

THE RIPPER

EARTH'S ABERRANT TORCHBEARER

Book Two in the Next Life Series

**A NOVEL BY
JAMES G. ROBERTSON**



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PREFACE

Hey there, it's your author. There's been a few changes in this new cover edition, so let's get straight into it. First, and probably the biggest, was that I moved chapter three in front of chapter one. The reason for this was that I've heard on more than one occasion the reader was unsure of what was going on until they read chapter three. When I wrote this book, I wanted to keep you (my readers) in the dark about Jack and what was going on, but after the feedback, I don't think it was the greatest idea. There are still plenty of mysteries to be figured out along the way, and I think this shift makes the pacing better I.E no flashback.

The second thing, but probably the first that you noticed if you had read any of the previous editions, is that I changed the subtitle. Calling it a prequel seemed not to fit and was another complaint. When I called this book a prequel, I named it that in the sense that the events took place prior to the first book, but some felt there wasn't enough context in this book, especially in the previous chapter reading order to be considered as such. Many never complained, but for those of you who did, I'm glad as you helped me correct this!

Now that we've covered that, let's talk about what inspired this book. I based the series on the mystery of what we humans call life, religion, and the unknown. So where does Jack the Ripper fall into all of this? As a person, we know little about him beyond his

(or even possibly her) murders. So that realm of mystery gave me a unique opportunity to expand on their lives' unknown aspects. It also allowed me to create a character that would tangibly explain why they did what they did.

I tried to keep the letters Jack sent to the papers as accurate as I could, so you may notice a bunch of misspellings / run-on sentences for those. I assure you, this was on purpose. It's interesting (at least to me) to see how well they wrote in English. I want to let you know I went against my editor in one regard, and that is the inner thoughts that some characters have in the dialogue (particularly with Magdalen). As an individual, I tend to have deep thoughts and explore them in my mind when nothing else is going on. So while they found it strange, (or not the standard way of writing), I felt it was quite normal and didn't want to change the essence of that for you. I honestly may have picked up this writing element from Mr. Stephen King, as I've read his books the most. Still, I hope you enjoy the story, especially Jack's character, as much as I enjoyed bringing him to life in both dialogue and in acting in the audiobook.

Perhaps this will inspire you to create stories of your own, or pursue your deepest passion. If I can do nothing else in this life of mine, I hope I'm able to inspire someone to follow their ambitions, no matter how difficult they may seem.

Thank you and enjoy the story.

-J.G.R 4/22/23

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PROLOGUE

Jack the Ripper. Jack-o'-lantern. Few know the whole truth of these stories. Only those now dead and the few witches that remain understand their souls' true tale. One Jack thought of as pure evil, who ripped through the London streets in the night, tearing away the flesh of the whores in Whitechapel. Another Jack, whose presence burns with a fiery passion on our doorsteps and calms us during All Hallows' Eve frights, scaring away the evil spirits while we sleep in our rooms with no light.

Both Jacks' stories have yet to be told in full. Their origins are vague and as hidden as the phantoms that still continue playing tricks on us in the fog of night. Yet, they are worshipped in one way or the next by their most loyal followers. Those that deem themselves Ripperologists, and those that partake in the festival known as Halloween, are both captivated by the stories that are known and of the many mysteries yet to be uncovered.

So, what is the connection between these particular Jacks? Is it the wickedness that surrounds them? Their names? Or perhaps it's just the truth in the misconception we've been led to believe throughout the years? What if I were to tell you that these Jacks were not all that different? In fact, while their followers may or may not be loyal to the both of them, these unusual Jacks were actually one and the same.

A strange hypothesis, one may think. Others might believe that it's downright preposterous. But perhaps they're right to feel that way.

There will always be those unwilling to see the truth, regardless of the evidence. There's not much I can do for those who look facts in the face and continue to claim the opposite time and time again, but that's not you, is it, dear reader? You are someone who wants, no, needs to know the story of these Jacks and more. Well, this story, which has remained hidden to most for so long, I will now share with you. Sit back, get comfortable, and let us begin the story of the burning ripper named Jack.

PART ONE

Death and Wildflowers



CHAPTER I

The 3rd of August, 1888

Beware of the doors. Beware of the tear in the darkness. Beware of the god from red, and of man. A future darkness approaches that cannot be stopped but must be contained, or humanity will fall from existence in all realms and domains. You, and the one soon to become, must help. You must protect the world of man from those of the divine, and those who escape even time.

*Well, my dear readers, here we are once again with the strange-looking girl in tattoos appearing to me in my dreams. She didn't tell me, John, you're going to get rich soon, or John, you're going to get a lucky break. This wasn't even a request, but a statement that I **must** help. You may be lost at this point, as am I in an even greater sense, but what I say is completely true and—*

"Darling, are you okay in there? Don't you think it's about time you take a break and we eat something?" a sweet voice called to John from another room.

"Well, I've got a lot more to write, but I suppose I could go out for some lunch. It's about noon, isn't it?"

John asked his wife while looking over the paragraph he had nearly finished typing out on his brand new typewriter. He had been busy writing his article for the local paper, but was hopeful that it would be accepted by one of the more prominent companies. For ten years, John had written to them about these strange stories he had dreamt about as he tried to score an interview.

The stories he wrote were out there, but like this one, they did happen. A girl with strange-looking tattoos did appear in John's dreams and warn him of what was to come. Behind her in his dreams, there were giant advanced automobiles that burned; on top of their wings were what John could only describe as devils dancing.

Although nothing in this story was fabricated, he didn't believe them to be real, and if somehow they were, it would be too far in the distance to mean anything to him. It would be in a far and distant future past his time, before what he saw around the girl, burning or not, would exist in reality.

"Noon?" his wife asked in a surprised tone from around the corner. "John, it's nearly 5 p.m!"

"Is it really?" He looked out the nearby window dazedly.

Where has the time gone?

"Give me a few minutes, and I'll be ready."

John slowly stood from the hardwood chair and desk. The tension that had built up from sitting and typing all day gripped his lower back like a vise on his spine. He put his hand on his lower back and pushed as he leaned into it. A loud popping noise fired off that sounded like popcorn kernels on rapid fire.

From there, he moved into the bathroom to brush his teeth. While John himself wasn't that well off, his wife Victoria had come from a prominent family. The house they had, while small, had all the modern luxuries, including running water and electricity. After he was done with his teeth, he splashed some water on his tired face and messy hair. He looked like a tired, wet owl. His face was a mess, and his hair was even worse. Then there were his eyes, which were red from the strain that had been put on them from staring at the small letters on the typewriter—pecking away at each key. Eventually, he moved his hair around and dried off what was needed so that he could begin to look somewhat human again.

"How do I look?" he asked his wife, who was by the door waiting for him to come out of the bathroom.

"You look absolutely wonderful, dear. Where shall we go?"

"Where do you want to go, my darling spring flower?" he grinned as he asked her.

He was mostly teasing, as he knew how indecisive she was, as most women he had been associated with were when it came to these kinds of things. Most couples would have the man deciding, but if she had something in mind, John was happy to give it a whirl; even if this rarely ever happened, he enjoyed doing what she liked.

"Oh, I don't know," she said.

"Let's walk and see where we end up? How's that sound?" he asked, and then his stomach released a rumbling growl.

He smiled at her, and she smiled back.

"Sounds lovely, but let's not take too long. I'm quite famished, and I'm sure you're not opposed to eating something soon, unless you plan on eating your stories," Victoria teased.

