from their stinky cow. Farther on, the baked potato man was doing a lively business. The butcher's stall displayed a row of little headless carcasses hung upside down: rabbits, pigeons, chickens for the stewpot.

"Sheep's feet! Get your trotters here, hot or cold!"

"Jellied eels! Pickled whelks!" The snail shells clattered as the fisherman turned them over with a large metal scoop. These, of course, were not as popular as London fish and chips wrapped in brown paper. With a bit of vinegar squirted on top, it was a meal fit for a king, or a savvy young prince of the rookery like himself.

Jake strode on, protecting the pie under his jacket. He arranged his grubby red scarf over it to help hide it.

Meanwhile, curious entertainment punctuated the end of every aisle he passed. A bamboo-flute player of Asian origins piped an exotic tune. Farther down, some ne'er-do-well was mesmerizing his dupes with sleight-of-hand tricks. And beyond him, a blind beggar sang soulful hymns, thanking the people when he heard the shillings drop into his hat.

The acrobat family was throwing each other around beneath the rotunda. Closer by, a strolling actress past her prime was chilling her audience with a dramatic reading of the last dying speeches of notorious criminals recently gone to the gallows.

But if there was a warning for Jake in the moral of her tale, it was lost on him as he went by at top speed, trying to look natural.

Cool-nerved as ever, he headed for the market's northern exit in order to avoid his mustachioed nemesis, Constable Flanagan.

"Spice cakes! Gingerbread here! Fresh-baked crumpets! Get 'em while they're hot!"

“Penny pies! Plum duff! Who’ll try my puddings?”

“Pippins ‘ere!” a familiar, high-pitched voice yelled out in the crowd. “Shiny apples, red or green! Now’s your chance, pick ‘em out cheap! — Jake? Hoy! Jakey!”

He froze. Blast it, the carrot-head had seen him! He mouthed a silent curse. It was just his luck she’d spotted him now; she’d catch him red-handed.

“Jake! Where are you goin’?” she called. Nosy! He never could decide if Dani O’Dell was all right or the bane of his existence.

He could hear her coming up closer behind him. Hesitating, he did not turn around at once, debating with himself. What to do, what to do.

If he greeted her, she’d notice him acting suspicious and would realize he’d broken his promise not to steal. But if he tried to ignore her, that would only raise her Irish temper; she’d yell the louder, and all the world would turn and look, and Flanagan would be on him in a trice. It seemed he had no choice.

Bracing himself, Jake slowly turned around and tried to look innocent, like any respectable citizen.

It didn’t work.

Dani O’Dell was ten years old, with chestnut hair, smart green eyes, and a smattering of freckles, and though he would not have admitted it under torture, she was the only soul in this rotten old world that he trusted, along with maybe her stupid dog.

As usual, her tiny brown Norwich terrier, Teddy, poked his head out of the old canvas sack Dani wore strapped across her back. Teddy yipped eagerly when he saw Jake — and smelled mincemeat pie somewhere close.

But Dani’s eyes narrowed, homing in at once on the round shape underneath his coat. She set her wheelbarrow down and folded her arms across her chest. “What are you up to, Jake Reed?”

“Huh, what?”

“What’re ye hidin’ under your coat?” she demanded.

As if she were his mother.

Jake knew from experience it was no use lying to her. With her drunken, superstitious Da and her tribe of wild, brawling, elder brothers, Dani O’Dell was the only honest one in her family. Long before her Ma had died and left her in charge, she had learned to smell a lie a mile away.

The thought of her rowdy teenage brothers and how they were of no help to her at all, but treated her like their maid and snatched any food away she tried to bring home, well, that and the ragged sight of her, just as hungry and desperate as he, made Jake relent all of a sudden.

The mincemeat pie was big enough to share, after all, and really, he was so proud of his accomplishment, stealing it by magic, that he could not resist a chance to boast. “Oh, nothing. Just this.” He opened his coat, quick, sly, and secretive, and flashed a cocky smile.

Her green eyes widened like the starboard lanterns on a ship; her freckles turned to dark dots as her face went pale. She reached out and shut his jacket with a frightened glance around. “You promised!” she whispered angrily. “You can’t just steal for a livin’, Jake Reed! The magistrate’s already given ye two chances!”

She launched into one of her grand rants, but oddly enough, Jake didn’t mind her scolding. In a strange way, it comforted him somehow. It showed that at least somebody out there cared if he lived or died.

“You think one night in the Clink was bad?” she cried. “That was only to teach you a lesson, ye daftling! They catch you thievin’ again, they’re gonna hang ye!”

“But I didn’t *steal* it, eh?” He couldn’t wipe the grin off his face. “It just floated over to me, like. If something comes over and puts itself in your hands, that’s not the same as stealin’.”

“Mother Mary!” Dani made the sign of the cross. “I told ye not to trifle with them powers! It could be the work o’ the devil!”

He scoffed. “It’s not the work of the devil, you nit. It’s just a bit o’ fun. Now you want a slice or not?”

Dani O’Dell fell silent, arguing with herself, Jake supposed. With her conscience. She tried to be the conscience of them both.

Her little brown dog, of course, had no such scruples. Teddy leaned eagerly over her shoulder, his black nose twitching at top speed to sniff out the hidden food.

Dani still hadn’t given him an answer, buying time as she tried to fight temptation. “Now you’ll get the headache,” she reproached him with a sullen look.

Jake shrugged. It was true. He had learned by trial and error that each time he exercised his inexplicable new abilities, it soon left him with a splitting headache, feeling weak and wobbly, drained.

He was already starting to feel that way now.

All the more reason to get to a safe place fast. Somewhere he could gorge himself in peace without worrying about Harris the Pieman seeing him, or that blasted Constable Flanagan. *Right.* “You comin’ or not?”

She lifted her chin bravely. “I’ll have no truck with stolen goods. It ain’t respectable.”

He snorted. “Suit yourself.” Stubborn carrot-head. Scowling and rather insulted that she turned up her nose at his offering, Jake turned away, but then he suddenly felt a small tug on his sleeve.

“Mister Jake!”

He glanced down at the little orphan boy in dirty overalls who had just run over to them. “Aye, what is it, Petey?” he mumbled, suffering an odd twinge from his not-quite-dead conscience.

He hoped the little fellow hadn’t seen him stealing.

Petey was only six years old and quite looked up to him. Jake didn’t want to set a bad example. (And he really didn’t want to have to share.)

He eyed his young colleague in question.

“There’s some people over there lookin’ for you, Jake!” Petey informed him. “Thought you’d want to know.”

“Lookin’ for me?” he echoed in surprise. “Who?”

“Don’t know, sir! But they don’t seem right. See ’em? Over there, by the flower girl.”

“Probably Constable Flanagan,” Dani remarked, folding her arms across her chest like a know-it-all.

“No, miss. Not the bobbies. Them blokes over there,” Petey said. “They’ve been askin’ all the kids if anyone’s seen you.”

Jake and Dani both peered in the direction that Peter’s grubby finger pointed. Jake furrowed his brow.

He noticed the strangers at once because they looked so out of place. A tall, elegant gentleman in a black top hat was speaking to the children, shielding his nose from the offending smells around him with a handkerchief. The stranger wore a long, fine coat and carried a fancy walking stick in his hand. Around him were a trio of bruisers, including a bald-headed muscleman that must have been six- and-a-half feet tall.

Dani glanced at Jake in worry, then looked at Petey. “What do they want with ‘im?”

The small boy shrugged. "Did one of 'em used to be your 'prentice master, Jake? That coal-factory owner or one of them others that used to beat you?"

Jake shook his head with an ominous feeling. He didn't like the look of this at all. "I've never seen them before," he murmured, already backing away. "I'd better get out of here. Tell 'em I went that way." He pointed to the left but intended to go to the right.

"Will do, Jake!" Pete said cheerfully, and then ran off to carry out his orders.

Jake turned to Dani, gesturing to her to bend down with him behind her wheeled cart. She did. He angled the potpie furtively out of his coat. "Hide this for me. Bring it you-know-where. I'm going to find out what this toff wants, then I'll meet you there, and we'll share it."

