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THE MURDERESS AND THE HANGMAN

by

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Chapter 1
A School for Pickpockets
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Her keen grey eyes, which seemed darker than they were because of her thick eyelashes, look down the street one way and then the other, before she puts her foot outside. There she stands, blanket in hand, before the morning rush of Bow Street where it bears onto Covent Garden, watching all London surging to the fruit and vegetable market covering the Piazza. Six months later she will be arrested again but for now Kate Webster is free to wander the streets, to turn her back on the Bow Street roundhouse, the police runners and all the 'big houses' of London town, and in her own words, "make a clean slate of it."

Kate tosses the prison blanket in the gutter. The wooden door is bolted behind her and the hand of the policemen releases her then disappears back into the morning darkness. The prison world is already forgotten. She is free. Kate strains her neck up to the gloomy skies already threatening a rainstorm to add to the night's drizzle and allows the pale moonlight to open her eyes. She yawns and bends to tie her shoes, rough cobbled boots with old leather laces that have stood her in good stead through many a scrape. As she stands her clothes unfold, black stockings pulled to the knee, a grey apron that hangs low at the front, a grooved tartan belt for no other reason than she swapped it in the prison last night with a young woman for some ready tobacco. Above her waist, wider than most women but more with a suggestion of strength than weight, Kate supports two tops - an incongruous blue blouse below a white shirt - the blouse adding a hint of colour from the elbow to suggest an air of friendliness, a sleight-of-hand for an otherwise plain and coarse garb. Overall, Kate gives the appearance of a vaudeville dancer on bad times. Her twin collar from shirt and blouse double up against the cold; a single dew drop earring of fool's gold hangs in her left ear. She raises a finger to test to wind and turns in the direction of the market from where favourable opportunities are blowing.

For an hour Kate crosses half of west central London in search of her son. She leaves the theatres of Bow Street and Drury Lane, the Theatre Royal itself looking crumpled and worn, and turns into the flower market corner of the Piazza. Only twelve hours ago she was arrested her for common vagrancy and insulting an officer, the usual wording for causing too much noise in the street owing to her merry

evening at the Pig and Whistle trying to find free lodgings for the night with the drunkest man - one who wouldn't catch on that she didn't sleep near him for half the night. On seeing Kate under the lamp outside, her chosen man had turned on her and the ensuing argument had attracted the constable's night watch. Hence her sojourn in the Bow Street 'roundhouse' providing her a stony corner for the night - but a blanket too - and more than she would find on the street. But that was then, and as Kate would be the first to tell you, she is no prostitute, just a woman trying to make her way and she no more trusts men than 'a flick of her nail.'

The market reeks with flowers, all tightly packed into wooden display carts with their wheels folded under them. Wire mesh encircles each bouquet, protecting it from the loose hands of Artful Dodgers. Picking her way along the stalls, the clamour of voices and bodies encouraging her to keep her distance, Kate turns in the direction of the slum of Seven Dials. But she changes her mind on noticing the lodging houses, Turkish baths and brothels all around Covent Garden, the 'Great Square of Venus.' What the market men and women and the polite shoppers of London town fail to see in the day, Kate knows only too well from the night - that this is a working square - although she is no worker in a Turkish brothel, in her own words 'would not sink so low.' But walking past the wooden façades of mock Elizabethan buildings, here doubling as houses of pleasure, Kate decides against Seven Dials where she has unfinished business with a theft of a necklace she suffered yesterday. She will get there soon enough.

Meanwhile the odour of perfumed flowers becomes the crude scent of unwashed bodies along Bedford Street - a row of fresh shops hawking the new invention of soap - something to fear because of its fashionable newness. Reminding herself to look presentable and to escape the sweet stink of soap, Kate takes a lozenge from one of her many inside pockets under her shawl. Unlike soap, she does not fear lozenges to sweeten the breath, but eats so few that the effect is absent. Unguents to perfume the body generally make her feel sick, so Kate relies on a healthy odour of tobacco and the faint hint of alcohol in the few hours since her release. Turning away from the queasiness that is the mixture of brothels and soap sellers she weaves on to the Strand, avoiding carriages and the fog of early morning carriages, fewer at this hour, and begins the long walk to Pickett Corner, past Temple Bar and Ludgate Hill to Blackfriars Bridge. She pauses under the bridge, a known

spot for children selling tobacco, ducks her head into their midst, and is instantly recognized.

