



OVER THE CLATTER of rain on the canvas awning above her head and the more remote background hiss of it on the pavement of Cannon Street in the darkness below, she could hear a faint, repeated crunching splash, as if someone were laboriously plodding down the narrow, gravel-paved street; but the sound didn't change its position.

Jacky Snapp shifted forward on the stone ledge and peered down. A streetlamp raised yellow gleams on an umbrella a dozen feet below her and to her left, out in front of St. Swithin's Church, and the umbrella was bouncing up and down as it moved forward



eight steps, then stopped, whirled and jumped eight steps back.

Midnight was long past, and the London streets were quiet except for the occasional rattle of a carriage and horses, or a distant bell from out on the river. Jacky had spent the evening tracking down a beggar who was rumored to have fur growing all over him like an ape, but when she had cornered the man in the basement of an old pub off Fleet Street, her hand tense on the flintlock pistol under her coat, he had turned out to be only a very hairy old fellow with a prodigious beard—not the half-legendary man she had devoted her life to finding and killing.

Another false trail.

Her cold hand went to her chest, and under the fabric of her shirt she felt the glass cylinder she wore on a ribbon around her neck. I won't give up, Colin, she thought—I promise.

The umbrella below her was still hopping back and forth on its eight-step course, and

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it occurred to her that the person holding it might be playing hopscotch, jumping through the pattern of squares in the children's game. Alone, at midnight, in the rain. Jacky had only arrived in the city a couple of weeks ago, but she was sure this must be uncommon.

She pushed her wide-brimmed hat more firmly down onto her cut-short hair and prodded the false moustache glued to her upper lip, then leaned out from the first-floor window ledge to grip the wet drain-pipe by which she had climbed up to this perch; it still felt solidly moored, so she swung out and slid down the cold metal till her boots stopped at a bracket. From here she could stretch a loose-trousered leg sideways onto the granite sill of a ground-floor window, and a moment later she had dropped lightly to the street.

The figure under the umbrella was a girl, facing away now, her wet skirt flapping around her ankles under the hem of a dark coat as she hopped forward on one foot.



Jacky had decided simply to steal away in the other direction, toward the dim silhouette of St. Paul's cathedral dome, when the umbrella abruptly began to glow; in the same moment it was tossed aside and Jacky saw that bright flames had sprung up on the girl's shoulders and in her hair.

Jacky leaped forward and drove her shoulder into the girl's back, and when the girl tumbled forward onto her hands and knees on the wet gravel, Jacky pushed her over sideways and leaned in over the burning coat and tried to roll the girl's head into a puddle. The heat on Jacky's face made her squint and hold her breath, and her hands and wrists were scorching, and the glass vial had fallen out of her shirt and was swinging in the flames.

And another person was crouched beside her, trying to push her hands back; Jacky swung a fist in the person's direction, but it connected with nothing but cold rainy air. Finally she was able to roll the girl over onto her back,

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extinguishing the coat, and with stinging hands splash water onto the girl's head.

With the flames put out, the street seemed darker than ever; Jacky flinched to see glowing spots on the pavement, but at a second glance she saw that they only shone a dim green. Even as she blinked at them they faded, but not before she noticed that they had been arranged in a long row of foot-wide rectangles.

Hopscotch! she thought. She leaned back, gasping in the wonderfully cold air, and quickly looked around, but whoever it was who had tried to interfere in her rescue was gone. The girl lying on the street was panting and moving feebly.

On its now-charred ribbon, the vial that hung around Jacky's neck was too hot to touch, so she let it swing free for now. She started to get to her feet—

And with a start she noticed figures standing in the dimness of an alley on the south side of the street, scarcely a dozen feet