"Jake!" she protested in a whisper. "I ain't taking yer contraband! I could get in trouble! Then who'll take care of Teddy?"

"Well, I can't get caught with it!" he shot back in a whisper. "If they catch *me* with it, I'll be sent to Newgate!"

"Ha! So you admit I was right and you were wrong!"

"Just take it," he ordered.

She huffed and fumed, but finally did him the favor, secreting the precious pie away behind the canvas drape concealing the lower shelf of her apple-cart. "One of these days, Jake Reed, you're goin' to get me killed. Go on, get out of here," she urged, nodding toward the exit. "And be careful. I don't like the look o' them people."

"Me, neither." Jake nodded in farewell, then he stayed low as he crept away from her cart.

When it seemed safe, he stood up and continued moving stealthily toward the end of the aisle. Who the blazes was after him now? he wondered. He did not intend to stick around and find out.

More worried than he had let on, he pulled the brim of his drab cap lower to shade his eyes and turned up the collar of his threadbare coat to help conceal his face.

Hands in pockets, he wove nimbly through the crowd.

Confident that he could get away with ease as he had so many times, he paused to peer back around the corner at the strangers.

Suddenly, the gentleman in the long coat spotted him. Quite without meaning to, Jake locked eyes with him. The stranger started forward with a look of shocked recognition. "Jacob?" he yelled.

Jake's eyes widened. *He knows me?*

But if twelve years of life had taught him anything, it was that anytime someone called him 'Jacob' rather than just plain Jake, it spelled trouble.

"There! There he is, Oxley!" The gentleman pointed, nudging his bald giant. "Bring that boy to me. Go!"

In the next moment, the mighty muscleman was charging at him like a bull, his two helpers following. Shoppers went flying out of their way as the black-clad strangers plowed through the crowd.

Jake stared at them, motionless for a second from pure shock. "Blimey," he breathed.

Then he ran for his life.

CHAPTER TWO

A Family Resemblance

Abandoning all attempt at stealth, Jake tore off through the market. He leaped a barrel, ducked behind a stack of clucking crated chickens, then sprinted past the tulip lady.

“Stop that boy! Stop, thief!”

He glared over his shoulder as Harris the Pieman joined the fox-hunt. Rushing out of his stall, he pointed after Jake. “Constable Flanagan! It’s that blasted Reed boy again!”

The next thing he knew, the bobbies were blowing their whistles fiercely, on the chase. Jake cursed, inspired by the thought of Newgate Prison to move with even greater speed. He zipped around stalls, dodged under display stands, spooked the donkey hitched to the tea-cart as he vaulted a row of hay bales, and scrambled on.

Racing out into the wide, open square around the market, he finally found a bit of luck. Dani’s wild elder brothers were loitering out on the benches with their gang and their dollymop girls — as bad grownup troublemakers as he was the junior sort.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John O’Dell usually gave him an affectionate smack in the head when they saw him, but this was sport the Irish boy-o’s could appreciate. “Run, Jakey-lad! Give ‘em what-for! Go, go!”

They laughed and cheered him on as he ran past, then helpfully misdirected Constable Flanagan and his bobbies.

The O’Dell boys ignored the black-clad thugs, but surely, Jake thought, the strangers would not dare follow him into the rough rookery neighborhood.

It was a treacherous place to go if you didn’t belong, with many shady characters lurking about. Here the tall apartment buildings crowded together, turning the narrow streets into dim, shadowed canyons.

Jake’s running footfalls echoed off the grimy brick walls. Only a few people were around, but when the rookery folk sensed trouble, they closed their doors and pulled their dirty curtains shut.

“*Jacob!*” The gentleman’s voice rang into the street behind him. “It *is* you, isn’t it?”

Blazes, why are they still following me?

“Jacob, please, I only want to talk to you!”

“Leave me alone!” he hollered back in fury. Every wily street instinct in him warned him not to believe the man’s effort to sound friendly. He felt a slight temptation to find out what they wanted, but his better sense told him just to run. And so he did, bolting down the street.

“Get back here, you brat!” the man snarled.

Ha, thought Jake, his head starting to pound after using his strange talent to steal the

pie. He tried to blink the throbbing pain away and barreled on, but the dizziness was getting worse.

At the four-way intersection, he ducked into the alley to the right. Just around the corner, he pressed his back against the wall; chest heaving, he glanced around, needing some kind of distraction to shake them off.

He hesitated to use his powers again, knowing it would only add to his sick feeling. But what choice did he have?

He brought up his hand just like he had practiced back at his hideaway. He concentrated on a distant garbage bin and summoned up all his mental focus.

Pah! He suddenly flung his fingers like you might flick water droplets off your hand. At once, the garbage bin clattered onto its side as if someone had kicked it.

A dog began barking at the disturbance.

The ruse worked. His pursuers raced off in the direction of the noise. At once, he pressed away from the wall and continued running down the alley to the right.

Unfortunately, it didn't take long for the strangers to realize the trail had gone cold.

That chilling, elegant voice echoed off the maze of brick alleyways. "We're not dealing with any ordinary boy, you fools. Find him!"

No ordinary boy? Jake was starting to feel seriously woozy, but these words drew him up short.

It sounded as if the stranger already knew of his secret abilities. But how? Aside from Dani, he had told no one, and though she was a girl, the carrot-head could keep a secret. Fact was, she didn't want word of this getting out anymore than he did, for if the local gangs found out what he could do, they'd soon be forcing him to join them.

That was a fate that Jake had been doing his best to avoid. It was probably his destiny to join the criminals, but for now, he held out some small, dwindling hope that life might still have something better in store for him.

"There he is! After him! Go!"

Uttering a choice curse under his breath, Jake raced on. He dashed off down another alley, past a bleak, noisy factory belching steam and smoke into the air, but the piercing headache was growing so strong it was starting to make him downright queasy.

While the pistons and machines inside the factory churned and clamored, he drew on his powers one last time to knock over a pile of barrels, creating a temporary blockade behind him.

The barrels tumbled and rolled, clogging the tight alley; it would not stop his pursuers, but it should slow them down. Then he knew he had to find a place to hide. He wasn't sure how much longer he could keep running. The world began to spin, the alley walls closing in on him as he staggered on, pushing off the dirty brick buildings.

He lurched along, zigzagging, his chest heaving. With his head pounding so, his vision grew blurry and distorted; and when the ghost of an old beggar appeared without warning, it startled him so much he nearly shrieked.

"Wait!" it moaned, holding up a bluish-gray, transparent hand to stop him.

Jake ignored the spirit, nearly running through it. Cheese it, he had no time for conversation with the dead right now!

His second odd new ability — seeing ghosts — didn't give him headaches like the other bit, but he could hardly say he was used to it. It was not exactly normal, after all, seeing spirits of the dead — and in London, they were everywhere. Chatty lot, they were! Always wanting to talk and talk and tell him everything that was none of his business.

He tried to pretend he had not seen the ghost and forced himself to keep running toward

the turn ahead. The apparition materialized again a few feet ahead of him — an old, homeless beggar with icicles hanging off his nose.

Poor old man must've frozen to death some cold winter's night in one of these back alleys.

"Not that way, boy!" the spirit warned in a thin, quavering voice. But it was too late.

Jake had already stumbled into the nearest turn.

A dead end!

A brick wall too high to climb blocked the garbage-strewn space. He glanced around in panic, looking for his next escape.

The back doors of the tenement houses on each side of the alley were boarded up. Broken windows yawned above, out of reach. There was no way out except the way he had come in, but the strangers were right behind him.

Jake whirled around.

At that moment, the bald giant appeared in the opening. His face was red from the chase. "We got him now, sir!" he panted, calling back over his shoulder as his two helpers joined him.

The first was a little rat-faced weasel of a man with a scrawny mustache; the other, a pale white bruiser with flame-red hair that stuck straight up. They, too, were winded, but they lined up on either side of the big fellow, blocking the mouth of the alley so he could not get out.