John smirked and grabbed his hat before taking Victoria's smooth hand and leading her to the front door. The couple walked outside into the town of Salisbury in Wiltshire, England. The town was a decent size, with over 14,000 people now and still growing. They passed by the small pasture of cows, sheep, and wildflowers that were blowing in the pleasant summer's breeze. They reached a few more houses at the end of the range until they made it to Salisbury's small shopping center.

It was always an adventure here, and they never knew what someone might be doing on any particular day. As they entered, an old gypsy man was playing a delicate little tune on his old violin.

"Let's just walk and see where we end up," Victoria said, poking fun at what John had told her earlier.

He gave a big smile as they continued through the center of town.

There were now many different little shops around them in the center's square. They passed by a few seamstresses and cobblers before arriving at one of their favorite restaurants, *Don's Farm & Fish Shop*. The Pepos were regulars there, and the owner Don had always enjoyed seeing them.

"Shall we?" John asked.

"I suppose, if we must."

"Are you feeling up for something else?" John asked, while moving a loose lock of her hair that was dancing around in the breeze back behind her ear.

"No, this will do just fine. At least I know I can eat my fill here and not be given a strange look."

Victoria was a small and slender woman, but she always packed an appetite. She was self-conscious about it, and at times, was afraid to let others see.

"Watch out, Pop, we've got one with an appetite coming in," John said jokingly, and the door's bell chimed as he held the door open for his wife.

Pop was what most of the locals called Don, since he had a habit of taking care of the local community. He was a quality worker and an even finer quality man.

Victoria gave John a pouting look as she passed him by. Upon entering, another couple passed by them, leaving them as the only customers remaining.

They sat at their usual table in the back corner by the window. The leather seats grumbled under the pressure as they sat down while the incandescent lights above hummed. The table itself was as spotless as ever, minus the salt and pepper shakers shaped like a fish and chicken, respectively. John looked at the menu and then smiled once he saw Pop's Special; this was an ice cream Pop had crafted from his own dairy cow, Miss Annabelle.

The waitress was one of the girls Pop took in, Rosemary. She brought a couple of glasses of water with her as she approached the couple.

"What can I get for you today?"

"I'd like to start off with one of Pop's Specials, in chocolate," John said.

"Before you eat, dear?" Victoria asked, cocking her head in surprise.

"Why not break the mold a bit? Let's stir things up. Doesn't that sound fun?"

"Hm," she hesitated for a moment before giving a small chuckle. "You're such an odd man at times, John Pepo. Okay, let's have it your way. Give me Pop's special. Vanilla and strawberry, please, Rose."

"Got it, two Pop's specials, one chocolate, one vanilla and strawberry," Rosemary said, writing the two orders down. "You better watch this one, Victoria. Seems he's prone to mischief."

"Oh, don't I know it!" Victoria said, chuckling in agreement.

The lights inside the shop and around the street flickered a few times. Both John and Victoria looked at one another and then at Rosemary, who had just finished writing down their order.

"It's a strange week we've been having here. Lights have been flickering on and off all week long. Not really sure what's to blame. Anyway, I'll get those taken care of. If you two think of what else you'd like, just let me know, and I'll get it back to Pop," Rosemary said, smiling at the couple before walking away.

"I wonder if something is going on with the grid? You think it'd be in top shape since they built it here a few years back. I'd hope it's not deteriorating yet," John said.

He continued to gaze at the streetlights, watching them flicker until the one in front of the shop started to fade. He flinched when it made an audible popping sound, fading to darkness.

"I'm sure it's nothing, dear. Now tell me, how is your story going? You've been writing it for a few days now."

"Well, to tell you the truth, I think it's going well. However, I'm really unsure if it'll be what the *Sunderland Echo* or any of the more prominent papers are looking for. I've got the premise

down, and I remember the details from my dream, but building the inside is a little more tricky. Trying to get every little detail right as best as I can remember it and keeping it to a proper length for the papers is hard. I know my destination, but the road along the way is tricky and twisted. Does that make sense?"

"I got the gist of it. I think you're doing fine as passionate as you are. Things will be quite alright in the end. If some of these men nowadays had half of your passion, the world would only be better. Just keep it up, and you'll achieve your dream of being a famous story teller one day. I'm sure of it," she said, gleaming at him while holding onto his hand from across the table.

At the back of the shop, the big double doors swung open, and Pop approached the two of them with their ice creams. He was a big, jolly man with more than a bit of meat around his bones. He was bigger than most and as strong as his build suggested. His size and red face reminded John of a robust Santa Claus. Not only from his look, but how his personality was in conjunction.

"I've got a chocolate for you, John, and for the lovely lady, a vanilla strawberry with an added strawberry on top, courtesy of Miss Rosemary," Pop said, sitting the ice cream down in front of the couple.

"Thanks, Pop," Victoria said before dipping the strawberry into the ice cream and taking a big bite. The ripened strawberry burst in her mouth, and the smooth cream remained on her lips, covering them even after she was done.

"You're quite welcome," Pop said, smiling.

"What's going on with the lamps outside? I noticed they flickered a little in here as well, but the streetlamps seem to be having the biggest issue," John asked before taking a bite himself.

"Beats me. You know I've asked the damn county to take care of the issue and look into it, but every time they come over, everything seems to be fine. It's a damn electrical mystery, but hopefully they figure it out."

"Strange," John said.

"It really is. Anyway, enough about all that. What can I get you two wonderful customers of mine?"

"Well, I think I'll get my usual. Strips, nuggets, and chips with a side salad."

"And for the miss with an appetite?"

"I... I..."

"What's wrong? Victoria, what's wrong?" John exclaimed, visibly worried, as his voice nearly cracked.

As her ice cream dish crashed to the ground, the remainder of the half-eaten strawberry rolled over to Pop's feet. Victoria's body was headed in the same direction until Pop quickly caught her.

"Cannnnn move," Victoria said in a slurred tone.

"I'll be right back; keep an eye on her, Pop!"

"John!" Pop yelled out after him, but he was already out of the building.



John sprinted down the road, desperately. The village didn't have a hospital, but there were a few doctors in the nearby area. The closest one was on the outskirts of the village. He rushed to the north, passing by the butcher and the gardeners until the stone road transitioned into dirt. Here, he needed to travel about a mile to make it to the doctor's house.

Huffing and panting, he continued to charge forward. John was a man who was by no means an athlete and had only been focused on writing his stories recently while enjoying married life. Still, he moved ahead for his wife's sake. His mouth was parched, with only the warped taste of chocolate and cream remaining on his tongue.

Victoria, I'll get help soon. Whatever's wrong, we'll get you fixed right up.

After about fifteen minutes, he made it. Completely exhausted and panting like a dying horse that went cross-country carrying more than it could handle, he had made it.

John raced up the steps of the house, took a few exhausted breaths, and pounded on the doctor's door.

"Doctor Kelly! Doctor Kelly! Please answer. It's an emergency! Doctor Kelly!"

There was a fumbling noise inside the house before the inner lock came undone. Soon after, the doorknob twisted, and the door opened.

"J—John?" the doctor stammered.

"Please, doctor, we have to go now—my wife. Something's wrong with Victoria. We were at Pop's shop, and then she collapsed and... and—" he said, tears stinging his eyes.

"Okay, okay. Let me grab my bag. Meet me by the carriage in the back. We'll take that back into town."

John met the doctor in the back, and together they wheeled the carriage over to the horses. After fitting them with their harnesses, they connected the leather straps to the metal rings. John, stressed and rushing, nicked himself with one of the metal ends. His trembling hands couldn't function properly, and despite the blood running down them, he continued. After they finished, he wrapped his hand in a small handkerchief he had in his jacket's pocket before he and the doctor climbed up into the carriage. The doctor whipped the reins, and silently, they traveled back down the long dirt road. John's mind was focused on his wife—his hands quivering along the way.

