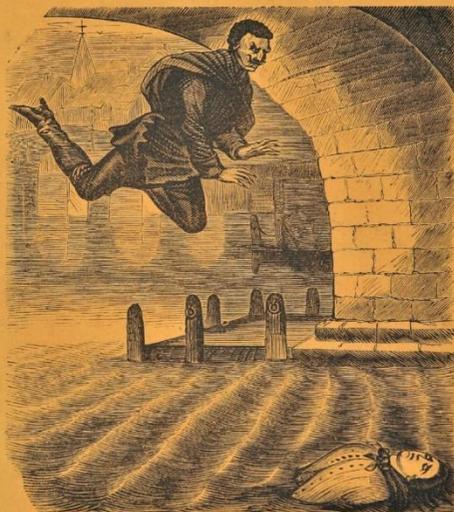


READ  
**SPRING-HEEL'D JACK,**  
THE TERROR OF LONDON.



JACK LEAPS INTO THE THAMES AFTER THE SEAMSTRESS.

CELEBRATED, a little over a quarter of a century ago, a person known to the police as Spring-Heel'd Jack did frighten and cause the death of several persons; the daring deeds and startling adventures of this wonderful man will be published in Weekly Numbers, with illustrations every week of his doings.

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# Spring-Heel'd Jack: The Terror of London (1863)

## Alfred Coates

Edited by J.S. Mackley

### The Spring Heeled Jack Library: Volume 1



**CHAPTER I.**  
**SPRING-HEELED JACK—THE OFFICER’S FRIGHT—CATCH IF YOU CAN.**

IT IS now a little over a quarter of a century since the inhabitants of London and its suburbs were kept in a continual state of terror by a man who, under various disguises, and in different shapes and forms, would suddenly appear before the unsuspecting pedestrian, and, after having nearly frightened the traveller out of his or her senses, would as suddenly disappear, with terrific bounds, from his side, leaving for a time the impression upon his affrighted victim that his Satanic Majesty had paid a visit to the earth, and especially favoured them with his presence.

Evening was generally the time chosen by this eccentric character for his strange conduct; and doubtless there are many living who can recollect—but not without a shudder—the pang of fear which shot through their hearts when, leaping from some dark corner, out of a doorway, or over a thickset hedge, he stood before them.

What his true object could be, none have been able to conjecture. Certain it is that robbery was not the cause, for he was never known to take a single coin from his victims, even when fright had rendered them almost insensible; nor did he ever practise any other degree of cruelty beyond affrighting them.

But this was bad enough—so bad, that in some cases the victims of his eccentricities never thoroughly recovered the shock their nerves sustained; and, indeed, in one or two instances, death was ultimately the result.

As may be supposed, his capture was ardently desired both by those whose path he had crossed and those who had not even seen him, and not a few attempts were made to render him powerless to continue his course for some time to come.

It was at the time that the terror he caused was at its height—when the husband, on his return home, cast suspicious glances behind him, and clutched nervously at his walking-stick; and the wife waited anxiously, with barred door, for her husband’s return, fearful even to open it to his well-known knock, lest it should be Spring-heeled Jack—that that worthy one evening entered a public-house in the neighbourhood of the Liverpool-road, Islington.

He was tall and well formed, which even the large dark Spanish cloak he wore did not disguise.

He called for refreshments for himself, and, addressing two or three persons standing at the bar, he likewise requested the landlord to serve them with whatever they required, adding, that he would pay the bill.

This, of course, drew all eyes towards him, and a policeman, who at the moment entered the bar, was solicited to partake of his kindness.

Nothing loth, the officer accepted, and his glass being filled, the stranger remarked—  
“Yours is a dreary beat, officer, this dark night.”

“You may well say that, sir,” replied the officer. “But I don’t mind much.”

“You are not afraid, then, of this Spring-heeled Jack there is such a talk about just now?” said the man in the cloak, in an offhand manner.