Trapped.

Jake swallowed hard, but was puzzled by a whiff of sulfur on the air, probably coming from that factory.

"Well, well. You're a slippery one, aren't you, my lad?" The elegant gentleman was the last to arrive on the scene. Slightly out of breath, he strolled up behind his men, blotting the sweat from his face with a handkerchief. "You've led us on a merry chase."

"What do you want with me?" Jake demanded, holding on to his bravado even as he backed away.

The lordly fellow laughed. "Ah, well, call me sentimental, but I suppose I just wanted to have a look at my closest living kin before we kill you, my dear lad."

Jake's jaw dropped. He heard the threat against his life, but it did not hold the slightest interest for him compared to the other word the man had used.

Kin?!

The stranger stalked closer. "Impressive display back there. So, you inherited the *Fernwirkung*, I see."

"What?"

"The *Fernwirkung*. The old German name for your gift, of course. But if you prefer the Classical languages, you can call it telekinesis."

"Tele-ka-what?" he echoed, rather bewildered.

"Tele: Latin, meaning 'at a distance.' Kinesis: Greek for 'motion.'" Then he shook his head with a bit of a sneer. "I should have known you'd get it. You even look like him."

"Like who?" he exclaimed, all the more bewildered.

"It's whom," the toff corrected, but did not answer this question, either. "Tell me, do you have your mother's gifts, as well, hmm? See any ghosts around, my clever boy?"

Jake floundered, overwhelmed. "You knew my mother?" he asked in amazement. "Who was she? Please!" As a foundling, he knew nothing of his parents.

The director of the orphanage where he had spent most of his childhood had had no information on them, not their names, their situation in life — or, more importantly, why they hadn't kept him. Had they wanted to get rid of him because they didn't love him, or had something terrible happened to them?

Jake wasn't sure which was worse, but the question chafed like a permanent splinter stuck deep in his heart.

Whoever they were, he had no clue of his origins except the baby bib embroidered with his first name, Jacob, and a necklace, a simple black cord with a small seashell on it. It had been draped around his neck when he'd been found eleven years ago. Some kindly fisherman had spotted him — a baby in a basket, floating down the mighty River Thames, happily gurgling to himself while the giant ships lumbered past.

The basket had been made of willow reeds, which was why the orphanage staff had thought it hilarious to give him the last name "Reed."

His real last name was anybody's guess.

"Do you know me?" he cried, hating the plaintive sound of his own voice as the pain slipped out. "Please, sir! Tell me who I am!"

The toff smirked, but took a measure of pity on him. "Only the son of the most arrogant fool I've ever known — and a thief, to boot. Like father, like son, I see. Still, it's nothing personal against you, dear nephew. How could it be? I don't even know you. You seem a fine, plucky lad and all that, but I'm afraid you're much too dangerous for me to leave alive. Trust me, it's better this way." He glanced at the bald giant while Jake was still marveling. "Carry on."

"Aye, milord."

"What of his powers, sir?" the rat-faced one asked nervously.

"Oh, he's out of steam. Look at him. Rather green about the gills, eh, Jacob? Oh, yes, I know all about it. Pity you won't live long enough to learn how to control it."

"Wait, please!" Jake cried, at a loss. "Y-you called me nephew. Is that true? Are you my uncle?"

"Do I look like the sort of fellow who'd lie to a doomed soul?" he countered in pleasant sarcasm.

Anger flashed through him at the man's cruelty. "Fine, then! Be like that! I don't believe you, anyway! I don't even *want* to be related to you, you glocky bloomin' mumper!"

The toff furrowed his brow at the street-language insult, but smiled in curious amusement. "You have some spirit, lad. I'll give you that. Almost remind me of myself when I was your age. But it doesn't change my mind. Adieu." He continued strolling away.

"Hey!" Jake yelled, growing increasingly nervous. "Hey, Uncle! Runnin' away, you nancy? Where are ye going?" he demanded, trying to stall and hopefully, delay his doom.

"Where am I going?" His supposed uncle laughed again in his haughty, annoying way. He turned around, his jaw clenched, a brief flash of fire in his eyes. "Do you really want to know?"

"Aye! I asked you, didn't I?"

"I am going back — urchin — to enjoying my life as the sixth Earl of Griffon, actually. You didn't think I'd give up all that power and privilege just because you somehow managed to survive all those years ago, now did you? Terribly sorry, m'boy, but there can only be one Lord Griffon at a time, and that distinction belongs at present to my more-worthy self. Cheerio, then! Give my regards to your parents, Jacob. You'll be seeing them soon."

Jake stared at him. *My parents?*

Turning to his men, the Earl of Griffon added in a lower, harder tone, "Be quick about it. And quiet. I'm getting out of here. It won't do for me to be seen, just in case. Report to me later, after it's done."

"Aye, milord, don't you worry about that," the bald one said. "We'll get the job done, lickety-split."

“See that you do.” Lord Griffon cast Jake one final glance, cold but pitying, then he pivoted on his heel and marched out of the alley.

When he had gone, his three henchmen drew out large, gleaming knives.

Then they started closing in on Jake.

CHAPTER THREE

A Knight of the Order

Jake continued backing away. Unfortunately, the Earl of Griffon was right: His powers were out of steam.

Frankly, after all these years of being an orphan without any kin, he was in shock that he had an uncle at all — an earl, no less! He had never dreamed he might be related to such lofty stock. Of course, it figured that his one living relative would want to kill him upon making his acquaintance. He'd had the same effect on his apprentice masters, strangely.

At any rate, despite feeling weak and sick enough to puke from using his powers, the threat of impending doom rather helped to clear a person's head.

Heart pounding, Jake took a quick glance around, scanning the alley for any sort of weapon. At once, he reached down and grabbed the smooth end of a broken bottle, threatening his approaching attackers with the jagged end.

They just laughed.

Suddenly furious, Jake hurled the bottle at the bald giant. The big man ducked and it flew past him.

Jake took two, three steps backwards, then out of the corner of his eye, spotted another possible weapon. He dove to retrieve it, bringing it up in both hands — a sturdy board with a big rusty nail sticking out of the end.

"Come on, baldy, I ain't afraid o' you!" he yelled.

Rough laughter followed. "Aye, he's a right plum goer, ain't he? Have at it, little master."

"Ho!" the flame-haired fellow cried, mocking him as Jake swung the board again like a cricket bat, trying to warn them back.

The old beggar ghost materialized again behind the earl's henchmen. He shook his head, looking on in worry. "You're small enough — try to dodge past them!"

"How am I supposed to do that?" Jake retorted.

"Do what?" the rat-face echoed. "Who's he talkin' to?"

"I dunno. Kid's loony," said the redhead.

"Mind your own business!" Jake spat.

"Our business is killin' you, little lordling," said the big one. "So come on and be a good lad. Let's get it over with, like your uncle said."

"Don't worry, Master Jacob," the rat-face chimed in, brandishing his knife. "We'll make it nice and quick for you. You won't feel a thing, hardly."

Gulp.

They laughed.

I'm going to die.

“Get him,” the big one muttered.

Jake gasped as his back suddenly came up flat against the brick wall. He had retreated as far as he could go, and there was no way out.

He braced himself to meet his Maker, briefly wishing that he had behaved himself just a wee bit better in his short, unlucky life.

But just before he squeezed his eyes shut for the death-blow, a flutter of motion overhead made him glance up.

His eyes widened as a large, fierce-looking man leaped out of an open window above and came hurtling down, landing with a lion-like pounce atop the brick wall behind Jake’s back.

From there, he leaped again, his long hair flying free of his dark hood, his black duster coat billowing behind him. He slammed down squarely into the alley between Jake and his uncle’s henchmen. With one smooth motion, he reached under his coat with both hands clad in fingerless gloves, and pulled out a pair of large, murderous knives.

Before the thugs could recover from their shock, he let out a roar and attacked them.

They fell into chaos before this one-man army. The stranger whirled like a bladed top; he thrust, he leaped; he ran a few steps up the side of the brick wall, vaulted into a spin, and kicked the rat-faced henchman in the head.

