

## Praise for **DEEP DARK**:

‘Zohra Nabi is an extraordinary talent – I’d read anything she writes. But with characters that jump off the page, a meticulously researched Victorian London and a beautifully plotted mystery, *Deep Dark* has to be her best yet.’

– A.F. Steadman, author of *Skandar and the Unicorn Thief*

‘An atmospheric adventure with a wonderfully engaging heroine – this richly evocative story will sweep you away to the streets of 19th century London.’

– Katherine Woodfine, author of *The Clockwork Sparrow*

‘This book is stunning – Zohra Nabi writes like a dream and has achieved the impossible by conjuring up a living, breathing Victorian London right before my eyes. I felt like I was right there with Cassia while reading it, magic sparkling around us.’

– Natasha Hastings, author of *The Miraculous Sweetmakers*

‘An extraordinarily thrilling, fantastical adventure through London with a monstrous twist! *Deep Dark* is a rallying cry for justice.’

– Lizzie Huxley-Jones, author of *Vivi Conway and the Sword of Legend*

‘An incredibly vivid adventure. And just when you think all the cards are out the story takes us deeper into the darkest underbelly of London and the revelation of the most terrible hidden secret – divine!’

– Jasbinder Bilan, author of *Asha and the Spirit Bird*

‘Zohra Nabi has the rare ability to write characters and worlds that feel both wholly real and full of imaginative wonder. This has all you could want from a great children’s book.’

– Aisha Bushby, author of *A Pocket Full of Stars*

‘An eerie and intricate tale that holds you fast and drags you beneath the surface of Victorian London . . . unputdownable.’

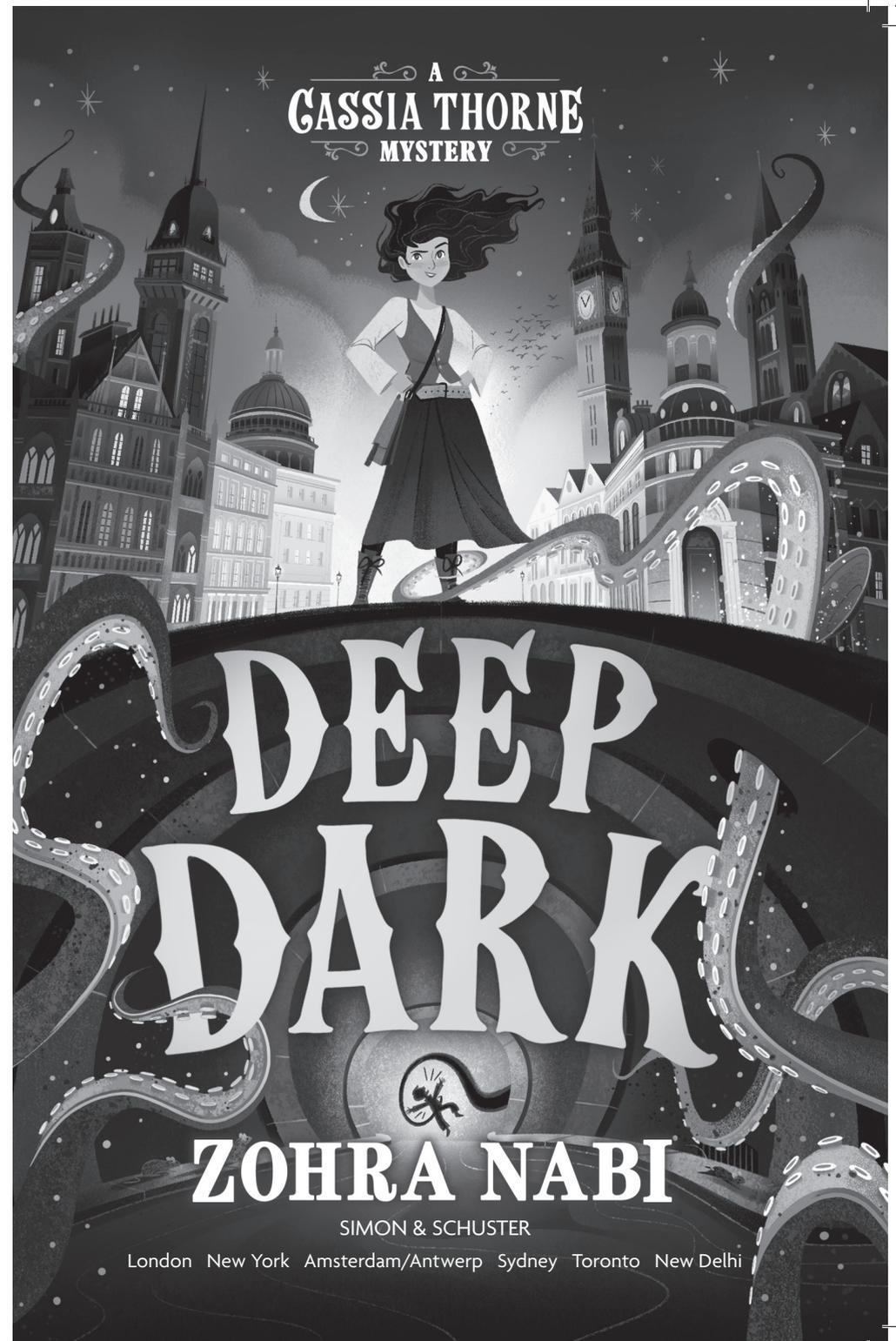
– Sarah Underwood, author of *Lies We Sing to the Sea*