"Why, Ms Webster," says a mite in a silver jacket, no older than twelve. The boy pushes his thumbs determinedly in the pockets of a dazzling waistcoat three sizes too big as though he were the Mayor of London himself. "You came back, ma'am."

"Enough," says Kate. "I smoked all me last 'uns last night, never you mind. So I'm 'ere for a few more, jus' to get o' Blackkies."

"Cold mornin' n' all," says the child.

Kate eyes him narrowly and then winks. "Ain't you got the sales pitch! What you got?" In a second a table of brightly coloured pipes is laid out before her. "I got the pipe kid, the 'nuff's my only stuff, if you catch m' drift."

"I surely do, Ms Webster, I surely do."

A sneeze from behind reveals faces caught along the wooden barrier separating the water from the steel bridge supports. A little girl is cradling what appears to be a doll, but as Kate peers through the gloom, her eyes adjusting, the baby again sneezes, and Kate leaps back.

"You want to get that baby turned in," she comments but the boy smiles without explaining the baby's origin. He dishes out the black tobacco on wooden scales from his pocket and pretends to weigh the wiry substance. Addicted to snuff himself, he counts in a whisper, while oily soot crawls from his nostril. Kate ignores all, her fingers pressed greedily as the black rolls twist in the boy's hands. She looks out across the black sludge compressed on river bank, where all the detritus of the night has gathered ready to be picked clean, the discarded treasures of hundreds of night boats that will keep the boy busy in the day.

The sale is made. Kate delivers two bars of soap she acquired in prison and they shake on it, Kate squeezing to delay the moment.

"Take care o' that babby."

"He's ours now," the boy replies. "Don't tell no-one, as they'll take 'im away."

"I know that," Kate says, and leaves it at that. But clambering to the austere lights of the bridge and the grass bank, she turns and cries, imitating a proud city accent: "You know, chaps, tobacco may be a charm against worry, and make you sleep like a baby. But babby's can't take it, so keep the stuff for yourselves, you here, my dears? You know the song, how the 'old gangs smoked, the

Roaring Boys and the Bonaventoes choked,' well that's for me and you, not for the young 'uns."

Puzzled by her tone, the boy decides to salute her instead, his blackened face and silver waistcoat glinting in darkness reflected off the river. Kate turns away and is gone. Soon she is south of the river and is reminded of the East End, and her last residence, the overpowering stench of fish, old wood and decaying bricks. She turns to the timber wharfs at Holland Street and cuts under an abandoned aqueduct in a route she knows well, past the sign for Bleeding Heart Alley and into a forgotten little square that prepares meals for all the men of the timber yards. It is past six o' clock now, and here in an enclosed yard on sunken land behind Commercial Road and London's three vast timber yards, Kate pauses. All around are greasy cooks at sweating work to rival those of Fowle Street or Stinking Alley, already mixing vast iron vats of pea soup, and loading bread baked only minutes earlier onto little carts to wheel them into the wharfs. The river is invisible on the other side of Commercial Street, but wood filings from the machinery can be seen flying through the air, giving the impression of snow falling over the Thames.

Kate shuffles to a baker's stall with a red sign overhead announcing 'Mrs Crease's Good Pies'. She has come to pick up her boy Daniel, minded by that crusty old woman. Usually he is gluing crushed matchboxes in the back room of her bakery - before they are resold - an occupation whose meagre profits are shared between the two women.

"Your husband here with you, Mrs Lawler?"

"The boy got no father," Kate replies. "And he ain't my husband."

"I was wonderin' if he wants t'shave? John Sweeney is back upstairs."

"The boy's only seven."

"I means Mr Sweeney..."

"There ain't no mister, now let's be 'aving Danny along, and we'll be off. Plus the week's takings."

A fat woman in a flatiron apron, Mrs Crease sinks into the dark glow of her bakery and reappears holding the boy's hand. He stands there dutifully, his red hair curled over his forehead, a blank expression on his face. He is thin and pale. Mrs Crease for no reason grips his shoulder tightly, displeased at having to look after the boy after his work hours are done. Squirming a little, Daniel is motionless when he sees Kate, uncertain how to react.

"Well, well," says Mrs Crease, "there's your mama, boy. Why not say hello?" She releases him. He hovers in the

bakery's entrance under the painted sign, darkness at his back, but takes no steps. Gently Kate kneels before her son, takes his hand and interprets the pleading expression in his eyes as another week of harsh treatment.