Jake watched him with his mouth hanging open.

“What are you still doing here, you fool?” The warrior sent Jake an impatient glance over his shoulder. “Don’t just stand there. Run!”

Jake jerked to attention, ready to obey — possibly for the first time in his life.

This was not the sort of man whose orders you ignored.

Unfortunately, while the fight raged, three against one, Jake couldn’t manage to slip away. The space was too narrow. He glanced around for another exit from the alley.

Spotting another garbage can nearby, he dragged it over to the wall, turned it upside-down, and climbed on it.

Clutching the top of the brick wall, he started to pull himself up, but the old beggar ghost suddenly pointed, behind him, yelling, “Look out!”

Jake glanced over his shoulder just as the bald giant, Oxley, hurled a knife at him. But the warrior also saw.

He grabbed his nearest opponent, the rat-faced man, and swung him around to block the flying blade. It shuddered to a halt in the rat-man’s back; he let out a garbled squeak.

The warrior threw him aside. “Keep going, Everton!” he ordered as he stalked toward the bald giant.

“Everton?” Jake whispered with a tingle down his spine. “Why does everyone keep calling me that?”

It was the same name the watery woman had called him when he had gone mudlarking a few days ago...

After promising Dani that he’d try not to steal, he had hoped to find a little something he could pawn in order to buy food. Taking off his old, holey boots, he had rolled up his trouser legs and waded into the Thames at low tide, hunting for any valuables people might have dropped into the river. You never knew what might wash up in the mud.

Coins, watches, brooches, jeweled cravat pins. These were the holy grail. You could eat for a month if you found some such lost trinket. Just bring it to the pawnshop and collect your reward.

Of course, all the starving mudlark children ever really found was trash. Hope sprang eternal, but instead of gold coins, they usually found dead fish heads, old broken bottles, and

bits of rotting rope from passing ships.

But that day, Jake had found more than what he had bargained for — which was why he was not going anywhere near the Thames ever again. For, as he had learned from shocking firsthand experience, there were weird ladies living in the river.

Underneath the water.

No one else seemed aware of this. He wouldn't have believed it himself if he had not come face to face with one while peering down into the lazy brown current trying to make his fortune.

He had blinked and there she was — a strange lady floating underneath the waves, sort of treading water.

She had looked at him and he had looked at her and both gasped. That was when he knew he must be truly losing his marbles, bats in the belfry, mad as a March hare.

She had had long, purplish hair and a fine-featured face with skin as pale as the inside of a cockleshell; she had been dressed in full battle regalia over a pale, floaty, toga sort of gown, like an ancient goddess.

A strange, faraway song had echoed in his head as Jake had stood there staring at her with his mouth hanging open, while the dirty Thames water slogged round his knees.

He had not known if he should try to save the creature from drowning, or if she might try to bite him like an eel.

Before he could decide, she had pointed at him, her dark-green fingernail just breaking the surface of the waves. “*You!*” she had uttered, her voice bubbling up to him in tones of shocked recognition. “*Everton!*”

“What?” he had burst out, astonished.

“Hoy, Jakey! Find somethin' good?” one of the other children had cried, noticing him staring down at the water in amazement. He had glanced over, still dazed by the impossible encounter.

The other kids were already hopping-running-splashing through the shallows to see if he had found a treasure, but when he looked down again, she was gone.

Everton? he had wondered all night long, tossing and turning in his hideaway. Why would she call him that? He had never heard that name before.

But it had eventually struck him there could be no lady living in the river. That didn't make any sense.

A person had to breathe. Which meant he was either so hungry that he had been hallucinating, or he had finally gone nicky in the head and would be locked up in the horrid lunatic asylum if anyone found out.

Jake could not abide being locked up anywhere. Whatever misfortunes he'd suffered, at least he was as free as a bird. Intent on staying that way, he had coolly backed away from that spot in the river, leaving his comrades to help themselves to whatever hidden valuables remained.

Climbing back up onto the docks, he had wiped the mud off his feet as fast as he could, pulled his boots back on, and fled.

And now this wild warrior, appearing out of nowhere, dropping out of the blasted sky, had just called him the same name. *Everton...*

Jake suddenly understood. Of course! *Idiots.* He jumped off the garbage can with a scowl. “You've got the wrong person, all of you!” he shouted, gesturing angrily at them. “My name's not *Everton*. I'm just Jake Reed!”

Nobody listened.

They kept on fighting, two against one now — until all of a sudden, the shrill, familiar

notes of Constable Flanagan's police whistle pierced the air.

The bald giant and the red-haired henchman exchanged a look of alarm. "The bobbies are comin'! Let's get out of 'ere!"

They fled the alley, but when the warrior started to run after them, Jake cried out, "Wait! Please!"

The intimidating fellow turned around, his chest heaving from exertion. "What are you still doing here?" he growled.

"Who *are* you?"

"Derek Stone is my name — but it doesn't matter who I am. What matters is who *you* are. I was sent to protect you, Jacob. That's all you need to know for now. No time." He wiped off his blade. "Can you get yourself to the Strand from here?"

Jake scoffed at the question. "Of course!"

"Good. Go there, now. Find Beacon House, beside the river. The people there will help you. Just tell them I sent you and that you're the little scoundrel everyone's looking for."

"Me? Who's lookin' for me? What are you talkin' about?"

"Just do it!" he said in exasperation, turning to stare toward the approaching sound of the bobby's whistle.

The police were on their way.

"Well, what are *you* going to do, then?" Jake demanded, though he barely knew where he got the nerve to question the tall, mean-eyed barbarian.

"I'm going to hunt those servitors down and finish this," he said grimly, "or they'll just keep coming after you. Now go! Lord, you're as stubborn as your father."

With that, Derek Stone ran out of the alley.

Jake stared after him, shocked yet again. *He knew my father?* His mind swirled with countless questions. Then he shook his head to himself. *Servitors?* he wondered. *He must've meant to say servants.* Then Jake snapped out of his daze, hearing the policemen around the corner.

Lord knew he could not afford to cross paths with the bobbies. Rushing back to the overturned garbage can, he used it to hoist himself over the wall.

He had just dropped out of sight on the other side when the bobbies arrived in a flurry of pounding footsteps.

From Constable Flanagan's whistle, there came a piercing shrill. "You there!" the mustachioed sergeant shouted. "Halt, in the name of the law!"

Thankfully, they weren't talking to him for once.

"Stop him! You there! Get that man surrounded!"

"Blimey, he's climbin' up the wall, sir!"

Running footsteps.

"Quickly! Pull his feet!"

"Oof!"

On the other side of the wall, Jake heard the sounds of large men diving into a heap, like in a rugby match, grunts and curses.

"Hold him, I say! We've got you now, you ruffian!"

"How'd ye run up the side of a bloody wall like that?" one of the bobbies cried.

Jake wished he could see what was happening. He listened for all he was worth.

"All right, all right. Let him up, men." Flanagan's stern, no-nonsense voice was familiar. "Let's see what he has to say for himself. Where do you think you're on about, you, climbin' up the side of a wall like a blasted spider?"

“Easy, boys,” a deep baritone rumbled in response.

When Jake heard Derek Stone’s voice and realized the bobbies had indeed caught him, he could have kicked himself for delaying the warrior with his questions.

“Armed to the teeth, he is, sir!”

“So I see,” Constable Flanagan replied. “Drop your weapons, you! Put your hands up! Now!”

“Sir, look! He’s got blood on him!”

“Keep him surrounded, lads. How’d you get that blood on you, eh?”

“I, ah, cut myself,” Derek answered in a bored tone.

“Right. Mister, you better put them weapons down, nice and slow.”

“All right, all right, take it easy,” Derek soothed.

“Don’t you ‘take it easy’ me! I’m placing you under arrest!”

“For what?” Derek retorted.

“Disturbin’ the peace! Don’t know yet what you’ve done, but you’re up to no good, by the look o’ you. An innocent man don’t run when he’s told to halt!”

