



Jack stepped through the crack into the night. Outside the yard was quiet and thick dark clouds hid the moon from view.

Squatting beside the door, he scooped handfuls of muck from a puddle and plastered it through his white hair. Muddy lumps dripped down his scarred face, oozing odorously into his eyes, nose and mouth, making him want to retch.

A spotlight swept past, outlining the barred windows. Jack crouched low to the ground and scanned his surroundings. The prison yard, the cells, the watchtower, the tall perimeter fence, the gatehouse, the iron gates, the high stone wall tipped with iron spikes – all unbreachable. In its long illustrious history, no prisoner had ever escaped the 'Ville.

But he'd conquered worse. After fifteen years in maximum security, under constant surveillance, it had been a mistake for them to transfer him here to Pentonville and a regular cell. This past week the screws had barely looked in on him; they'd even let him out to exercise. They should've known better. Now, because of their stupidity, he'd be The World's Most Infamous Jailbreaker as well as its Greatest Escapologist!

He crawled towards the fence and pulled himself onto its wire surface, scrambled upwards, vaulted nimbly over the top, and dropped down the far side. Landing with a squelching thump, he raced towards the main gate and exterior walls. A drainpipe snaked up the side of the gatehouse. Jack brushed his muddy palms against his chest, took a deep breath, and began to climb.

Reaching the top, he hauled himself over the gutter onto the slippery roof and across a patchwork of tar and tiles, the exterior wall looming above him in the dark. Mounds of leaves and globules of green moss gathered in the crevices up here, creating perfect hiding places for small items someone might wish to stash.

Jack rummaged in one such crevice and pulled out a tarry tangle of ropes. They'd been bartered and bargained for outside the oakum shed over the past seven days, and were the makings of a secret escape kit. He began fastening them together, checking each knot carefully and pulling them tight.

Long ago he'd taught Fin to do this. A good knot can be the difference between life and death, he'd told the boy. Especially for an escapologist, or a hanged man. Luckily, he'd never yet been threatened with that final rope.

Thoughts of the old times led Jack to remember his wife and the plan they'd made long ago to hide his greatest treasure – the Blood Moon Diamond. Artemisia might be gone, but soon, very soon, that big beautiful stone would be his once more. And, oh, what a diamond day that would be!

Jack checked the last knot and fastened a heavy stone to the rope's end. Then he stood and began whirling it around his head like a lasso, feeding out lengths of line until the stone picked up speed. When it was finally making a wide circle about his head, Jack released his grip.

The stone flew through the air, arcing over the exterior wall. For a second the rope wriggled, trying to snake free, but Jack kept a tight grip on its end, and the stone hit the ground on the wall's far side with a clunk.

He waited a moment, listening...

Awhoo! Awhoo!

An owl hoot – the signal that the line was secure.

The searchlight was fast approaching once more.

Jack dropped flat against the tiled roof and, when it had passed, jumped up and pulled the rope taut, testing his weight against it.

His knots held – as he knew they would.

He scraped the soles of his boots in the roof tar to make them sticky.

Then he began to climb.

The cracks between each stone made strong footholds.

The top of the wall was fifteen feet above, but he took mere seconds to reach it and hop nimbly over a row of spikes that guarded the parapet, before lowering himself down the far side into the street.

Finlo stood beneath him wearing a battered bowler hat. He was a little taller than his father, though that wasn't saying much – all the Doors were short. As a teenager, fifteen years ago, he'd been a skinny disappointing runt, but since then he'd added a few inches, filled out into a man. Perhaps, Jack thought, he might be useful on this mission after all.

Jack dropped to the pavement beside his son and embraced him, sniffing the air. "Get a whiff of that peppery smell, Fin. I haven't smelled that in fifteen years!"

Finlo took a deep breath. "What is it?"

"Freedom!" Jack flashed him a scarred smile. As he strode towards the prison entrance, a few feet away along the wall, a loud alarm bell began to wail.

"Da, please," Finlo called softly. "We have to go."

"Quiet! I've one more trick up my sleeve..." Jack pulled a playing card from thin air, and pinned it to the jail door. When he lowered his arm, Finlo saw what it was: the Jack of Diamonds.

"And now," said Jack, slipping into the shadows, "we disappear."