

The TV screens continued to display the couple's progress out through the Abbey's open doors.

At that moment Gallin was seized by the frightening realization that he and Alexine were in great danger: Their faces on two of the most important kids in this country were blazing from TV screens. They had to disappear.

Alexine felt the danger, too. She was still wearing her red dress, but the white wig and small red hat had fallen off in the jostling at the fence. At her first stunned sight of Ra-Alex on the TV screen, she had pulled her scarf over her hair and across the lower part of her face. Ducking her head, she began working her elbows and shoving her way out of the crowd. A lock of blonde hair escaped the scarf and shone brightly under the cloudless sky.

Gallin caught sight of the fleeing blue-eyed blonde girl in the red dress and veered to intersect with her. Alexine jumped back as he touched her elbow. Glimpsing his face deep within the hood, she grabbed at his arm. Gallin perceived in her eyes his own bewildered alarm. Their only possible getaway was by joining the departing crowd.

Halfway up the boulevard the surging human river split into channels around a man in black as immovable as an island fortress. Chief Police Sergeant Barnaby Raker scanned the faces for any he might arrest. Even the passing glances of honest men and women verged on panic as his dark, indicting eyes bored bullet holes through theirs. A flattened nose surmounted by thickly-scarred black eyebrows were relics of a youth spent scuffling for coins to survive as, first, a petty thief and, later, a bare-knuckle bar fighter. He was not a big man, but his tenacity had made him a feared opponent.

Walking a beat in the central city's nastiest streets, a job no one else would take, was his ladder up and out. He soon pacified those streets by bashing into submission every hooligan, petty criminal, and gang member in his bailiwick. Many went on trial still nursing cracked skulls. His superiors were happy to reward his and, accordingly, their own success at clearing the streets by raising him to the command of a similarly aggressive black-clad police force. Policing based on his model had been installed throughout the British Isles.

Scanning the faces flowing by, Raker sought the muggers, pickpockets, and cut purses, vermin feeding off their betters who would be working today's event. He knew them all and which were out of prison after serving their sentences. He wanted them back inside.

"Halt!" he suddenly yelled, pointing his dark-wood truncheon.

Gallin and Alexine kept moving.

"You two!" he shouted again. "Halt!"

People around the couple turned to block their escape. A patrolman moved in.

"What is it, sir?" the constable called to Raker.

"Their faces! I want a better look at their faces!"

The constable shoved back Gallin's hood. Another patrolman, who had made his way to the commotion, pulled away Alexine's scarf.

"Imposters!" Raker yelled. "Impersonating royalty and Noblics are criminal offenses."

The crowd, screaming incoherently, tightened like a noose.

*These people aren't playing dress-up, Gallin realized. This is real!*

Worry ignited his ingenuity: *Don't deny it. Make them believe it!*