At that moment, thankfully, Jake discovered a chink in the mortar between two bricks. He leaned down, spying through it. A knot formed in his stomach as he watched the policemen encircling Derek Stone.

He bent down slowly, calmly, to place his weapons on the ground, as instructed.

Meanwhile, closer by, one of the bobbies came poking around in the alley where they had fought. He stopped with a gasp. “Constable Flanagan, sir, come quick! There’s a dead man here with a knife in his back!”

Flanagan pointed at Derek in fury. “Arrest him, now!”

The warrior let out a sigh as all the bobbies rushed him. Jake looked on, aghast, as the policemen piled atop the rude hero who had saved his life, while those who had attacked him were nowhere to be seen.

From under the pile of policemen, Derek cursed, but Jake noticed he did not lift a finger to fight off the bobbies the way he’d thrashed the other three. Dangerous as he was, at least he seemed to have a clear idea of who was good or bad.

“Jenkins, bring the handcuffs!” Flanagan ordered. “Shackle his ankles, too! Fletcher, comb the alley for any clues of what went on here.”

“Yes, sir!”

When the officers backed away, Derek was on his stomach on the ground, his wrists bound behind him, his dark mane hanging in his angry face.

Flanagan proudly dusted off his hands and gave Derek an insolent nudge with his toe. “You’re a murderer, aren’t you.” It was more of a statement than a question. “Why don’t you confess right now and save us the trouble? We both know you’re goin’ to hang for this.”

Jake paled.

“It’s not how it looks,” Derek said.

“If I had a penny for each time I heard that! Why’d you kill him, eh?”

“Didn’t.”

“I don’t see anyone else ‘round here that could’ve done it. Stabbed him right in the back, didn’t you?”

“Nah, not my style,” Derek growled.

Flanagan looked appalled at this. “What are you, some sort of monster?”

Derek laughed darkly. “Something like that,” he snarled back, which even Jake knew wasn’t smart.

Clunk. The sound of a skull getting a whack of the nightstick. The London police never did seem to appreciate sarcasm, as Jake himself had learned the hard way.

A few minutes later, they threw Derek into the police wagon that had been summoned, a heavy black carriage fortified with metal bars.

Through the chink in the brick wall, Jake watched, appalled, as they drove Derek Stone away. *Oh, this is terrible! What am I going to do?* He couldn't remember the last time an adult had actually helped him.

He wasn't fond of them as a species, but this Stone fellow had just risked his neck for him and got arrested for his pains, no doubt to be charged with murder and, with Jake's luck, probably sent to the gallows.

And it's all my fault.

More to the point, Jake realized, whatever information Derek might have about his father would be lost unless he could figure out a way to save the warrior's neck.

Jake suddenly realized he was in danger of being arrested himself as the bobbies on the other side of the wall discussed spreading out to comb the area.

Besides that, his so-called uncle's henchmen were still out there somewhere, looking for him. They could be lurking anywhere right now, he thought uneasily. Derek had warned him they would just keep coming after him until they had finished him off, and Jake believed him. *Better hide.*

Ducking back into the maze of alleys, he brushed off the thought of trying his luck at that mansion Derek had ordered him to go to — Beacon House. No boy of the streets who had lived by his wits for as long as Jake had was about to go and blindly trust himself to strangers. He had seen the place before, a great, hulking, old mansion on the river, but he wasn't sure who owned it or what went on in there.

He prowled through the back alleys until he came to the Strand and spied on the place from across the street for about ten minutes. But he didn't go in. No, he needed to think carefully about all this before deciding his next move.

Recalling Dani's promise to meet him with the potpie at his hideaway, he picked up his pace to return to the only place he thought of as home. It wasn't much, but his uncle's minions wouldn't find him there.

Nobody would.

It was a safe place. A hidden place.

Where freaks like him belonged.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dani O'Dell

Dani O'Dell headed home to the rookery, back to the rough, grimy world she hated. But she only stayed long enough to put her apple-cart away. As she angled it into the ground floor apartment in the tenement house where the O'Dells lived squashed into two small rooms, she dreamed of a day when she might be respectable and live in a nice home, where everything was pretty and clean, orderly and quiet. Where no one was drunk or crude-mannered, and a dirty word bellowed at the top of a person's lungs would have been unthinkable.

In her neighborhood, such things passed for normal conversation. On the other hand, rookery life had made her tougher than she looked. The world saw a poor-but-decent girl, small for her age, but when provoked, Daniela Catherine O'Dell had all the Irish fight as her pack of brawling elder brothers.

Fortunately, they weren't at home right now; otherwise, Jake would not have seen his mincemeat pie again. "Come on, Teddy." She let her dog out of the sack, secured his leash, then retrieved the potpie off the lower shelf of her cart and concealed it under her dark woolen cloak. "Let's get out of here before anyone comes," she whispered to her dog.

With that, she left the apartment, locked and bolted the door, then set out with a businesslike stride for Jake's hideaway. Teddy trotted along by her heels.

Though she was nervous about carrying Jake's stolen contraband for him, it was her self-appointed role in life to manage that stubborn blockhead.

Somebody had to do it, and he didn't have a mother. They had that in common, but at least Dani had known her sainted Ma before she died. She still had all the mementoes and the single precious photograph of her that Da had set up on the mantel as a sort of shrine. Poor Jake knew nothing of his parents and she knew he ached about it, though he'd never say so.

From the first time she had laid eyes on him three years ago, being pushed around and bullied by her brothers, Dani had realized she had found herself an ally in the harsh rookery world. Her brothers did that sort of thing to *her* all the time, shoving her this way and that like a football, having fun at her expense. She had shrieked at them like a banshee the day she had found them jovially beating the poor young stranger to a pulp — just to toughen him up, they said, as if they were doing him a favor.

When they had finally lost interest in their sport, she had gone over and scraped the boy called Jake Reed up off the cobblestones. Something about the way he pretended to be all right, though his eye was swollen and his chin trembled with his refusal to give way to angry tears, well, it had wrenched her heart — all the more so when he had told her he came from the orphanage.

Dani had made it her business since then to look after him, as much as he would let anyone do so. Now, as the world's best expert on all things Jake, she was extremely worried about the weird things happening to him of late.

These days, it was one bizarre surprise after another. It was not so much his seeing ghosts that alarmed her. Her Irish granny, rest her soul, used to say the second sight was not uncommon. 'Twas a gift the Good Lord gave to certain people, to let them give the news to those who grieved that their loved ones were in Heaven, or to deliver a message for them, like maybe some money they'd stashed somewhere in a shoebox.

What really worried Dani was the other bit, the way her friend could move things with his mind. It made her want to reach for her Rosary. Of course, Jake laughed at her for thinking that it might signify something evil, but that was why she had been so strict with him lately, making him promise not to steal or do anything bad. For if the devil had taken an interest in Jake, then her friend had better watch his step.

Teddy and she pressed on. After the usual trek across the bridge, they finally arrived at the once-grand, arched entrance to Elysian Springs Pleasure Gardens. The old, abandoned amusement park had once been one of London's main attractions.

Now the paint was peeling on the weathered white pillars, the colorful letters on the curved sign fading into oblivion. She walked through the archway into the park's green acreage and skipped up the winding drive with Teddy. She loved coming here to Jake's hideaway. Elysian Springs was decades past its glory, but it was still a place that made the regular world and all its cares seem a thousand miles away.

The big pavilion with its fanciful pastel turrets had been closed for years, but once upon a time fashionable ladies and gentlemen had come here for dinners and concerts and dancing in the garden under the stars. She could just imagine them. There had been strolling musicians and all sorts of acts for entertainment: jugglers, acrobats, a tightrope walker, a fire-eater, daring trick-horse riders, a man with a dancing monkey, and clowns on giant stilts.

Back in the old days, there were fireworks shows and carnival games. You could stroll the flowery walkways in the moonlight, or hire a gondola shaped like a swan and go for a boat ride with your sweetheart. The park had many interconnecting canals and small, manmade lakes and ponds; the water flowed in from the river.