Victoria, please be ok. Just please. Don't leave me alone in this world again.

With the sun now all but set, the small shopping center greeted them with a disheartening darkness as more of the lights had gone out. Upon arriving at Pop's, the pair jumped from the carriage and made their way inside. Pop was still holding onto

Victoria in that same familiar corner that held so many fond memories for both her and John.

"How's she doing, Pop? How are you, Victoria?" John asked, still shaking as he approached.

Pop looked up with tear-filled eyes. It was then John heard Rosemary crying in the next room.

"She... just—stopped," Pop said after a brief struggle.

John froze, his eyes wide, his voice caught in his throat. The nerves that had caused him to shake seemed to stop sending any signals at all. His arms fell to his sides and hung there like bricks in the water. Doctor Kelly looked at Victoria and checked for a pulse. He stared up at John with a sad expression on his face, only to utter two words:

"I'm sorry."



A few days had passed, and a single violet wildflower dropped onto the casket of Victoria Pepo as the dirt began to fall atop it. Crows cawing and a soft evening breeze met the small burial group composed of only a close group of friends and Victoria's family. John's small family was tragically killed in a house fire nearly a decade ago. He had been lost after that, lost and alone in a new country.

Nearly a month after the fire, when things started getting hard to handle, he met Victoria. She had saved him from his life of loneliness and sorrow. She had saved him then, but now she was gone, and he was left alone once more.

As the dirt continued being thrown upon Victoria's coffin, her sister, Diana, recited the poem *The Fountain of Tears*, by Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy into the microphone. She cried profusely. The devastating sound of pain was echoed by all in attendance, and when combined with her own, it sounded like

a sad willow's cry as the sorrowful babble reverberated a great distance. There was no happiness or celebration of her life to be found in her tragic death. All that was found at Victoria's funeral was sudden, deep grief.

Once Diana had finished, she pursed her lips together and departed from the cemetery as a fountain of tears streamed down her face. Soon after, Victoria's distraught mother approached John, sneering at him with disgust.

"It should have been you, you worthless poor man with nothing. Why is my daughter now gone, and you, a man with hardly anything to your name, left here? You pathetic, useless man. You're lucky. She put the house in your name, or I'd take it away from you. Why didn't you protect her? Why!"

Victoria's father placed a comforting hand on the broken woman and led her away. The rest of their family had all begun to leave after the poetry reading, and John gave his thanks to Pop and the girls for coming.

"You sure you don't want to come by the shop? I'll fix you a big plate of strips, nuggets, and chips—on the house, John."

Pop knew John didn't have anyone else in this town, and he knew he had been short on his luck lately. This happening, on top of him already struggling to get recognized as a writer in order to make a living—Pop knew it wasn't a great combination to be had.

John shook his head. Maybe he'd take him up on the offer another time. But he wasn't ready to visit Pop's shop; the place his wife had taken her last breath. He had no idea when he would be able to bring himself to do so again, if he ever could. A place that once held happy and sweet memories was now a place associated with yet another significant loss in his life. Rosemary gave John a big hug, and Pop and the girls left, waving him off as they said their goodbyes.

John sat for a long time, watching the gravediggers cover Victoria's casket until they finished and walked away. Alone at the cemetery, he observed the sunset. His eyes that reflected in

a nearby puddle of water were dark red; redder than they had ever been—even when compared to when he lost his family in that tragic fire.

Eventually, he made his way from his wife's grave to the dusty dirt road where he walked along its darkened rocky path. He was only met with the occasional owl flying past him on the barren route until he made it back home, where he heard the sound of the wind chime swinging on the front porch. John walked it into the empty house and dived into his deserted bed as the nearby clock ticked away. He laid there only for a moment before he closed his eyes. Immediately after doing so, he was swept away and taken into his haunted dreamland.



John escaped one nightmare, only to be thrown into the next. His chaotic thoughts, combined with his state of complete misery, produced some of the worst nightmares he had ever experienced. He was haunted by the fire and rage of demons spilling blood across the earthly grounds ahead. Explosions echoed in the distance and a hysterical woman yelled for help as John remained frozen, unable to move.

People were dying and burning in front of him, and his darkened, elongated, blood-stained hands were unable to protect any of them. He continued watching others burn, reminding him of his family, but that was displaced by the sound of gunfire that roared past him like thunder cracking the cosmos.

This ignited something inside of him—ignited something that lingered in the depths of his soul. He laughed wickedly, no longer frozen, until he began trailing behind a man holding a coin. The man flicked it into the air before clenching and punching his way through the hordes in front. Following behind them, bright quick

flashes of empowered blades zinged from a dark mist—shooting through the devilish crowd ahead.

The dreams vanished with the bright light, and the haunted nightmares stopped after another vision of the girl from beyond came to him with the same message:

“You and the one soon to become must help,” the girl echoed in his dreams.



“Who are you talking about?” John exclaimed as he awoke from his hellish nightmares, only to be greeted with the stark pain of losing his wife. He felt as though he had been sleeping for days, but in reality, it had only been a few hours. He sat up and squinted to see the nearby clock that was illuminated by moonlight. It was now 1 a.m.

“Victoria!” John cried out, somehow hoping for an answer, but he knew there would be none. He had yearned for her, hoped that something would break the laws of nature, and for her to hear him before calling back with her sweet, comforting voice. He wanted to hear her say it would be ok, that it was only a dream, but deep in his heart, he knew better.

John closed his eyes, trying to get back to sleep and away from this harsh reality of sadness—choosing the nightmares over his current unrelenting grief; he could not do it. He tossed and turned, but he could not bring himself to fall back asleep. John laid there for a few minutes, staring at the dark ceiling above until he could no longer take it.

He got up from his bed and headed into the kitchen. As he traversed the short distance, the creaking floorboard’s cries, along with the persistent ticking of the clock, reminded him of just how alone he was. Opening the cabinet door, he grabbed himself a lavish teapot and set about making a cup of tea. It was

a special variety that he and Victoria had gotten from one of the fancy shops in London.

He filled the pot with water and the tea leaves and, after a few minutes, a whistling sound came from atop the stove's burner. He took the pot off the fire and poured himself a cup.

John brought the tea into the other room and took a seat at the little wooden desk and chair that held his typewriter. The brand was the prestigious Remington, and it was one of their newest models. Victoria had gotten it for him last month as an early birthday gift. John had a hard time calling it that, since it wasn't a few days or even weeks early, but she had given it to him four months sooner than expected. He stared at it while sipping his tea and smiled; the expression faded as more tears streamed down the broken man's face. The deserted bed, the open room, the empty house—all of it was gnawing on him, pushing him little by little.

He tossed the cup across the room and into the wall. The sound of it shattering echoed through the lonesome house. John knew if he didn't leave now, he would snap, and even if he did, he might snap regardless. He stood from the wooden desk and grabbed his hat from the bed. He took the picture of his wife from the bedside and tucked it into his inner jacket pocket—leaving the house once more.

John traveled down the dusty road with tears falling from his eyes, watching as the moon was being concealed by the clouds. The distant thunder and fresh breeze that accompanied it did little to comfort him. He watched the strange occurrence of street lamps flickering as he moved past them at the edge of town. He did not mind it. In his own desperate and convoluted attempt at comfort, he felt it could be Victoria watching him.

The heavy sadness that weighed upon John caused him to walk like a drunk down the dirt road. Behind him in the distance, the lights had stabilized again, no longer blinking or flashing. His trek towards the cemetery became dampened as small droplets

of rain hit his hat and face. He looked up at the sky and thin beams of moonlight that penetrated the dark clouds, basking in the small droplets as he stumbled along. Not long after that, he passed the graveyard's wooden gates and stared at his wife's plot as the sprinkle turned into a thunderous downpour.