## About the author



Photo credit: Henry Harrison

**Z**ohra Nabi grew up inventing stories for her two younger sisters. She studied Law at Cambridge and Oxford universities, but secretly dreamed of being an author. Now she lives in London, browsing bookshops and writing magical adventures.



First published in Great Britain in 2025 by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd

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1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Simon & Schuster UK Ltd  
1st Floor, 222 Gray's Inn Road  
London WC1X 8HB

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Simon & Schuster Australia, Sydney  
Simon & Schuster India, New Delhi

The authorised representative in the EEA is Simon & Schuster Netherlands BV,  
Herculesplein 96, 3584 AA Utrecht, Netherlands. [info@simonandschuster.nl](mailto:info@simonandschuster.nl)

A CIP catalogue record for this book  
is available from the British Library.

PB ISBN 978-1-3985-3292-2  
eBook ISBN 978-1-3985-3293-9  
eAudio ISBN 978-1-3985-3288-5

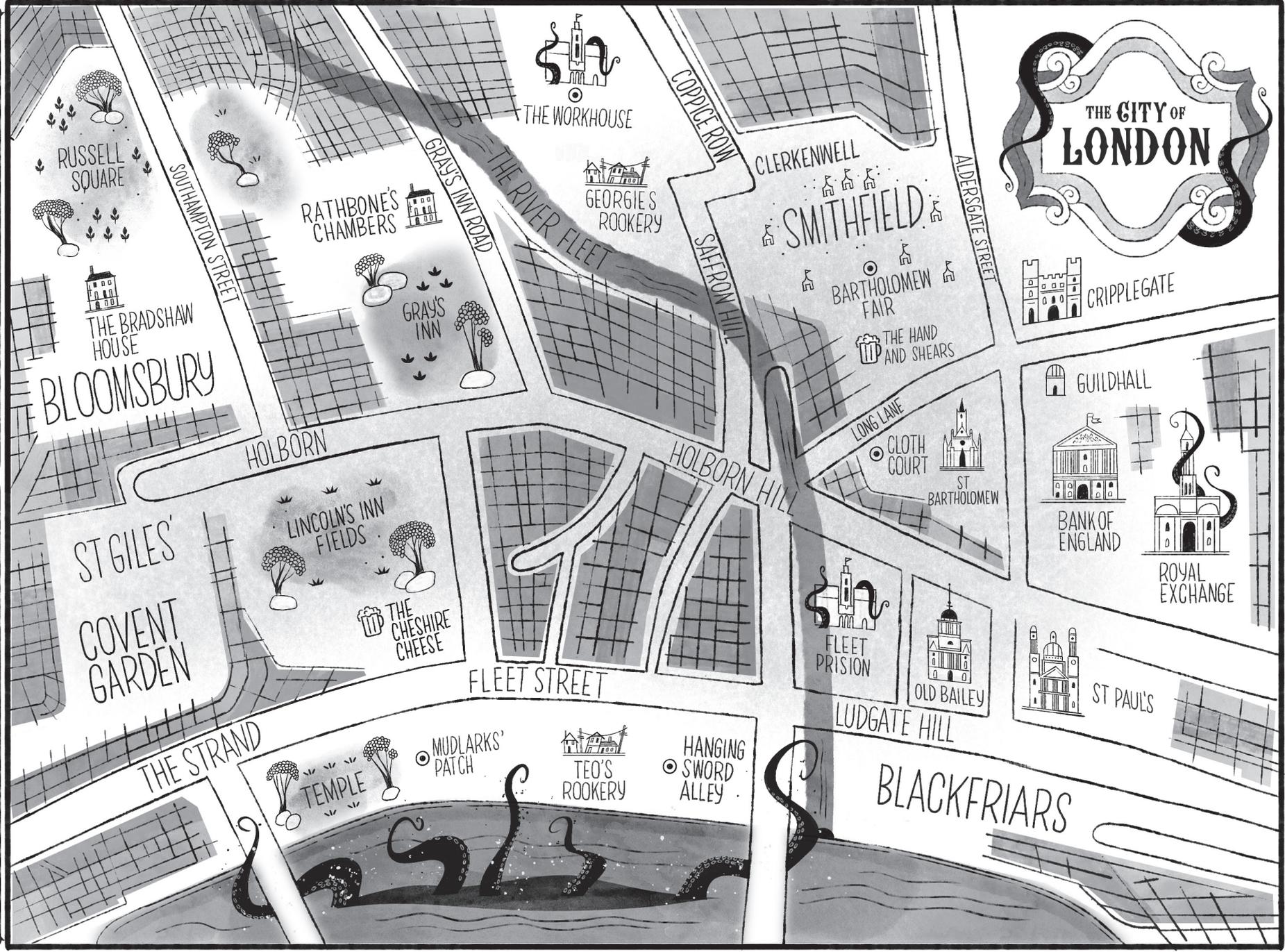
This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places  
and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or  
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Typeset in Garamond by M Rules  
Printed and Bound in the UK using 100% Renewable Electricity  
at CPI Group (UK) Ltd