Across from the main pavilion was a smaller one where you could pay a penny to go in and see the freaks: the bearded lady; Mr. Lilbit, the world's smallest man; Big Tess, the fattest woman; Lizard Boy; the Siamese twins; or the odd fellow who drove nails up his nose with a hammer.

They all still lived here, quietly minding their own business, still happy to let people come and gawk at them, which, to Dani, seemed very rude, but as they said, it was a living. The freaks were not ashamed of who and what they were, and so, as Jake put it, "Bully for them."

But Dani did not stop to visit the carnival people today on account of delivering the potpie back to Jake.

With a tug on Teddy's leash, she strode down the graveled walkway toward the lily pond. The fountains no longer ran, but frogs chirruped everywhere amongst the pussy willows. Dani scooped up Teddy and carefully stepped into one of the old, faded swan boats. Tail wagging, Teddy put his front paws up on the edge of the swan's wing as Dani put down the oars. "Here we go, boy."

She rowed toward the little overgrown island in the center of the manmade lake, where Jake had taken up residence in an old white gazebo. It was very peaceful gliding through the still waters. Her hard day at the market was forgotten. Soon she spotted Jake standing on a

boulder near the water's edge.

His back was to her, and with three rocks flying in circles above him, she thought he was trying to juggle, but then she saw that his hands were not moving, and she scowled. *Boys! Why don't they ever listen?*

As soon as her swan boat bumped against Jake's island, Teddy bounded over the side and dashed up onto the land to go and see him. The dog's barking broke Jake's concentration, and the three fist-sized rocks he had been levitating with his mind plunked to the ground.

Dani put the oars in their holders and carefully stood up. "I thought you weren't going to do that anymore," she said as she threw her sack over her shoulder and hopped off the boat.

"Huh?" Jake pretended not to hear her over Teddy's happy barking.

"Don't complain to me when you get the headache."

"It's not as bad as before." He squeezed his temples with one hand. "I think I'm getting stronger at it."

She was not sure if that was such a good thing. The headache at least kept him from using his powers too much.

She produced the potpie from under her cloak and his blue eyes lit up. "Ah, Dani O'Dell, you're a right plum lass, you are."

"I know," she replied.

He took it from her and went to sit on his favorite boulder. The next thing she knew, he was shoving huge bites of mincemeat pie into his mouth in a most unmannerly fashion.

"Give Teddy some. He's starving."

"Dance," Jake ordered through his mouthful of food. The terrier danced, and Jake tossed him a good-sized crumb.

Reluctantly, Dani went over and broke a piece of the potpie off for herself. So much for her good intentions, she thought with a shrug. Then she sat down with a flounce of her dreary drab skirts on the top step of the gazebo that Jake had made his temporary home. His few belongings were strewn about inside it.

"So what happened after you ran off?" she asked. "I saw those men chase you. I guess you got away."

He paused in his chewing and gave her a guarded look.

"What?" she asked, nibbling on the famous pie-crust.

Jake snorted like a half-wild colt and tossed his dirty blond forelock out of his eyes.

"What did they want?" she demanded.

"To kill me," he said matter-of-factly.



"What?"

Perhaps he shouldn't have told her, Jake thought.

Dani's green eyes grew as round as the algae-covered pond surrounding his little island. She stared at him in dread. Once he had said that much, however, it was too late to back out from telling her the rest.

The truth was, he was glad to share it, because secretly, this was one of those rare occasions where he could admit he might be in just a wee bit over his head.

He told her all about it, though he skipped over the magic bits. He knew that topic gave

her the willies. Instead, he simply told her about his so-called uncle, the Earl of Griffon, and Derek Stone and his unjust arrest.

Jake was all too familiar with the process that Derek would undergo after the police wagon took him away.

The bobbies would haul him into the nearest police station, where he'd be thrown in a holding cell for a few hours until it was his turn to stand before the magistrate. Known in street language as a "beak," the magistrate served as a sort of first-round judge, who would determine if there was indeed a case to be made against the person arrested.

When it was Derek's turn to be brought into the courtroom, probably this evening, the beak would ask questions of everyone involved. Their answers would help the court decide if there was enough evidence to formally charge Derek with the crime. If not, the case would be dismissed and he'd be free to go.

But if the beak determined there *was* enough evidence to take the case to the next step, then formal charges would be filed, and Derek would be sent to London's dreadful Newgate Prison to await trial.

Those accused of murder were rarely allowed out on bail. In the meantime, the detectives would carry out their investigation. Finally, at the trial, if Derek Stone were found guilty, he would be sent immediately to the gallows.

"And I can't let that happen," Jake told Dani. "This man saved my life. He didn't kill anyone! It wasn't even him who threw the knife, the bald man did it! He hit his fellow henchman by accident. Derek was only trying to save me. I'm not even sure how he knew I was in that alley, but you should've seen him, he was brilliant. And now he's doomed. They've got it all wrong! Constable Flanagan's already made up his mind that Derek is guilty. You know the bobby's the only one the beak is going to listen to." Jake shook his head, dismayed. "This is all my fault."

Dani searched his face in worry. "So, what are you going to do?"

"Only one thing I *can* do," Jake said grimly. "I have to go in there and speak up for him, tell the magistrate what really happened."

"What, like a witness?"

"Aye. They'll hang him if I don't. Believe me, I don't want to, but the beak needs to hear the truth of how it all played out. Then maybe they'll see they have no case against him. They'll have to throw out the charges and let him go free. And then I can make him tell me what he knows about my father," he added in a darker tone.

"Jake, they're not going to listen to you," Dani exclaimed. "You're just a kid — with a criminal record! What if they don't believe you?"

"I have to try. He stood up for me; now it's my turn to stand up for 'im," he said with a scowl.

"But you could go to jail! You realize what could happen if they remember you nicked this potpie today? They could toss you into Newgate right along with him!"

"What choice do I have?" he argued. "I'm not a coward! Anyway, it's the honorable thing to do!"

She raised her eyebrows, for few people from the rookery ever mentioned honor.

He charged on. "This fellow stuck his neck out for me. Whoever he is, I can't stand by and see him hanged for my sake."

Dani heaved a sigh. "Very well, then. Come on, Teddy. We'd better hurry." She scooped up her dog in one arm and grabbed her satchel in the other. "We're comin' with you."

For once, Jake didn't argue.

CHAPTER FIVE

Witness for the Defense

Jake never thought he'd see the day that he would willingly walk into a police station. But standing outside the famous crime-fighting offices at Bow Street, he felt Dani nudge him with her elbow.

She nodded in encouragement, Teddy's fuzzy head poking curiously out of the sack on her shoulder once again. Jake braced himself and walked in.

They passed all the bobbies on duty and made their way into the magistrate's court. The gallery overlooking the long, narrow courtroom was already crowded with spectators who came to hear about the day's arrests and scuffles as if this was a form of entertainment, taking amusement from other people's miseries.

Against the back wall of the high-ceilinged room was a raised platform, where the magistrate sat on the middle chair. On both sides of him were clerks scribbling down their notes on the proceedings.

The courtroom was a busy place. People came and went among the rows of benches. A few bobbies were always on hand, standing here and there with arms folded, waiting for anyone to misbehave.

Some folk in the courtroom were crying, family members of victims or accused criminals who'd been caught. Lawyers trawled for clients. Disheveled people still bloodied from their recent troublemaking waited for their turn to step forward and make their excuses. Jake did his best not to look suspicious as he and Dani went and took a seat.

One after another, the losers of the day shuffled in, one man accused of making counterfeit coins in his basement. Next came two mean-eyed fishwives arrested for brawling over a particular cast-iron skillet. After them came a jolly fellow accused of stealing a horse, but he insisted he had only stolen the bridle: The horse had simply followed him home, being attached to it. "So, you see, it weren't my fault, Yer Worship!"

The audience in the gallery laughed, but the beak rolled his eyes as if he'd heard this one many times before. He sent the jester on to Newgate Prison with a stroke of his quill pen.

Finally, the clerk advised the judge that the next case on the docket involved a most serious question of murder.