"It's been such a stormy few days, Victoria. I don't think I've ever seen so much rain here in my life," John said with a straight face, but then choked on his words. "I don't think I can do this, Victoria. I can't do this again. The pain of losing my family in an instant tragedy. And now you? It's too much for one lonely man to bear. I can't even go to Pop's anymore. It's too painful—much too painful. I can't live without you, my spring flower, my one true friend in this world—my wife; the one who kept me going and believed in me. Without you, I don't think I am even myself. Why must the world always work like this? I try my best; I give everything I've got—yet, why? Why does it forsake me yet again? Why am I a part of some sick god's tragedy? Some divine joke that I am the continuous punchline for. I can't stand it! I can't keep this up! Not one of my submissions have been responded to. I have no family or close friends any longer. Now that you're gone, what am I to do? Tell me, Victoria!"

He reached in his pocket to grab the picture, but he felt something else alongside it. He pulled out the photo with a fine pearl switchblade that she had given to him for their anniversary three years back. John gave a comforting, warped smile as he looked at it.

"Is this the answer you've given me, my dear?" John asked with a strange calmness in his voice. "Very well, my love. I will follow you into the abyss. Devils beware, for I fear no sins of this world or the next. I will reclaim my wife's hand in the vast oasis of the unknown. On this soil, I shall throw my life's essence and feed the wildflowers so they may grow."

He put the switchblade to his neck while looking at his wife's picture. As the rain fell upon the photo, he pulled the lever,

releasing the blade. Sharp as the exceptional edge was, it cut right through his skin, puncturing his throat and carotid artery. John dropped to his knees and fell upon his wife's grave. Soft new dirt greeted his face like a cool pillow as he looked to the side, coughing blood as he continued gazing upon the picture.

Eventually, his vision began fading as he strained his eyes, like he had done on those countless nights trying to write into the witching hours. John gave himself over, and with his conscious mind slipping, he fell into an almost perfect slumber. A slumber that only death itself could give to the broken man.



John awoke from what he felt had been the most pleasant sleep ever. His sense of euphoria diminished, however, as he felt an odd sensation in his right hand. It was warm, slimy, and wet—dripping down his fingers. It was similar to what he felt covering his neck on Victoria's grave, but there was no pain accompanying the fluid, and it was now much more prominent. After taking a moment to gather his wits, he realized while the liquid was mostly contained to his right hand, there were moistened splashes of it across the entirety of his, what now felt like, naked body.

The smell of iron and piss filled the air with an incredible intensity. Even more aberrant and nauseating odors seemed to penetrate his heated nostrils as he continued trying to grasp what was happening. He couldn't see what was going on, and only heard the sound of unfamiliar voices in a muffled distance.

"Martha, oh Martha," they said before laughing, and a woman ahead of him gave a frightful gasp.

One of the voices he heard belonged to a peculiar individual. The most bizarre part wasn't that he heard this voice, but that he

felt it. John felt the vibrations of their words coming from within himself.

John heard the woman getting closer. Her frightful breaths becoming more intense.

“Martha, oh my dear Martha, what a trepid bad witch you are! Let me cut you deep so that you may repent in scars!”

John felt this must have been a strange dream, but didn’t he just awaken? This dream wasn’t even in the same realm as those he’d had before. Even those with the tattooed woman in them weren’t like this. As he struggled to understand what exactly was happening, the warm flowing substance continued to soak his skin while his body moved on its own.

The woman’s heavy breath and frightened moans became elevated as the sound of knives sparking across a solid surface reached his ears. A gruesome echo of flesh being torn into interrupted the woman’s moans. A horrid cackle screamed out before all sounds diminished.

He was now at a complete loss. He had no idea what was happening or who the voice was even talking to. John didn’t know any Marthas, and he was sure he had died on the grave plot. He wondered if he was now in hell.

The bloody hell is going on? John asked, forcing his eyes open.

Now looking around, he saw that he was indeed covered in blood, but it wasn’t his own. The blood belonged to the person in front of him, who was now cut to ribbons.

“What’s going on? What the hell is happening?” John exclaimed, falling backwards.

He scrambled, crawling back while his eyes were entranced by the mutilation of the woman ahead. He stopped when his back hit a wall. The woman’s blood flowed onto the wooden planks from her stab wounds and steadily encompassed the bottom of his bare feet.

"Quiet on down there, Johnny-boy. Best you be quiet after we complete our little games. Playing with these treasonous witches—some might not see it the same!"

"Who's there? Show yourself!" John demanded as he frantically looked around in all directions.

"Show myself, show myself. How can this be done? Do you have a mirror on you? After all, we are one!"

"What the hell are you talking about? What have you done!" John demanded of the voice once more.

He stood up, completely stripped save for the blood dripping from his limbs. His pounding heart felt as though someone was trying to forge him a new organ.

He looked left. There was nothing.

A screeching bat flew by from his right, but again, he couldn't see anyone around. Everything, including the dead girl in front of him, was silent. Even the wind showed no signs of whistling for him tonight.

"Curious, curious, I shall explain myself to thee. I am the one sent here to slay the treasonous witches with glee! You, my dear Johnny-boy, I've been watching for some time. Told you would be the one to do it, so was I. So I waited while you dined, waited while you would sleep. I waited while you took a shit by that huge oak tree! I watched you with anticipation for the past week, my dear, sir. Remained there until the time you cut yourself from this Earth!

"After you took that step forward, I was free to proceed. Free to make you a part of me—and me a part of you, don't you see? We've become one at last, finally! Your soul split apart and combined with myself. It was the compromise from the gods, and the hand you've been dealt! A just punishment and job that you have received! Don't you see, John? It was meant to be!" the voice explained in its curious phrasing.

"Punishment? What punishment? What games are you playing?" John asked of the voice that came from inside his head.

"I play no games with you, Johnny, my boy. I'll only tell you the truth and more in good time. The punishment I am describing is for the sin you committed. The sin of taking your own life is the one that is not permitted. So for that, you see, we have become a part of each other, inevitably. Your body and soul are shared from now on! The reason the gods dealt you this favor was because of what the witches had done. You see, my dear friend, Johnny, my boy, a witch, killed your family and meddled with your joy. So the punishment you've received is quite the compromise—indeed!

"You are to help me in my search and seizure of these foul witches. We must leave them in a state beyond receiving even stitches. Together, we will hunt each of the traitors down and tear out their organs. Grinding them all down into bear size proportions! We'll stomp out their rebellion, set them ablaze if we must. These witches of traitors are the scum we must dust!"

John was at a loss for words. What he was told by the inner voice confused him, and it was enough to bring a shock to anyone's mind. He had been a somewhat skeptical Christian practitioner, but he never expected anything like this to occur. Now, he had either blacked out and was in a terrible dream, in hell, or what this being was telling him was true.

Somehow, all of his senses and instincts knew the answer to this already. The being was telling him the truth; he could feel that much. Life was without a doubt about to change for him in the oddest, and perhaps darkest, of ways.

"Where am I? And... did you really have to rip her up in such a way?" he asked, as his heart beat calmed.

"Rip her up, you say? Mmm, I quite like that phrase. Perhaps it will be a part of my official title and mark. To answer your question, I had to rip her up real good in the dark. The message has to be sent, to make the others like her go back and repent. Where we are right now is in the city of London. This witch summoned you here after you had killed yourself. Beg my pardon. I hopped along together with you before she transported the two of us. I already dissolved your

previous body and clothes before you awoke here, to hide the truth of us. This body is made anew, and you're free to live your life mostly as you did before. That might be difficult for you to do, however, but please, rest assured. We must stay here in London and dig up the dead seeds. Until we make them suffer and completely disappear, our work won't be done, don't you see?"