*In memory of Ghulam Nabi*

# THE CITY OF LONDON



RUSSELL SQUARE

SOUTHAMPTON STREET

RATHBONE'S CHAMBERS

GRAYS INN ROAD

THE WORKHOUSE

GEORGIE'S ROOKERY

COPPICIE ROW

CLERKENWELL

SMITHFIELD

BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

THE HAND AND SHEARS

ADERSGATE STREET

CRIPPLEGATE

THE BRADSHAW HOUSE

BLOOMSBURY

GRAYS INN

SAFERON HILL

HOLBORN

LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS

THE CHESHIRE CHEESE

HOLBORN HILL

LONG LANE

CLOTH COURT

ST BARTHOLOMEW

GUILDHALL

BANK OF ENGLAND

ROYAL EXCHANGE

ST GILES' COVENT GARDEN

FLEET STREET

FLEET PRISON

OLD BAILEY

ST PAUL'S

THE STRAND

TEMPLE

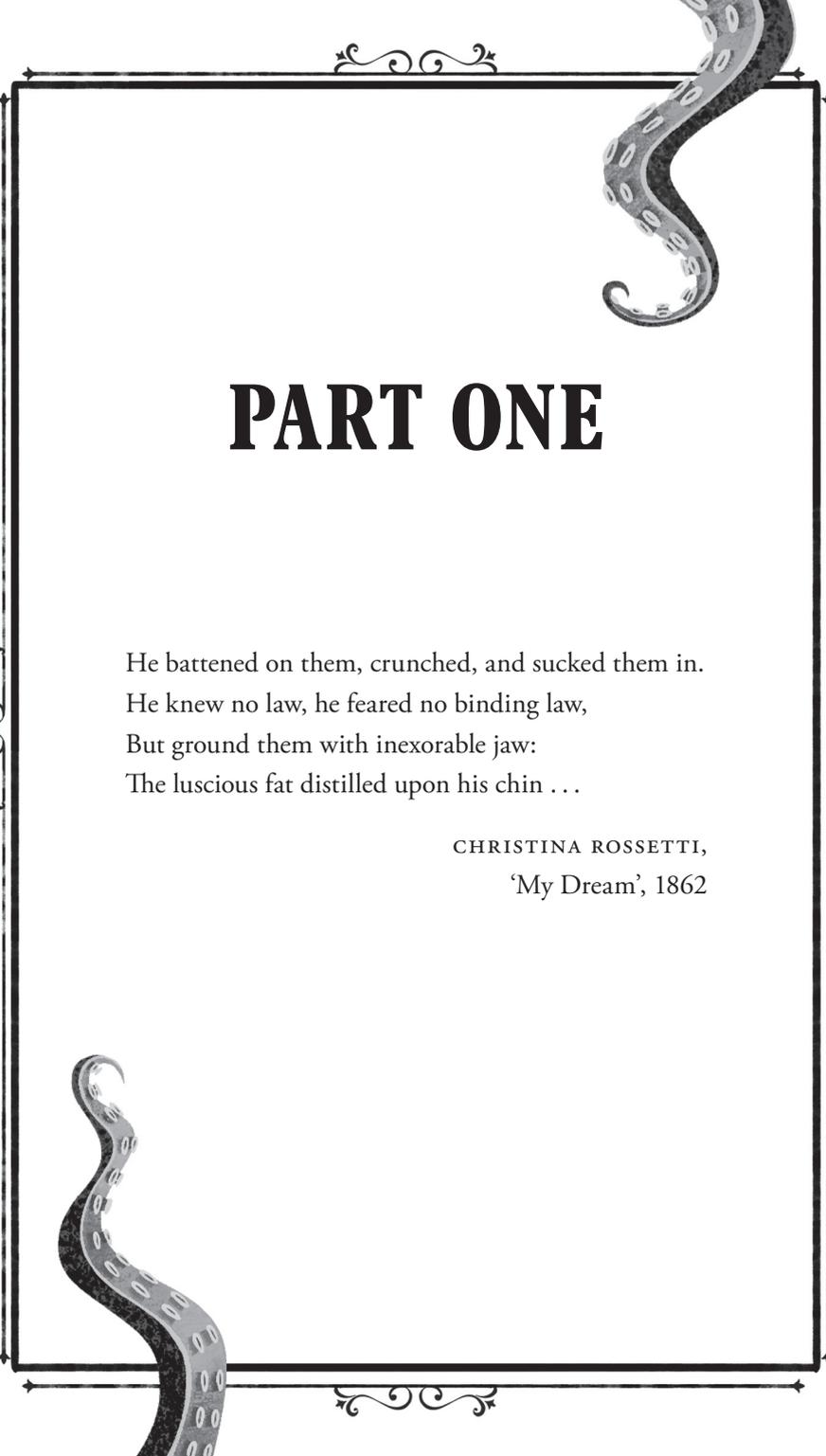
MUDLARKS' PATCH

TEO'S ROOKERY

HANGING SWORD ALLEY

LUDGATE HILL

BLACKFRIARS



# PART ONE

He batted on them, crunched, and sucked them in.  
He knew no law, he feared no binding law,  
But ground them with inexorable jaw:  
The luscious fat distilled upon his chin . . .

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI,  
'My Dream', 1862



## Isaac

Every city has its buried secrets, and London has always had more secrets to bury than most. In the year of 1833 the ghosts of its past lurked on every street corner, haunting the ancient walls, guarding its long-forgotten gates. Meanwhile, beneath the surface, its secret rivers churned, running their dark paths below the city. Long ago paved over and bricked up, nevertheless, they spread out from the Thames like the fingers of a grasping hand. The Tyburn still circled the hangman's gibbet, the Walbrook still flowed through the golden vaults

of the banks on Threadneedle Street. The Fleet cut London in two: its people and its noise on one side; the might of its brokers and businesses on the other.

Without knowing it, two boys were following its path. They had long ago left the gleam and splendour of the city behind, and were running as best they could through the grime of a yellow-bricked street packed with organ grinders and watercress sellers and street-musicians singing a song about a chimney sweep who had been hanged for stealing. Their hair was tousled, their faces artfully smeared with dirt.

‘We’ll never get away with it,’ said the taller of the boys, his pace slowing as doubt set in. ‘Someone’ll clock us. Then they’ll bring us both home, and your ma will lock us up in the cellar ’til we’re twenty.’

The smaller boy paid no attention. There was a skip in his step, and he sang as he went.

