

he was well past the workhouse, till his breath was bursting out of him. At last he fell, weak and panting, into the black well of a side alley.

He was free.



THE JAW OF THE IRON DOG

Jim knew one thing for sure: he must keep away from policemen. "If they see me, they'll send me back," he thought. He remembered the white-faced boys in the yard. "But I'll run away again as soon as I get a chance."

Somewhere in his head was the thought of finding Rosie again. She had been his mother's friend. Maybe, if he found her, he would find Emily and Lizzie too. But London was a huge, throbbing, noisy place. He had no idea which way to go. The shops were still open and busy, and the streets were full of traders carrying trays of fish and fruit, shouting out their wares. A woman was selling coffee from a handcart. The smell of it reminded him of that morning in the kitchen of the big house, when Rosie had given his mother some of his lordship's coffee to drink.

The night noises of the street baffled Jim – he had grown used to the drowning quiet of the workhouse,

and the distant midnight wails of the mad people. It seemed as if no one here wanted to sleep. He reckoned he was probably safer where there were many people around. Lots of boys of about his age were dodging about from one side of the street to the other, in and out of the light of the lamps. It was easy to pretend to be one of them. Soon he stopped to rest against a shop wall, leaning next to another boy. He slid his hand into his pocket for a bit of his supper cheese. The boy looked at him and Jim stuffed the cheese into his mouth before he had a chance to grab it.

"You from the workhouse?" the boy asked him. Jim shook his head.

"Bet you are. Them's workhouse clothes, ain't they?"

The boy was dressed in tattered trousers and a torn, thin jacket, but the cap on his head was the same as Jim's. Before Jim could speak to him the boy snatched up a broom that was propped beside him and darted out to stand beside a man in a top hat and long coat.

"Clear the road for you, sir?" he said, and when the man nodded the boy stepped out in front of him, brushing a pathway through the slush. The man

tossed him a coin without looking at him. Jim ran after the boy.

"Give us your clothes, and you can have mine," he offered.

The boy laughed at him. "Not likely!" He darted off with his broom across his shoulders.

There was a sudden cackle of voices behind Jim. A woman selling pickled salmon was being shouted at by another woman with a tray of eels round her waist. Onlookers were joining in, and bearing down on them, their tall hats visible over all the heads, were two policemen. Jim put his head down and ran.

Soon he realised that he was out of the busy area, and that he was running through quiet streets without shops. The roads were wider here, and the houses grand. They began to look familiar, and yet it was impossible to tell one from another. He came to a dark square that was full of skinny trees. In the middle of it was a fountain, and, as if he had looked through a window into his memory, he knew that he had been here before.

He sat down on the fountain steps. He had sat here on that last journey when his mother had stopped to drink. He had trailed his hands in the

water. A bit further back, he thought, there should be a statue of a man on a horse. He made himself stand up, hardly daring to look. There it was. The very statue. They had stopped there too. She had leaned against the statue, and he had seen the fountain and helped her across to it. She had been so weak then she could have been a little child. He remembered how helpless and frightened he had felt. And that had been over a year ago. He could hardly believe that it was a whole year since his mother had died. Emily and Lizzie didn't even know. All these things were just as they had been then, the man on the horse and the fountain and the big houses. Only this time, his mother wasn't there.

He walked slowly up to the statue. Three streets led away from it, three long, tree-lined streets, and one of them was the street where Rosie worked. If he found Rosie, he would find Emily and Lizzie again. He began to run.

The houses all looked the same. They all had black railings and a little flight of steps going up to the main door, and a little flight leading down to the servants' quarters. Must he knock on every door in every street until he found the right one? He ran up

the first street, then came back and tried the second. A sound caught his attention, and he looked round. Hanging from the window of one of the kitchens was a tiny cage. A finch with just enough room to move hopped from stand to floor and stand again, whistling out loud for a companion. Jim had heard that before. He was in the right street, and somewhere, a long way up it, was the house he was searching for.

By the time he stopped again he knew exactly what to look out for. He remembered, when his mother had sunk down on the steps, and Lizzie had looked up at the grand house and asked if that was where they were going to live, he had seen something that had made him hope it wasn't. On the side of the step there had been a metal bootscraper in the shape of a dog's head, with a wide, vicious mouth. He remembered thinking then that if he had put his foot inside the mouth the metal teeth would have come clashing together and pinned him there for good. He ran from side to side of the street looking for it, and at last, there it was. He had found it.

The house upstairs was in darkness, but down in the basement window was the soft glow of a candle.

He tumbled down the steps, tripping himself up in his big boots, and fell against the door.

"Emily! Emily!" he shouted out. Before he could raise his fist to hammer on the door it was pulled open, and he staggered against a girl.



LAME BETSY

"We don't give to beggars," the girl said, trying to edge him out of the door again with her knee.

"I'm looking for Emily."

"Emily? There's no Emily here."

"Emily Jarvis. She helps Rosie out in the kitchen."

"Rosie? Who's she?" The girl was laughing down at him through her loose hair.

"Rosie," Jim said. "You must know Rosie. She's got big arms. And she don't like making bread."

The girl burst out laughing and looked over her shoulder at a woman who was sewing by the table.

"Hear that?" she said. "There's no one here who doesn't like making bread, is there?" She laughed again, and the other woman laughed back in a mocking sort of way.

Jim peered past the girl. Surely it was the right kitchen. It had to be.