"Who are you, being who now resides in my body?"

"Me? Until today I have been given no name. Though since your name is John, my humblest host from this Earth, I will go by Jack, Jack the Ripper—your most humble and closest of cohorts."

"What did you mean that a witch killed my family? What happened in that fire?"

"Curious now, Johnny-boy. I can see that it's true. You're curious about the emotional toll that was taken upon you. The reason that a witch killed your family, you see, was nothing more than a contract fulfilled by those of the dead seeds. The dead ones are trying to claim a lost power. That, my dear sir, we must ensure never happens! Your family was killed by a jealous man at the time. He gave up his soul to act out the most devious plot line. From there, the witches burned your family while you were away. Just for a single soul, it is beyond cruel, even I must say.

"A man who lusted after your mother had her and your father set ablaze! The rest of your siblings were only collateral—doesn't that just amaze? He's since passed on, but his soul is unaccounted. Claimed by the dead seeds, that seems to be what has amounted."

"My family was killed due to a man's jealousy? Is that really all there was to it? Was this the witch who carried it out?"

"This woman here, I cannot say. I do not know who committed that sin on this day. We must get to the bottom of this and investigate the dead seeds. Only by doing so will we find the answers that you seek. The woman here was a traitor to her own kind. So, by the gods, I lured her out using your death to act as a trap on behalf of the divine. From there, I took it upon myself to play a little game. Ripped Martha up real nice, so she'd never be the same. She left you a little

letter, though a bit bloody now. I put it in your hat's inner lining with the picture that you held."

He looked around the area, finding his hat lying nearby, and watched as the still fresh blood dripped from it, landing down on the brick alley ground below. John reached in the inside of his bloodied hat and pulled two items out. The first, the picture of his wife, which Jack had seemed to protect for him. For this, he was grateful. Although he didn't understand why Jack would do this for him, it did lead John to trust the words of the being inside him more. The second item was a letter addressed to him, written in shiny silver letters.

"John Pepo," the outer envelope read.

He pulled the letter from its containing envelope—his hands stained it in even more blood. Upon unraveling it, a few shillings fell out, and he began to read what was inside.

Dear Sir, or Ma'am,

This is your official invitation to join us. You're probably a bit confused right now, but that's to be expected, as you have indeed died. We have rescued your soul from an otherwise terrible fate. We know you killed yourself to escape the pain of this world, but we also know there was a reason why. You would have never been able to find the answers, or the ones you sought after using this method. Thus, we took it upon ourselves to save you from a fate worse than death: obliteration.

Had we not stepped in, you would no longer exist at all. For this, we offer a choice to you. You can join us, learn the truth about the world and help us shape it, or you can go your own way and forge your own path.

We have many businesses you can work with throughout London and even the world. Take a few

days to get your bearings at a hotel of your choice. We have included the funds for up to a week within this letter. Should you choose to go about your way and return to the world alone, we understand and will try to assist you; however, if you wish to learn more about the world, the universe, and your fate, we can help.

Included is a blanket letter of recommendation to one of the many businesses we are a part of. We understand life can be challenging and tedious, so we wish to help you along the way as we work towards our future goals together. If you select to join with any of the businesses included, I will be in touch with you personally. Please, take a week to consider which you would like to do.

Sincerely, Nick.

"No last name?" John said as a few more shillings clinked from the letter and into his palm. "I have no choice but to hunt these witches, and dead seeds, as you called them, do I?"

"I'm afraid not, Johnny, my boy. If we are found to avoid our duties, we will be dealt with the same in due time."

"So, how do you suggest we proceed?"

"My advice to you, John, is to accept this invitation. Get close to them, and by doing so, we should find out a few clues as to the treasonous witches' locations. We will teach them all about the Ripper's games in our own time. For now, you must rest and become accustomed to having me on the inside. Follow my lead, John, into this world. I will guide you with a steady hand, not a handle made of pearl. Together, the two of us will complete the task at hand. Gather up the clues and prepare to make the defiers bend. Going forward, we must rely on the benevolent witches of Loch. Don't worry though, I've heard they're quite the wonderful flock."

"Come along now, John. Let us be on our way. Get away from this body before the bobbies we must contain."

John left down the alleyway stairs with only his hat, leaving Martha Tabram dead and alone on the first floor landing in one of Whitechapel's small flat buildings. She wouldn't be officially recognized as deceased until the 7th of August, 1888, at 5 a.m, when her body would be formally discovered and not gazed upon as a sleeping drunk. This was only about three and a half hours after John had sliced his own throat open with a pearl-handled switchblade; three hours after he had been summoned to London, and where the Ripper first became physical.

CHAPTER II

The 31st of August, 1888

In the dark streets of London's Whitechapel district in 1888, all sorts of foul humans lived. Some preyed on the weak; others took advantage of those in their sleep. Some drank themselves asunder, while others enjoyed the pleasures of one another. One may see these acts as heinous or deviant, but even greater depraved acts were committed.

"Hi sir," a young woman said to an approaching man. The man continued forward and replied with a firm "No" as he passed her by.

Prostitutes were about like locusts in the streets throughout both day and night; most looking for their next target to make ends meet. You see, in the poor district of Whitechapel, nearly everyone was struggling—especially the single women to find work. However, none of them were expecting that while they looked for their next target, someone, or *something*, was also searching for those that caught their eye.

"Ey Polly, any luck tonight?" a woman asked after walking through the rough dirt and stopping in front of Polly who was in front of a flat building sipping liquor.

"Not much, luv. I haven't really had much of any luck outside this bottle, you?"

Polly asked her, while taking a swig of what most there would call rat piss. This was the local name for the liquor that was the cheapest one could get their hands on. The stuff the shop keepers would keep on the bottom shelf where the rats scurried.

"Well, I had this one bloke. He paid decently enough, but his cock knackered me right out. I shoulda charged him more for what he gave me."

"That good, aye? Sounds like something I could get behind!"

"You've always been a bit more flexible than me," she said, laughing. "I better head on inside, though. Gotta get some rest. This poor old back of mine won't make it through tomorrow at this rate," she said stretching.

"I hear ya. You don't happen to have the time before you head off, do ya?"

"Well, let's see. I did get a timepiece from a gentleman earlier this week," she said, rummaging through her burgundy overcoat. A moment later, she pulled out a watch attached to a metal chain from within and it clicked open. "Looks to be about 2:50 a.m. Still early enough, there might be a few customers around for you to cater to."

"Alright, luv, I won't keep ya any longer. Take care, and have a good night."

The other woman smiled and headed off, leaving Polly with the pleasant wind and chirping of crickets to keep her company. Not too long after the woman waved her off, a few gentlemen passed her on the dark road. None of them seemed too interested in what she had to offer.

"Go away, bitch," one of them said as another snickered.

"Bugger off then, will ya!" she yelled after them. "These damn blokes. I'll never get anywhere at this rate."

One man approached from around the corner, wearing a top hat and a dark civil suit. He paused for a moment, giving her a nice smile, but then began to walk off. She caught him by the arm right as he was about to pass.

"Hey there, darlin', can I interest you in a fun night?" she asked, tugging on his suit while gently squeezing on his arm.

The man smiled as he searched through his trousers. Polly continued pulling him closer until he stopped—frowning with disappointment.

“Sorry dear, ‘fraid I wasn’t dreaming. I lost all my shilling gambling tonight. Shame ‘cause I could use a bit of distraction after that disappointment. Perhaps, another time?”