"Give me the money. Looks like you o'erworked 'im."

"He's lazy," Mrs Crease replies as though ready for the verbal accusations, "and then can't sleep at night - don't do what he's told."

Daniel holds up his wrist and shows Kate a bruise, fresh from that morning and still red. His mother shows no reaction. Instead she touches the dark birthmark on his face, whispers how it will itch for a while, and Daniel almost smiles.

"Just you pay what's owed, and I won't tell the yardmen in Bleeding Heart Yard."

Sarah Crease opens her apron and tips out the coins into one hand. She explains how the yardmen who patrol the lumber yards and are paid by the Bow Street Runners scare her, local vigilantes in the vicinity of her business. Her bakery could catch fire if she gets on the wrong side of the only law south of the river.

"And the rest," adds Kate, and soon enough from Sarah Crease's garters more coins appear. The exchange occurs, and the two women, seemingly at odds, now hug each other. Money has been made and together they have lost little. Sarah twists Daniel's ear before he leaves: "same time next week, I can do Thursday to Sunday."

"I'll be back before then," Kate says, "unless I get work in Covent Garden sooner."

"Ha, what you gonna be, a flower girl?"

"A theatre usher."

Together they laugh at the joke, a mystery to the boy, and Sarah Crease turns her huge frame back to the unseen ovens of her bakery. Through her half timber, half brick establishment sudden gasps of steam through makeshift holes in the roof. "I'll be here, Kate, slaving away, if you need me."

Kate takes Daniel further south back over Blackfriars Road to Bear Lane. Gradually they enter Southwark in the direction of London Bridge, and they cross back, drifting down Sugar Key Walk to the mud banks beneath the City. The neighbourhood begins to resemble the one they've just left, except for the twin fingers of Tower Bridge rising, and the glimpses of St. Paul's Cathedral through the morning smoke and dispersing in the cold air. Kate wraps her shawl tighter, sensing the boy shivering at her heels.

"Almost," she says. "Just be thankful we're in the City, 'cos there's worse places down south."

"We is south o' the river," the boy says and Kate eyes him shrewdly, tapping him on the head.

Eventually they arrive at their destination, a tavern under Southwark Bridge - a musty alehouse, the Cat and Salutation. All around, Bell Wharf is deserted except for a handful of wooden shacks, old boxes and weeds. The Cat and Salutation, the name eerily jovial for such bleak surroundings, rises up before them, a solid two-storey brick building, over-solid in a street fighting the river and losing. Wheezing lightly as though sleeping, visible either side of the isolated beer-shop, the mighty Thames laps its brickwork, undercutting the foundations so that the pub's top storey is wider than the lower pub; the river tide is slowly claiming the ground floor. Outside a dog stares at broken bottles in the street, sniffs desolately and trots away looking over its shoulder at Kate and Daniel. Beyond Bell Wharf tapers uphill to a narrow passageway, the light and life of Cannon Street glinting beyond with the promise of escape.

"To malt and hops!" Kate calls out on seeing the pub. Mother and son descend the muddy bank, treading on jutting stones trying to be steps. She hurries into the saloon, swinging Daniel by his arm. The heavy oak door is held ajar by a thick leather strap, threatening to slap the wall and alert the barman to new clientele. Kate twists her boy ahead so the strap cannot catch her, and sits on a stool before the zinc-topped counter. Sawdust settles back on the wooden floor, the room returning to morning gloom, as their eyes re-adjust.

Before long a tall and wiry man appears behind the horseshoe bar, polishing a glass in one hand.

"Welcome back to my humble abode!" He gestures to the benches and tables on either side of Kate, to the spittoons hooked to the barrels, to the coloured bottles behind the bar looking more like medicine than liquors.

"You're Jonathan Clatter?"

"I am." He peers through the gloom, still twisting the glass.

"Sarah Crease sent me here with the boy." She twirls Daniel into view, and immediately the owner comes to life from his slumbering daze. He sets the glass on the bar and leaves the horseshoe by a side door, appearing under a kerosene lamp. Carefully he draws the tavern's heavy purple curtains, his face glowing with intrigue.

"You brought him for the school," he says.

"I did."