Hearing this, a hush fell over the courtroom.

A clank of chains announced the prisoner's arrival, and everyone turned to look.

Jake winced. If any man had ever walked into a courtroom looking capable of murder, it was Derek Stone.

It was not just the messy, menacing size of him in that long black coat, nor the wild tangle of dark hair that hung to his cliff-like shoulders. It was the way he held his chin high

and stared straight at the judge, completely unrepentant. The bobbies escorted the manacled prisoner toward the podium for the accused.

Dani hugged her dog protectively. "That's the man that saved you?"

Jake nodded, watching. *My turn to save him now.*

"He's terrifying! He looks like he could even squash my brothers!" she whispered.

"He could, believe me," Jake assured her.

Then Constable Flanagan stepped up to the opposite podium for the prosecution. Compared to Derek Stone's wild, scruffy, dangerous appearance, the arresting officer looked smart and polished in his tidy blue uniform, the brass buttons down his coat a-gleam.

"Please state your name for the court, sir," the head clerk ordered, getting the proceedings underway.

"Constable Arthur Flanagan!" he said proudly.

After a few more exchanges of official information, the magistrate looked up wearily from his papers. "Mr. Flanagan, describe the circumstances surrounding your arrest of this individual."

"Yes, sir." Flanagan nodded. "I was on duty at Covent Garden Market, my usual post. It started out a quiet morning. Then we were summoned by the pieman, Mr. Harris — "

The audience murmured in approval at the mention of those famous pies.

"— who claimed a child thief had just robbed him."

Dani pushed a pointy elbow into Jake's ribs.

"Myself and fellow officers went in pursuit of the lad, but then, about three blocks northeast of the market, we heard the sounds of a serious altercation in progress."

"A what?" Jake whispered.

"A fight," Dani translated.

"Fletcher and Jenkins and I ran toward the sound."

"And what did you find?" the magistrate asked.

"This man, Your Worship." Flanagan slanted Derek Stone a disapproving stare. "He had just emerged from a dead-end alley where we found: a corpse."

The audience gasped at this macabre twist in the tale.

"The dead man had a knife in his back, and this one — " he eyed Derek fiercely, "had blood splashed on his clothes."

"Hmm, and who is the dead man in question?"

"We don't yet know his identity, Your Worship. But this fellow here was less than twenty feet away when we apprehended him. He was tryin' to escape," he added in reproach.

The beak frowned and fixed a piercing gaze on the warrior. "Who was this poor dead fellow, and what did you have against him that you'd resort to murder?" he baited Derek. "Did you kill him in a sudden fit of anger or was it coldly done — premeditated, hmm?"

"Didn't kill him," Derek Stone growled.

"Speak up!" the recording clerk insisted.

Derek glared. "I. Did. Not. Stab. Anyone."

The magistrate's frown deepened. "State your full name for the court, please."

"Derek Stone."

"Your age?"

"Thirty-three."

"Place of residence?"

He sighed. "I have no permanent address, sir." The admission seemed to pain him slightly.

Jake was intrigued. No home? Maybe he had something in common with this fearsome fellow, after all.

“Let the record show that the accused is a wandering vagrant,” the beak said to the clerk with distaste. “No home, indeed. How very uncivilized. Well, Mr. Stone, do please tell us your side of the story. Why were you in that alley, if not to do foul murder, eh?”

Derek Stone took a long, scanning look at the gallery, as though perhaps he feared enemies might be here even now, lurking in the audience. “I heard some men harassing a child. I heard his calls for help. So I went to assist.”

“I did *not* call for help,” Jake muttered indignantly.

“When I went to see what was the matter, I found three men armed with knives, closing in on the boy, with clear intent to do him serious harm. So I jumped into the fray to even the odds.”

“Well, well, rescuing a youngster under attack? You would have us believe you are very gallant, Mr. Stone,” the beak taunted. “So how did our corpse end up with a knife in his back?”

“When I saw their leader throw his knife at the boy, I shoved that, er, unfortunate fellow into the way to block it.”

The magistrate narrowed his eyes, considering Derek’s account. “Well, that is a very colorful tale. But I’m afraid even if it is true, you are still looking at charges of manslaughter, rather than premeditated murder. Are you sure you want to stick with this story?”

Derek stared at him, looking utterly insulted that anyone would dare to doubt his word.

But the beak was a cynic who had seen it all and spent every day listening to people lie.

“Sir, it is the truth,” he ground out. “The reason the constable and his men found only me and the dead man in the alley was because the attackers fled the moment they heard the stupid police whistles.” He glanced at the policeman in contempt. “If Flanagan and his men hadn’t made such a clatter, alerting the villains that they were on their way, then perhaps they would’ve had a chance to catch the real perpetrators.”

“I say!” Constable Flanagan uttered.

“Instead, he gave them plenty of time to run.”

“But you remained?” The beak scrutinized him. “That wasn’t very intelligent of you.”

“I had to make sure the boy was all right.”

“And was he? Whatever happened to this alleged boy, anyway? Did he escape, Mr. Stone, thanks to your protection?”

A grim smile curved the warrior’s lips. “He did, sir.”

“Well, it’s a fine tale, but I’m afraid I don’t believe you. Unless — well, I don’t suppose you can produce this alleged boy as a witness to back up your story?”

“No, Your Worship — ” he started to say.

But that was the moment Jake stood up and stepped forward, his heart pounding. “It was me, sir!”

The whole courtroom turned and looked at him in surprise.

“Hat!” Dani whispered, nervously hugging her dog.

Jake whipped off his drab cloth cap, twisting it in both hands. He took another step forward. “I am that boy, Your Worship, and everything this man just said is true! That’s exactly ’ow it ’appened.”

The magistrate leaned forward over his high desk. “Jake...Reed?”

“Aye, Your Worship.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Jake noticed Derek Stone’s look of horror at his arrival.

No, he had not gone to Beacon House, as ordered.

The beak let out a droll sigh. "Well, I can certainly imagine any number of people wanting to kill you, Mr. Reed. Come forward, you young rascal. Constable Flanagan, you may step down. Let us hear from Mr. Reed. This is sure to be amusing."

Derek glared at Jake in disbelief as he stepped up to the podium Flanagan had left, as instructed. Jake shrugged at him, then glanced around at all the people watching and began feeling slightly cold and clammy.

The judge leaned back in his chair and tapped his pen on his desk. "Well, Mr. Reed, it's been at least a month since you paid us a visit. I trust you have been on your best behavior since our last little chat?"

"Uh, yes, sir," he lied.

"No more thieving?"

"Oh, no, sir! I'm a street-sweep now. Occasional mudlarking."

"Right. Let the record note that Mr. Reed has discovered a new calling in life. You'd have been better off as an apprentice, ungrateful cub, but I suppose it is a start."

"Thank you, sir," Jake replied, ignoring the sarcasm.

"Well, Jakey, old boy, you know the drill. Name."

"Jacob Reed, sir. Age, er, twelve or so, to the best of my knowledge," he added sheepishly.

The clerk stopped scribbling and looked in befuddlement at the magistrate.

"Mr. Reed is a foundling orphan of the parish. Therefore his true birth date cannot be confirmed," the beak explained to the clerk.

"Ahhh," the audience said with great sympathy.

"Home address?" the clerk inquired.

"Nowhere in particular," Jake admitted, even more embarrassed in front of the world. He glanced at Derek, but the warrior just stared straight ahead with a seething scowl.

"Very well, then. You wish to confirm that Mr. Stone's account of the morning's events is correct?"

"Yes, sir!" Jake declared in a strong voice. "I was attacked today by three men in the rookery, and their leader threw a knife at me. It all happened just like he said. I don't think you should charge him with murder or manslaughter, Your Worship, or with anything, because he only done it to save me. That's why I'm 'ere."

"Hmm. Are you really telling the truth, Jake?" He leaned forward slightly, lacing his fingers as he studied him intently. "Or did somebody offer to pay you if you would come forward to try to clear this fellow's name?"

Jake's eyes widened. "No, sir!"