“That’s not a worry. Not a worry at all. What’s your name, darlin’?” she asked, looking up at him, blinking. Her large, voluptuous bosom pressed firmly against his arm.

“It’s Robert, and you are?” the man almost stuttered while asking.

“Most around here call me Polly,” she said in a gentle tone.

The words and feeling of her warm, soft skin and hot breath sparked something in the man’s loins that made him want to join her even more than before.

“There are other ways we can settle if you’d like to join me tonight,” she said, smiling at him.

The man swallowed, his dry mouth offering no comfort to his throat.

“I’d be very interested to know,” he told her, staring at the woman with glazed brown eyes.

“It’s really simple. You see, all you have to do is...” She continued whispering in his ear until the man’s face perked up.

As she pulled him inside the nearby gate to her flat’s building, he smiled with a wide, giddy expression; like a child who had experienced the taste of a chocolate truffle for the first time. He was about to whisper something back, but was interrupted before he had the chance to begin. The pair froze as they heard dry leaves crunching in the darkness. The voice that followed sounded like a terrifying jester.

“Mary Ann, oh Mary Ann,” a voice echoed with maniacal laughter from the shadows.

“Who’s out there?” Robert demanded while snarling at the man in the shadows.

"Leave now and forget, my human friend. For it is I, Jack, who has stopped you from committing a cardinal sin."

The woman tried to scream out to him, but no sound was heard. He pulled his arm out of her grasp and, as if in a trance, walked away.

"Why don't you come with me tonight, Mary Ann?" Jack asked as he continued pacing in the shadows. "All this time you owe has come due. Oh, what a treat it must have been for you—to do what you have done all these years. Only thinking of yourself is how it appears. It's all upsetting to the natural order, little Mary. You knew this, yet still, you did it! Oh, for what a travesty Mary that this carries with it!

His voice ping-ponged back and forth as he continued dancing on the leaves in the shadows.

"You hurt me, Mary Ann, I must admit. You hurt me, and you've hurt so many others in the figurative and literal senses of the word! Just why Mary Ann, oh why? Why have you been doing it all this time?

"Won't you come here, Mary Ann? Won't you come to see me? Why do you divert your eyes so? Does the thought of what's coming frighten you for what you owe? Does the sight of my face send shivers down your spine? Will you not look upon me, oh Mary Ann of mine?"

"I... well, I—" She tried to speak, but the words left her lips as a silent stuttered breath.

"Oh, Mary Ann, you know you've been bad. The price you've asked for has come back to be had—for you, due to what the boss man asked you to do! You can blame no one else but yourself; that is true. You were told not to continue down this path of sacrilege, and yet it was done! But fear not, my poor Mary Ann! I'm here to put it to an end, so try not to run!"

The girl's mouth in front of him opened wide. She tried to scream, but this time only a harsh breath exerted from her mouth.

"I'll make it quick, but painless I cannot promise to you! I'll start with your throat, and no more devious words shall be spoken by you. Your soul may be lost, but you knew this already. Before I even beseeched you today, you knew the consequences, so get ready. For Mary Ann, the devil's contract hurts both the seeker and the conscriptor that makes it to be true. So ready yourself, miss Mary, for your own time is now due."

Jack exited from the shadows and began approaching Mary Ann Nichols. As he did, the gated fence clicked over and over. It was as if he was using a stick or rod to taunt her, moving it through the groves before entering the gate. Once he reached her, his long, slick fingers ran across the nape to her bosom. Chills were sent down her spine, causing her to shiver.

Mary Ann looked up at him with a face contorted from the terror. Her teary eyes begged for mercy, sensing the patient hand of death now rapidly approaching. The violent, monstrous man looked down upon her with no pity. His round head filled with fire only cast a dark shadow upon the woman as he smiled down at her.

At last, she found the will to fight back. Struggling with all her might, she punched and kicked the presence in front of her. But it was no use. She was repelled with limited force. Her flabby body grabbed like a child and tossed against the nearby fence—where she was pinned. He squeezed both of her hands with one large, intrusive grasp, while slapping her face with the other.

He cackled as blood gushed from her mouth.

"SHH, SHH, SHH," Jack sounded with a half shushing, half laughing wheeze.

He put one finger to her lips while letting out a heated smile that warmed her beaten face. Gently, with a lover's touch, he tapped and slid his finger down from one side of her mouth to the other four times, like a taunting metronome.

"We. Must. Be. Quiet. Can't alert the nearby watchman."

He smiled one last time as tears and fluids escaped her swollen body—her final, distorted breath quickly exited with a swift flick of the wrist. Blood followed that last breath as it came rushing out from her neck. The wound was so deep that it went almost all the way through, just short of the spine. The corpse of the woman dropped to the ground as a deep scarlet blood continued to spew out. It looked like some sort of twisted champagne bottle that continued to fizz over.

“You see, that wasn’t so bad. No more wicked words are heard coming from you when you’re nearly behead! Your soul will soon be destroyed, and what’s more, I’ll disembowel you all the way through, you meaty whore.”

By making a small incision in her stomach, he reached in deep, pulling out what he could. His smiling face created a soft illuminance as he tore away at her flesh and innards. Mary Ann’s intestines and uterus were ripped from her body and tossed to the nearby building’s stone floor. Laughing at her lifeless corpse, he stood up and walked away. Mary Ann Nichols’s remains now layed there alone, silently, in a puddle of her own blood, guts, and teeth at the inner gate.

One of the miscreant whores of Whitechapel were now added to the Ripper’s death list in a blood-red ink. It wasn’t the first name, and it would not be the last. Jack’s devilish games were just beginning, and soon his games would force the devil himself to come to collect.



A few hours after the incident in Whitechapel, after the sun had crested the shores of England, a man at the Central News Agency, John Pepo, who had recently started working at *The Star*, was preparing a story he had been given by his superiors. Since he was new to the paper, he was working closely with

those at the Agency to learn the ins and outs of the world of journalism. The man he was being mentored by was named Thomas Bulling, which could be read from the nameplate on his desk in big, bulging silver letters. As the sound of papers shuffling and typewriters being pecked at continued throughout the building, Thomas approached John, and began to look over what he had written about the fateful incident that occurred earlier that morning.

"Police, Police! Oh my god, this is horrible. Someone, please!" a man yelled at 3:40 a.m. from the front of a flat complex in Whitechapel. The man's name was Charles Cross. He was soon met by a man named Robert Paul and the police shortly followed. The body of Mary Ann Nichols, or Polly as she was known to most, was found mutilated within the gates of her flat's building. Her abdomen was found to be eviscerated. Her organs, intestines, and other parts of her insides slung out across the concrete of her flat's grounds, right before her foyer—

"Jesus Christ, John. When Charles asked me to give you this story, I was skeptical, but really now, we can't lead with that much brutality. I know you're new to the professional journalism world and all, but for Christ's sake, that's a bit dark. They hired you to sell papers for public consumption, not horror stories! This is the Central News Agency. If you wrote something this sensational at *The Star* from a story we gave to you, William and Edward would have a fit. I'm not sure you'd get anything serious from us for a long time after, or if the paper would even keep you around if they were to come across this. You're lucky I caught this before someone else had seen it."

"Is it really all that bad?" John asked Thomas. "I read the *Sunderland Echo's* recount of a mysterious murder a few weeks back, and it wasn't much less gruesome."

"You're not with the bloody *Sunderland Echo* now, are you, John? You're working for the bloody *Star*! You have to have more tact than the people at the damn *Sunderland Echo*; that's just how things go."

"Well..."

"Well nothing!"

Thomas gave him a quick look and took a long drink of some black tea from a beaten tin cup that seemed to calm him down.