*‘My name is Jack Hall chimney sweep, I’ve robbed  
both great and small,  
When the law men come for me, my neck shall pay  
for all.’*

‘Isaac!’ the taller boy cried, following as fast as he could. ‘Isaac, wait!’



The boys turned a corner, and the chatter faded to a sudden silence. The street here was narrow, the ground sloped unevenly beneath their feet, and the houses leaned over them on crooked old frames. A stone gargoyle grinned down at them with a grotesque leer, and the taller boy caught its eye uneasily as they came to a stop, catching their breath.

‘We should go home. Your pa said he’d take us to the fair on Sunday.’

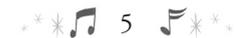
‘Cassia says the fair’s no good on a Sunday,’ said the smaller boy – Isaac – stubbornly. ‘I want to see the man who breathes fire and the marionette puppets and the sideshows. I want to hear the ballads Pa says aren’t meant for little ears, and if you’re going to be such a dunghill about it, Joseph, *you* can go home.’

‘You boys like ballads?’

The pair jumped. It is never a nice feeling to think you are alone and then discover unexpectedly that you are not. But the voice was pleasant and well-spoken, and it was a bright-eyed, smiling man who emerged from the shadows of an alleyway.

‘Maybe,’ said Isaac. ‘Why, you selling?’

The man laughed, ignoring Isaac’s insolence. He had a well-off, genial air about him that made it hard to tell whether he was young or old. ‘No. I just happened to pick up some



exciting new songs down the road. I think you two could be the first people in all of London to hear them, if you so wish.'

'Show us! Show us!'

'Tell you what,' said the strange man, 'we could play a game. Hide and seek – I'll hide, and if you can find me, I'll give you the music.'

'What's in it for you?' asked Joseph.

'Oh, just a small thrill on my way to the fair.' The man's eyes grew brighter, filling with brilliant light. 'So do we have a bargain? Yes? Very well, turn around and count to ten.'

The boys obeyed.

'Eight, nine . . . ten!' Joseph and Isaac spun around. They hadn't heard footsteps, yet the man had vanished from sight. Instinctively, the two boys drew closer together.

'We should go home,' said Joseph again. He had begun to shiver. Even Isaac looked as though he might be tempted – but then his ears pricked. He stood still, his head tilted to the wind, not moving or fidgeting for a moment.

'Joseph,' he breathed. 'Joseph, the *music*.'

'What music?' Joseph asked, sharply. A bout of measles several years before had left his ears full of buzzing and made it difficult to follow a tune. Isaac, however, was in a world of his own. He began to run again, barely looking over his shoulder at his cousin. 'Isaac, wait! Come back!'

They ran, Isaac ahead – they turned into another alley, and only just caught the flash of a blue coat as their new acquaintance disappeared around a corner.

'This way!' Isaac was really running now; Joseph could hardly keep up with him. 'This way, I can hear it!'

He turned left and ran on, almost slipping on the cobbles. Joseph was falling further and further behind him, until he only knew where his younger cousin had gone by the sight of his shirttails. He rounded the corner, and this time the alley was a dead end.

It was empty. No bright-eyed man. And no Isaac.

'Isaac? Is this a trick?' Joseph called out. 'Very funny – I'm not playing any more. Come out right now, or I'll tell your ma.'  
Silence.

'Isaac? Isaac?'

Then came a low, rumbling sound that knocked Joseph off his feet and left him gaping on the ground, still with fright. It was deep, wild – it was a *roar*, a roar with such power that Joseph felt the vibrations of it in the wells of his bones.

Then softly, so faint and growing fainter still, Joseph could make out the ebb of his cousin's voice on the breeze.

*'My name is Jack Hall chimney sweep, I've robbed  
both great and small,*

*When the law men come for me, my neck shall pay  
for all:*

*When I die, when I die, my neck shall pay for all  
when I die.'*



## Chapter One

Cassia Thorne was not nervous.

She did not get nervous; it was not who she was. She had overcome more adversity in nearly fourteen years than most people would in their lifetimes; there was no unfamiliar situation that could faze her.

This is what she told herself, hovering on the battered threshold of a Fleet Street public house, clutching a bundle of papers with white, ink-stained knuckles. She was dancing the steps of an odd dance, taking two step forward and then