An Englishman of the upper classes descended from the City after alcoholic disgrace, Jonathan Clatter has discovered his metier is serving alcohol. Constantly being around the substance is the only way he can stay sober, watching the ill effects of what he calls "the merry killer" in his own tavern. His grey eyebrows twitch at the new arrivals, his toes encased in soft black pumps pressed together. His excitement is inexpressible. Lips cutting up his cheeks, his hands find each other on the bar; his oversized fingers stack together like branches of a deformed tree, as looks down on the boy.

"You can leave him with me. The expenses are all sorted through that woman Crease."

"As is everythin' else."

"He'll get well looked after here, Mrs..."

"Lawler," Kate replies, using her real name as a pseudonym now she goes by Webster. "Ms. Catherine Lawler, and this is my boy Daniel."

"He'll be fed three times a day, and only sent out once in the afternoon, and then only to Cannon Street, until he gets fixed with the game, you see."

"I see."

"The older boys will show him the ropes. It's all a bit rough, I won't tell a lie, but he'll soon settle in. Just like a school."

"Sure," Kate replies, and her black eyebrows draw over her eyes. For some reason she can't decide if Clatter is a genuine shady dealer with a friendly edge or the reverse, but not so much a crook with a heart as a gentleman fallen on hard times who has turned to petty theft. Pushing the feeling away, she taps Daniel on the shoulder, and again kneels to his height.

"I'm sorry," she says, and puts her arm on his shoulder, more for her own benefit. "I don't want to leave you."

"But then don't, mama, why?"

"I...that's no' any question, Danny. We mus' make our ways' in the world, you know. It ain't no party out there, not this ol' city. The world is what it is, tha's one thing you'll learn. She's what she is!"

He frowns and the plaintive expression on his face - doubled by holding his arms out straight, freckled and innocent - is too much for her.

"I shouldn't, I can't..." she begins, but something in her reaction steels the boy, and he senses he has to impress.

"It's okay, mama," he says, and takes her face and touches it on his chest, a gesture that causes her shock, a brief moment of sobbing, and then some humiliation. Kate gets a grip on her strength and shakes the boy. "Now you go, Danny. There's no other way." He trembles, Kate's expression tight as fists as she steadies him.

"I know, there's no need..."

In a peculiar way, Kate raises her hand to slap him with a thought it will make the parting easier, refrains and then confused she pushes him to the bar. Jonathan Clatter is already there with the two drinks, one for Kate and one for Daniel, none for the teacher. He instructs them to drink "for fortitude" and watches as the boy has a nip of the house beer and Kate is offered a shot of the emerald witch, absinthe.

"What is it?" she asks innocently.

"Now, now, Ms Lawler, let's not pretend," says Clatter. "This here's the green fairy, the opalescent muse or bottled madness to me and you. The essence of life!" Kate feigns surprise, and he smiles as she tips it back.

"One more for the road. Not you," she says to Daniel. "You're a big boy! We can't have you legless before you've graduated from Mr Clatter's fine school."

Clatter prepares another two shots. He places a spoon across a tulip-shaped glass, balancing a sugar cube on top. "This is what the greatest minds of London drink," he says, opening a narrow-spouted spigot on a tabletop fountain; he allows the trickle of water to melt the sugar into the clear liquid below.

"Was that before or after they were great minds?" Kate asks, watching the green liquid filter through, her eyes glowing.

"You have to use old-fashioned glass fountains," Clatter adds. "Check out the elegant metal pedestals I bought recently," he adds, the decaying plaster on the dank walls and the stale last night's beer clouding the clean glasses he produces. One remains empty while he pours Kate a large double "for the road."

"To drink without the ability to get drunk, that's my talent," Kate jokes, Daniel almost forgotten on his bar stool.

"Such is the fine and delightful madness of the goblin!" Clatter replies.

The day now becomes easier for Kate's temperament. Not especially one to remain light-hearted, but rather a stern character prone to fits of melancholy and temper, she allows the absinthe to life into her brain with a vaporous

delight; its sudden waves moving one upon the other like storm clouds brooding, waiting to soak the lighter clouds of memory with nothing but oblivion. But fortunately she stops. Clatter is not trying to con her, and if he was, he would have picked the wrong adversary.

After the drink, Kate is led into the backroom by Clatter, treading gingerly. They pass through a room of bunk beds with boys sleeping haphazardly, two to a bed, some on rugs. Three of the four corners are filled with half a dozen tiny bodies all wrapped together, hair frazzled and mouths hanging open, the relief of sleep cast across their eyelids.