"Don't worry about it," he said, licking the droplets from his lips. "I'll edit this up for you real quick and make it less perverse so you can get *something* printed and out in the corner in time. I really don't know why Charles is having me help with this. I've got enough on my plate already. Goddamn interns," Thomas muttered as he walked away.

Are they all like this here? Such an interesting fellow, John thought.

Although John was now technically working for *The Star*, the Central News Agency had been where he had done most of his work throughout the joint internship. He sat back at his desk and started looking through the other articles they had given him to work on, and then turned to the stories he had been writing himself. Stories about a young man with lightning covering him and deep scars down his back; the desperado from beyond the endless desert, searching for the god that damned him, and, of course, the girl with the tattoos and feather who was the cause of it all. It was her that had kept coming to John Pepo, an Irishman whose family emigrated from Ireland and into England a little more than a decade ago. Throughout the years, she would come to his dreams in order to show him these glimpses and more. After doing a few small edits, John stood up and proceeded to walk over towards the manager's office to try and get some answers to questions that had been bugging him.

The wooden floor of the multiple storey building echoed as he passed by a few smaller offices along the way. The people inside of them were working on their own stories for the day, or editing someone else's. Still, nothing else compared to the one he had been given. The story of a woman ruthlessly slaughtered, a prostitute, nonetheless. It was almost guaranteed to be the talk of London as soon as it got to print and down to the corners. It would be likely that no one would be talking about much else. The other stories that were being added to today's paper were just there to fill the pages. If they were allowed, this would be one of those rare instances that they could sell a paper with a single story.

At the end of the long hall, he reached the most prestigious office. It was odd for an agency to have such a fancy-looking office, but they went all out here. The private investor who backed the Central News Agency, Nick, was very well off and took great care of those under him.

After a brief moment of inspecting the solid oak door in front of him, John knocked.

After three thumps on the door, the occupant, Charles Moore, hollered from the other side.

"Come on in, don't be shy."

John entered and looked around. It wasn't his first time being in Charles's office, but he was nearly caught off guard each time by how nice it was. Expensive paintings, leather and velvet decor. And then, to top it all off, there was a Steinway Square grand piano that Charles was known to play from time to time.

Such prestigious comforts, John thought, disgusted by the overly luxurious room.

"What can I do for you, John?"

"Charles, I was wondering if you had heard anything from Nick? I was brought on to learn the world of journalism at *The Star*, and the Central News Agency has done well to guide me, but I was also to help Nick with other operations."

"Other operations? I don't follow," Charles responded sullenly, with a scrunched brow.

There's no way this guy doesn't know what I'm speaking of, John thought to himself. "You know, those to do with the shaping of things to come? Nick told me he'd be in touch in that regard, but I haven't heard anything since I received my, well, recommendation to work here. I was quickly hired on, and I love every aspect of the job, but I was told I would also be helping with *other operations*—outside the concerns of the paper and agency."

Charles looked at him with pursed lips while brushing his rough beard with his stubby fingers.

"I'm sorry, John. I really don't have a clue about what you mean. Tell you what, I'll get a message to him for you, and you guys can figure that part out together. You've already finished your article today, and it looks like Tom got it approved by *The Star* for print as well," he said while pointing out the office window at Thomas who held up a copy of the completed paper—still panting from running up and down the stairs.

"Why don't you take the rest of the day to do some further investigations at the crime scene? You should look deeper into it and see if you can come up with anything to add. I'll contact *The Star* and see if they'd like to do a follow-up piece on this tomorrow, as it's bound to be a hot item by the way the woman was cut up like that!"

"But I—"

"No buts, I'll get that message sent over to *The Star*, and to the boss man for you. You just go ahead and take the day. Go on now," Charles said in a forceful tone.

Very strange, John thought and grabbed his dark hat and his orange, sunset-colored scarf from his small desk before heading down the stairs and towards the exit.

There was a reverberating thud with each step, until he made it to the first floor lobby, where he passed by Ruth, who was the secretary at the front entrance. She waved him farewell on his

way to the front door of the building, and he at last passed by Chip, who was the young security guard.

"Sir," Chip said, tipping his hat as he held the door open.

After walking through the front door, a brisk north wind hit John in the open street, along with the sound of people and carriages moving about. At the end of the street, a boy was loudly touting the freshly released news.

"Hot off the press from *The Star*! The Central News Agency's detailed report of the gruesome murder of the Whitechapel harlot! Get them while they last!"

*I hope Thomas didn't destroy the integrity of what happened too much. I don't want to hear about it from **him** later on.*

Horse driven carriages passed by John, and the nearby crowd swarmed the kid on the corner of the brick road like vultures to pick off what remained of Mary Ann Nichols in the form of her detailed obituary in the paper. John pushed through and made his way across the street. He traveled straight for a few streets, and then a couple to the left and then straight before making one final turn to the right. After reaching the street's end while holding his hat tightly to keep it safe from the wind, he entered a small business named The Spirits' Pub.

As John entered, a smooth, elegant sound greeted him from the back of the pub where the third-hand piano the owner Sallz had brought in was located. The man who was playing and was responsible for such a fine melody looked as though he may be homeless from his dirty, ragged clothes. No one seemed to be making a fuss about his attire, as they all looked to be enjoying the professional grade he brought to the craft. For the time of day, it seemed to be quite lively in this little back alley joint.

"Is MK here?" John asked, approaching the barkeep.

The man at the front gave him a quick look up and down and then, after a moment, nodded him over to the lower section of the pub. Sallz was there waiting on two older gentlemen who were a little off-balance from the many empty drinks stacked

around their table. Not too far away, MK stood cleaning up the abandoned bar.

"MK, a word?" John asked, approaching the younger woman with piercing blue eyes. Her long strawberry blonde hair swayed as she swept a cloth over the bar. She stopped to adjust the shoulder strap of her dress, which covered most of her body aside from her exposed ankles. Two sloshed old geezers were staring at her like dogs in heat—whispering their dirty thoughts back to one another.

"Just a moment, John. I'll be right with you," she said, grabbing the remaining dishes and heading to the kitchen with them.

John smiled and took a seat at one of the smaller tables nearby. He rotated the condiments and shuffled through the menu as he awaited. Fancy drinks like *Ghost's Whisper* and *Witches' Brew* were among those he thought sounded interesting.

MK made her way back into the lobby and walked over to John with a sweet smile on her face.

"How's it going, John? How's everything with the job?" MK asked, sitting across from him.

"Everything's as well as it can be, I suppose. How's the day job treating you, MK?"

"It's fine, thanks to everyone here. It's really thanks to Sallz that we've been able to keep this place up and running as well as we have."

John started tapping three of his fingers on the dented pine table rhythmically. He found a strange comfort in the uneven surface beneath them.

"And how about your *other* job? Have you been able to come up with anything new for us since you've been there?"

"No, but John," MK paused for a moment before continuing. "I don't know how long I can keep doing the other job for. You know if he finds out..." she said. Her hand quivered, and she tried to steady it by gripping the table.

“You don’t have to worry about that MK, none of these drunks in here know anything about that. Just keep your head down and do the minimum to keep up appearances. I don’t know much, but what I do know is that you’re fairly new here. As for those you need to look out for, they dare not show their faces here, as it’d cause a great scene. If they were to plan anything that bold, they’d have done it by now. You just keep a low profile and continue what you’ve been doing. I’ll take care of the rest. The plan all of you have concocted with Fate has brought me inside. Now I’m just waiting for the meeting I was promised to get in closer. Once that happens, it’s only a matter of time before our friend sets things straight, as they were intended to be, for all of us.”

