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London, England. Early September, 1811

The basket of apples flew up into the air, scattering the round fruit in all directions while the fruit seller tried in vain to stop herself slipping in the filthy refuse of the gutter. Her feet skidded out from under her and she sat down heavily in the muck, ragged skirt around her knees, screaming abuse at the boy who had crashed into her and at the laughing urchins nearby who were doing nothing to help.

The girl's indignant wails followed Will Tucker up the narrow street as he pelted between horses, carriages, and carts filled with produce, dodging the people who were everywhere. The noise was such that the yells of the girl were soon lost amidst the hubbub so Will paused for a second, panting for breath, and stole a glance behind him. Nowhere could he see the tall gentleman with the top hat and cane. From past experience Will knew that meant he hadn't noticed anything amiss. Good.

It had been an easy snatch. The gentleman, youngish, tall, and cleanshaven, wearing a forest green coat and tight yellow breeches, had been striding down the London street in high, black boots, picking his way carefully around the puddles and filth. Will had seen him coming from a shadowed doorway across the road, then had followed him, not too closely, for a quarter of a mile or more, keeping the bobbing top hat in view all the time. He wondered why such a seemingly wealthy man was walking and not riding in a carriage, thereby risking the well-being not only of his clothing, but his person as well. The streets of London were not healthy places in which to go on foot if you could ride. This man was strolling along as though he were on Richmond Common, and appeared to be unaware or oblivious of any possible danger. Will had kept the man in sight until he had finally stopped outside a jeweller's shop, old Manny Goldstein's Jewel Emporium, and there he had stayed, gazing in at the window, allowing Will to get close enough to pick his pocket.

The deed had been done in a flash. Still a few paces away from