"Such heavy sleepers," Clatter says, "young boys!"

"What time is bed-time?" Daniel asks.

By way of an answer Clatter kicks objects from the floor, old pieces of wire, toy trucks, knitting needles, rags, discarded kettle tops and empty bottles of beer. Clatter now repeats his trick of previous introductions. He parts a curtain and reveals the back room, a triangular partition separating his own lodgings from a third room, the one he claims for "a special boy" who has worked hard.

"This will be Daniel's room for the first week. It's better he's separated from the boys, you know how they can be. But this way he grows used to his surroundings, and then he'll learn to compete like the others, for the prize of winning the room back." All this is said in front of Daniel, and after her three shots of absinthe, Kate only receives the news with mild comprehension.

"Your room, Daniel," she says.

"For a week," Clatter adds, making sure all is clear. "But a grand way to start his stay." Rolling his fingers, he turns back to Kate in the partition door, the boys stirring from slumber behind them, groaning, kicking a little and going back to sleep. "We should talk of charges..." He places his hands on the boy's shoulder, and Kate does the same, Daniel caught between them like a piece of property.

"Now now, Clatter-er, don't get your hopes high. I know Sarah Crease paid you, up front."

"She did that," and he smiles maliciously, the lips cutting high into the cheeks like a painted clown. For two weeks only. After that I'll keep him a week, but if you don't show."

Together they direct Daniel to the third room, out of earshot. Clatter pulls the curtain, which has the ability to swing as a covering for any of the three rooms, so Daniel has the privacy - or imprisonment - for now.

"This ain't no Olivia Twist get-up," Clatter says. "Though we are famous as a school for pickpockets, I'll give you that. Clatter's Double Dozen. While one dozen sleeps, the other works."

"I thought they didn't go out at night."

"Anyway," the gentleman ignores her, "we only target my old friends of the City. The ones who did me wrong! I was a broker, you know, and they forced mi' hand and made me look like a criminal. I will not be known as a criminal! I am a gentleman bartender, and that's the end of the deal. Ms Lawler, the end of my story!"

"I'll be here in a fortnight," Kate says. "Just to see you ain't thrown 'im on the street." She takes a step forward and raises a menacing finger to Clatter's chin and prods him. "Start 'im slowly, Mr Jonathan, "that's all I'll say. Start 'im off slowly, he's as green as they come, but he's my boy. And I love him. No doubts about that - I'd kill for that boy, ain't no mistake."

"He's in safe hands here."

"So watch your p's and q's."

"I do nothing else, Ms Lawler, nothing else."

With that, Clatter draws back the curtain, revealing Daniel standing in the same stop, clearly aware of the whole conversation. Suddenly a noise from the other room reveals a tiny boy in grey shorts and an overlarge white shirt, banging the bottom of a soup pan with a stick, grinning with one tooth. He runs away on seeing Kate and Daniel, knowing he'll be in trouble, but the boys all rouse and line up at that moment.

"I'll be leaving you then," Kate says, and once again Clatter moves part of the curtain to reveal a passageway - - outside. Clatter turns to the line of boys and commands they prepare breakfast. Then he turns and ushers Kate, both bending their heads, through the passage of dark red bricks into a scrubby little yard bound by a black iron railings. An incongruous white bench, known as Clatter's reading bench, is jammed up against the Cat and Salutation. From here he can see both Bell Wharf in one direction and the Thames in the other, no doubt for gauging the best getaway, and he sits there now as Kate and Daniel walk to the black grilled gate to say their goodbyes. Kate makes it quick and walks around the railings whose high spikes turn craftily back into the yard to prevent the boys climbing out at night.

"Mama," says Daniel, chasing her along the railings. "Wait!"

Now on the other side Kate approaches him, the grilles separating them like any of the prisons of London. She can see Clatter in the background, striking up a pipe and sucking it meditatively from the corner of his mouth, lank hair falling in grey matted folds to his collar bones protruding from his shirt. Between the teacher and the mother stretches a long taut washing line, only four feet over the rugged yard grass.

"Pockets and purses," Clatter whistles from his seat. "Just rich folks' discarded hankies."

Kate nods a false smile to Clatter and then turns back to her boy. Her eyes are glistening and she tries to wipe them away but her cloth is too rough. "See those 'hawkes bells, I don't know what he'll call 'em." She points at the line. "Scaring bells maybe!"