“You don’t understand, John! You don’t understand one bit. He’s not really a man, no, h-he’s really no man at all. He’s more akin to a complete monster. He goes against everything sacred and takes advantage of the weak and only worries about his collections and... and—”

John gripped her trembling hand and squeezed gently.

“It’s okay. You’re okay.”

MK sighed.

“You’re right... I’ll be fine. I’m sorry. I-It’s just, it’s just been very, well, very stressful lately. With everything, well, you know. That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?”

“That’s right. Anyway, I was just coming to check on you to make sure things are still going well. Keep doing what you’re doing, and everything will be fine. If things go well, I should be able to completely end all this before the end of the year. This is my task to handle and why I was brought here. You just rest and focus on yourself, and what Sallz asks. I’ll handle the rest. Anyway, I’ve got to head out. You be good now.”

“Where are you going?” she asked, now more composed.

“I’ve got a job to do. I have to go investigate things more thoroughly in Whitechapel.”

"Be careful, John," MK said as he approached the door.

John smiled at her, tipping his beaten hat, and MK smiled back, now a little more relieved. John stood and headed towards the exit. Sallz waved him off, and the door to the pub closed behind him.



Thirty minutes after leaving The Spirits' Pub, John made his way into the decrepit district of Whitechapel. Usually, the streets would be packed with whores, even at this time of day. On this particular morning, however, there wasn't much whoring going on at all. Though the act was frowned upon, and technically illegal, it was not being enforced as much as in previous years. Though right after a murder like this, the area was heavily covered by police.

By the time John arrived, Polly's crime scene had mostly been cleaned up. As far as he could tell, besides the occasional officer patrolling the area to keep a watchful eye, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. He thought that even if it was improbable, perhaps the police suspected the killer might return to inspect the reactions of the nearby populace. While unlikely, it was the only explanation he had as to why they might be sticking around.

John carefully inspected the area, trying to complete his own assignment. Before long, he heard the sound of a whistle and was approached by those same few officers asking him what he was doing snooping around. After showing them his journalist credentials, they eventually left him alone, but he was unable to get an informative statement from them.

I'll never find anything useful out here at this rate. There isn't really anyone out here that can tell me anything meaningful that I don't already know, John thought.

After looking around the crime scene and nearby area, he decided to go deeper into Whitechapel's roughest part. The district as a whole was a poor, run-down, whore-ridden stain on the otherwise mostly prestigious city of London, but there were parts of Whitechapel that even the locals would avoid.

John passed the local market trying to sell their meager-looking grapes, lamb chops, and chicken burgers that were beginning to rot, and eventually made it into the darkest sector. After kicking a few glass bottles and other rubbish along the way, he soon found himself walking by street vendors selling fancy looking watches; most were easily decipherable as knock offs, and he knew that even if he bought the few that weren't, he'd likely receive a visit from the police about it being stolen. That, or one of the hawkers' scouts, would follow him until he was alone. This way, they would have no trouble stealing it back in order to sell it again. That was just the way it worked in Whitechapel.

A few muddy roads later, and John was in the depressing epicenter of filth. The clouds and tall buildings here blocked out all sunlight, and only whores and beggars could be heard mumbling about.

An older woman in her sixties met John from the side of an alley. She held a hand-rolled cigarette, and it looked like it took quite the patchwork to get it to stay together. Her voice haggard, and lungs full of nicotine and tar almost growled as she spoke to him.

"It's a little early. Are you lookin' for some company?"

"'Fraid, I'll have to decline," John replied, as the woman leaned upon the raggedy concrete wall. "If you can answer my questions, however, I can see about giving you some sort of compensation to make up for the time. You see, I'm a journalist for *The Star*, and I'm searching for answers to what happened to Mary Nichols; perhaps you knew her by the name Polly?"

The old crow groaned as she lit her next smoke that would only add even more tar to her already caked lungs.

"I didn't know her personally, but seeing how we participated in the same business, I may be able to help you. What you want to know about her, deary?"

"Well, you see, I'm trying to get a better perspective of what she was like. So perhaps if you could tell me a little more about her, possibly you know of a circle of friends that I could ask? Maybe they could shed some light on the situation for me? If so, that would be very helpful."

The woman snorted, before hacking up a lump of phlegm that dropped onto the dusty road below.

"Shed some light? What more ya need to know? Seems like she got herself killed by some crazy person. Not sure what friend would be able to tell you more about that."

"That's not... well, never mind. Do you have any names or not?"

"Well, ain't you a pushy lad? We ain't really supposed ta tell names of our own like that. An like I say before, I don', well, didn' really know her that well now, ain't it? I know she used to hang round a particular tavern more than most. Mmmmmm, really fine place. Too fine for her if you ask me. If you want, I can give you the name of that for some coin. Aye, what you say?"

"I'd say what's your price?"

The woman paused, taking a long drag on her patched cigarette that still held together as she smoked it, and then coughed breathlessly before responding.

"Well, considering the risk to me for the telling of this, I think I can do it for a quid. Ye, yeee, that be fair. Can you handle that?"

John stared at the woman. He knew there would be no bargaining with her.

"I suppose it can't be helped. A little expensive, but you've got yourself a deal. May I inquire as to why you feel there is a risk associated with divulging this information?"

The woman took a long drag, considering before responding.

"I got me theories, but the people she was hanging aroun' don' play. Could have been them tryin' to send a message with her.

Not sayin' it was, but you never know when it comes to these kinda things."

John looked at the woman before flicking the quid over to her to cover the cost.

"Go to the Silver Edge tavern, deary. It's just outside of Whitechapel to the west. Oh, but in a far nicer area than this. You might find the clues you're lookin' for there."

"Silver Edge, you say? I thank thee, and will be on my way."

John nodded to the woman and headed west from where he was, according to the directions she had given him.

Silver Edge, wasn't that the name of the tavern Sallz mentioned the other night that she found to be suspicious?

After passing by the same lovely market, and barely dodging a bird that seemed to have had it out for him, he found himself back at the crime scene. With even fewer people there now, someone caught his eye, and it seemed he had caught hers as well. A fine woman who looked to be in her early thirties approached him. Leather boots, pearl necklace, all fine features and accessories someone from this district couldn't afford, and most would be hesitant to even wear here.

"Excuse me, I'm doing an investigation of this crime. If you don't mind my saying, you seem quite a bit out of place here. Not many people are daring enough to wear that kind of attire around here, especially a pearl necklace. Is there perhaps something you could tell me that would help enlighten the public about the events that took place here? Perhaps you have a theory of your own that you would like to share and have published in tomorrow's paper?" John asked the woman, who looked at him indignantly.

"Your message was received. Stop asking questions not related to the paper before given the go-ahead. Know your place in this equation. When you were brought on, it was through the boss's own kindness. Don't forget that. The boss is currently indisposed and unable to meet with you to discuss your operations role until next Friday. You are to meet with him on the 8th of September at

the Silver Edge tavern. Until that happens, you are to keep quiet and continue your normal work as usual at the paper. Are we clear?"

I guess both Sallz and that old hag were onto something in regards to the Silver Edge tavern. Seems I'll have to wait until next week to check things out, or it would look suspicious, John thought, while offering a pleasant smile to the woman. "I understand. Is there anything else I should know?"

"No, that is all you *need* to know until next Saturday. We won't be in touch. Here's your invitation. Make sure not to lose it, or you will not be given entry. Do try to dress appropriately for the late dinner and festivities. Someone will be by to get you at 3 a.m. sharp, be ready."

After opening the envelope the woman had retrieved from her jacket, he found a black index card inside, and nothing else. John looked at it strangely, as the index card itself was completely blank on both sides. With a faint glimmer in his eyes, he smiled and looked towards the woman as she departed.

I have a feeling the fun is just beginning.