"No? A chance to make a little pocket money? I'm sure you could use it. Who put you up to this? Stone himself?"

"No, Your Worship!" Jake cried, appalled. "I didn't want to come, but I 'ad to!"

"Why is that?"

"'Cause it's the right thing to do!"

"Ah, I see. And our young delinquent friend here would be the world's foremost expert on right and wrong?"

Jake scowled. "I'm tellin' the truth, on my honor!"

"Oh, on your honor, indeed?" The beak chuckled.

The whole courtroom was laughing at him now.

Jake was red-faced and growing furious.

"The honor of a pickpocket!" one of the smug lawyers said. Even the stern Constable Flanagan snickered at his expense. Jake wanted the earth to swallow him. He had come to tell

the truth and do the right thing for once in his life, but he had not anticipated public humiliation.

Dani sent him an encouraging nod to hold his ground, but he had half a mind to go storming out right now.

“I’m tellin’ the truth! Stone heard them bothering me and came to help,” he insisted.

“But Jake, honestly, even as vexing a lad as you are, why would three grown men risk hanging for the pleasure of ridding the world of you? If there’s any truth to your account, maybe they merely wanted to thrash you. Perhaps you stole something from them, hmm?” the judge suggested. “What did you do to annoy them?”

“Nothing, Your Worship! I never saw them bleeders before in my life!” he said, infuriated. “I was minding me own business in Covent Garden Market when they started chasing me — for no reason! I ran into the rookery, but still they followed, and when they cornered me in the alley, some toff called Lord Griffon showed up and ordered them to kill me.”

The judge abruptly stopped laughing.

“What?” His voice dropped to a harsh whisper. “What did you say?”

Derek Stone also looked over at him with a look of dark surprise.

“Surely you did not just claim that the Earl of Griffon was a part of this?” the magistrate said crisply.

Jake nodded and swallowed hard, his heart pounding. “Yes, sir, I did. He was.” He did not think it prudent to tell them the earl had claimed to be his uncle.

The magistrate stared at him for a very long moment. Then he set down his pen. His face was getting redder by the second, and when he spoke, his voice trembled with barely contained wrath. “Jake Reed, you are a dangerously misguided boy. This time, you go too far with your wild tales. You are under oath of perjury — and yet you would speak such slanderous lies against one of the greatest philanthropists in London! Now I know you are lying! Order in the court!” He banged his gavel as the audience exclaimed in shock over Jake’s accusation against the earl.

Jake turned to Dani, shrugging as he mouthed the question, “What’s a philanthropist?”

“A person who gives lots of gold to charity!” she enunciated back.

“Oh, great,” Jake muttered.

“Lord Griffon is a fine man, practically a saint, and he happens to be the chief patron of the Police Pensioners’ Alms House!” the judge nearly stammered in his righteous fury. “Why, he gives more each year to support our retired bobbies in their old age than the greatest merchant houses in the City!”

“Well, he still tried to kill me,” Jake growled.

The beak was fuming, all his world-weary joking cast aside. “Order in the court!”

“Your Worship!” Constable Flanagan called above the noise of the scandalized murmurs from the audience. “There’s something else that you should know, sir.”

The beak settled back into his chair and gestured to the policeman to speak.

“The boy thief we were chasing this morning on behalf of Harris the Pieman...was Jake Reed.”

The whole courtroom burst into cries of astonishment and whoops of hilarity.

The judge turned to Jake in utter fury.

“I suppose that’s what he meant when he says he was ‘minding his own business,’” Flanagan drawled. “He got away from us at the time, but the flower-seller saw him sneaking past with something, and let’s just say, my officers know his face.”

The judge glared at him, but finally found his voice. “Jake Reed, you are a terrible boy!”

You have disrespected this courtroom and me, coming in here and lying to my face, after I've already given you two chances to better yourself! I don't know *who* might've promised you *what* to get you to come in here and tell these brazen lies, let alone to slander a fine, upstanding pillar of society like Lord Griffon, but this time, by Jove, you will learn your lesson!" He banged his gavel. "Send them both to Newgate!"

"Jake!" Dani cried in horror, but Jake stood there frozen.

"Jake Reed, you will give us thirty days detention for your thieving, and as for you Derek Stone, you are hereby remanded to Newgate, as well, to await your trial — for murder!" *Bang!* With a whack of his gavel, the angry beak dismissed them.

He was now so out of temper that he adjourned the court and marched out, taking refuge in his chambers.

Teddy was barking at the chaos that erupted and Dani was yelling supposedly helpful advice, while Jake, in a panic, tried to dart away from the officers coming to arrest him.

Unfortunately, there were bobbies in all directions, and this time Flanagan was too fast for him. He grabbed hold of Jake's arm. "Don't even try it, you young scamp. You're on a bad path, Jake. You better mend your ways."

"I didn't do it!" he cried, merely out of habit.

"Bah! I saw you bolting off this morning with my own eyes. I know you're hungry, lad, and it's too bad you ain't got a proper father to show you any discipline, but you've got to learn your lesson somehow."

Jake glared, trying to hide the fact that he was terrified. He looked over his shoulder as they clapped the handcuffs on him. "Don't worry, Dani, I'll be seeing you soon!" he called, sending his friend a meaningful look as they began dragging him away.

Dani usually understood what he meant without him having to spell things out, which was why her eyes widened.

She realized he was referring to his tele-ka-whatever.

"I'll be out before you know it," he assured her.

Then the officers brought him outside and tossed him in the big, black police wagon.

Derek Stone wasn't far behind. "Foolhardy, thick-headed — don't you ever do as you're told?" Derek demanded as soon as they slammed the heavy carriage door and locked it tightly.

"Nah, not my style!" Jake shot back, parroting the warrior's own insolent words to the constables from this morning.

Derek harrumphed.

"Why did you let them catch you?" Jake demanded. "You could've at least fought back!"

"I'm a Guardian. I don't kill policemen," Derek growled. "The Order would've had me out in a few days."

"What Order?"

"Never mind. Did you really see Lord Griffon?"

"Aye! That's what I said. Is he really my uncle and if he is, then why does he want me dead?"

Derek cursed under his breath, shaking his head. "You should've gone to Beacon House like I told you."

"How was I supposed to know if I could trust you?"

Derek looked at him in amazement. "I saved your bloody life, you ungrateful whelp! Why *wouldn't* you trust me?"

"Mister, I don't know nothin' about you! I don't even know why you bothered to help me in the first place."

“Hoy! No talking! Shut it, now!” The bailiff banged his truncheon on the bars. Then two policemen climbed up onto the driver’s box of the police wagon, and in the next moment, they were underway, soon to be delivered into the dark oblivion of Newgate.

Jake looked back and, through the bars, saw Dani standing alone in the road, looking terrified and bewildered. She was hugging Teddy close and trying not to cry. Seeing her standing there, looking so small and defenseless, Jake was furious at himself. He hung his head.

“Your little girlfriend?” Derek drawled.

“Shut up! She’s not my girlfriend.”

“Then why do you look so distraught?”

“Because it’s dark out, right! And now she’s going to have to walk home by herself in these bad streets.” Jake cursed himself. “Not that you give a twig.”

Derek studied him. “I’ll say one thing for you, kid. You may be a thief, but you’ve got your father’s courage. I think you actually *do* know the meaning of honor.”

Jake looked over at him uncertainly.

Derek gave him a rugged nod.

“You really knew my father?” Jake whispered as one of the policemen glanced back to check on them.

Derek looked away with a faint smile on his face in the darkness. “He was like a brother to me. His name was Jacob, too,” he added.

“No talking, now! Don’t make me tell you again!” the bobby ordered, reaching back to hit the window bars with his nightstick one more time.

Derek fell silent, but he gave Jake a look that helped bolster his shaken courage.

And it was a good thing, for when the police wagon rolled up to the looming fortress of Newgate a short while later, Jake saw he was going to need it...



This concludes the sample of *The Gryphon Chronicles, Book 1: THE LOST HEIR* by E.G. Foley. For more information, visit www.EGFoley.com.