"I know mama, I can guess it already. We's a thieves shop, that's what. I got it figured up here," and little Daniel taps the side of his head. "I's to be trained to rob and kill."

"Not to kill," Kate snaps. "Not that."

They look up at the washing line and hear the voice of the teacher: "If a child can take a coin from the line," Clatter calls out, "without triggering the bell well then he's a judicious Nypper. There's more pea soup for those special ones. We conduct a competition too on Sunday and the winner gets the top bunk."

Kate looks at him with a scowl, and walks briefly to the middle of the yard.

"I don't trust you one inch with my boy," she says. "But I'll be back, soon enough, to save him from yer claw." Clatter rolls his fingers in mocking menace at her anger, and chews on his pipe.

"I can blow the smoke from my ears."

"Like they did to you in the City," Kate answers. "These kids aren't safe, but you touch one hair on my Daniel's head, and I'll cut your off, see." And she tips her heads back, winks and giggles. "Don't think me wrong, Mr Clatter, and I'd do it too." For a moment he is silent. "You'd teach 'em to steal from under the rope that's hang 'em if you could, at ol' Tyburn."

"Marble Arch now, missy, those days are gone."

"Do they still hang kids, Mr Clatter? Do they? Tell me that!" Kate raises her fist, and scratches her head, and again laughs. "Thanks for the absinthe." She bows and Clatter smiles, uncertain of Kate's sudden shifting moods.

"You'll welcome," he says, the colour slowly returning to his neck.

"I'll tell you this much," she continues. "If Londoners catch 'em, they don't turn 'em in. They just drag 'em to the nearest well or fountain and duck 'em half drowned'."

"That won't happen to your boy."

"On your life, it'd bettn' not."

Clatter stands and hands her a small phial of absinthe. "One more for the long drop." She glares at him but takes the gift.

She walks back to Daniel. Despite all the talk of safety, Kate doesn't know how to soothe the boy, whose tears have not stopped. She talks through the railing about going to see a fairground, or a hanging, whatever he prefers in the weeks to come.

"I'll be the same," Daniel says. "I won't change here. I don't want to see no hanging!"

"Sometimes a hanging's all they've got on a holiday," Kate says. She lifts his chin where the salt from his tears is beginning to crust. "It's a joke, Daniel, you're too young for a hanging."

The boy frowns, and grips his mother's arm. "Don't leave me."

Once again she bends down. He is sad, but tries to look happy.

"Be good for your mother. This is a good place, a learnin' school for the street. He'll teach you more than 'istory and numbers." She taps her chest. "I was never so lucky to see such a school."

Reaching out, she touches the birthmark on his face, and thinks of his father the sailor, now long gone. "Oh Daniel, I'll come back for you. Ten days, you'll see. "And she covers the birthmark with her shawl so he won't get bullied. "Cover it up," she says. "Find some tape and cover your face up a bit."

Scrambling the embankment back to Southwark Bridge Kate makes certain not to look back. At the bridge corner she skips over the black dirt road as the sun appears over the river. Then she opens the absinthe phial and tips it to the back of her throat, letting the 'divine fire' trickle down her tongue and burn away the pain. Instead of a soothing feeling, though, a brooding desperate anger is stirred, and then soaks away in the calm and lotus drowsiness of the green liquid. Kate lets the sun stir her eyelids with a foreign pleasure as she crosses the bridge. Back on the north side, her destination unknown, she tosses away the empty glass container and watches it fall into the water and disappear with a tiny bubble. A crooked smile

crosses her lips. "Gone, gone," she whispers. "Glug, glug! Gone for good. For better days to come!"

Inside her mind the absinthe is taking effect. She twirls in the morning light, bumping into people who brush her away - just another lost stray of the city, no one's pride, no one's sorrow. She can hear sonorous chamber music, vast and echoing. Tripping on half delirious and drunk, half happy for her lungful of freedom, the music carries her on. Among the smells and rush of waking London, Kate can feel the fullness of her mind, the beating of her heart. Her mind empties.

After a minute she realizes the sound is only St. Paul's Cathedral. The grand bell is tolling eight o' clock in the morning, time for the men to return to their city jobs, for women of leisure to head to church for morning services; it is time for small boys, abandoned and invested into a new league of gentleman, to venture out to capture of a little of the city's sunshine and cut a few purses before nightfall.