“Not a bit of it!” said the policeman, supping the hot rum and water with which he had been supplied.

“And yet I think he’d frighten you, if you met him,” continued the man in the cloak.

## SPRING-HEEL'D JACK

“He might frighten an old woman, but he wouldn't frighten me!” said the officer. “I should like to be as sure of a five-pound note to-morrow morning, as I am now, that if he comes across me to-night I'll lodge him in the station-house!”

“Nonsense!” said the stranger, coolly.

“Good sense! sir. All I hope is, I may get the chance, for I believe, if any of our men take him, he's certain of promotion,” said the officer.

“That won't be you, bobby,”<sup>1</sup> said a tall, ostler-looking man,<sup>2</sup> winking over the rim of a quart pot out of which he was drinking.

“Why not?” asked the policeman, indignantly.

“Because you'd be frightened to death!”

“Should I?”

“Yes, you would!”

“I tell you what I'll do with you,” said the officer, indignantly, “I'll bet you a glass of brandy and water that I take him if he comes on my beat.”

“And I'll bet you that you don't!” said the ostler, placing the pot down on the bar, and extending his hand to the policeman.

“Done!” said the officer, shaking the man's hand.

“That's a fair bet,” said the man in the cloak; “and now I'll bet you both the same, that Spring-heeled Jack will be on this officer's beat to-night.”

“To-night?” exclaimed the officer and the others.

“Yes, to-night.”

“How do you know?” said the ostler, looking at him suspiciously.

“Because I have seen him.”

“When?”

“Just now.”

“Where?” asked the policeman, turning pale a little.

“Just up the road.”

“The devil!” stammered the officer.

“Well, I can't say whether it is the devil or not,” said the man in the cloak; “but I believe he is the devil and no one else.”

“Do you really think so, sir?” said the officer.

“Yes; but I may be mistaken. However, you are sure to know if you catch him.”

“I'll do that,” said the policeman, “never fear. Devil or no devil, if I get a sight of him I'll have him.”

The stranger shook his head.

“I fear your courage would fail you at the moment you most needed it,” he said.

“No fear, sir; I ain't so easily frightened,” said the policeman.

“You are not?”

“No.”

“Well, it is certainly worthy of the trial, if you would get promoted for it,” said the stranger.

“And I mean to make it.”

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<sup>1</sup>“Bobby” or “Peeler” general names for a policeman after the founder of the police force, Sir Robert Peel.

<sup>2</sup>A man employed to look after the horses of people staying at an inn.

## THE TERROR OF LONDON

“Perhaps you had better not.”

“Why so?”

“The shock might be too much for you.”

“No fear of that.”

“And if you did not succeed you would be laughed at.”

“I’d chance that,” said the officer. “He had better not come near me, nor even let me see him. I’d take some of the spring out of his heels.”

“Well, you’ve got a chance, bobby,” said the ostler, “for this gentleman says he’s on your beat to-night.”

“And I spoke truly, my friend.”

“Then I’ll just go home,” said a man who had been listening to all that had passed, “for if my old woman was to see him she’d about go into fits. I hope he’ll soon be collared, for I feel half afraid to go out into my back garden after dark.”

“You wouldn’t do for the police,” said the officer, contemptuously.

“Perhaps I’ve got as much pluck in me as other people,” said the individual thus contemptuously addressed. “Yes, quite as much when the time comes for it to be wanted.”

“Humph!” said the man in the cloak, “I must be going. Now, landlord, what’s to pay?”

The host having reckoned up, the stranger flung a sovereign down on the bar, and received his change.

“By-the-bye,” he said, turning suddenly to the officer, “you did not accept the wager, did you?”

“What wager?”

“That Spring-heeled Jack would not be on your beat tonight.”

“I took your word for that, sir; so it ain’t worth betting on.”

“No more it ain’t. But, come; I’ll make you a bet that he will appear before you in less than an hour, and that not only will you not take him, but that you’ll start back in terror.”

“I’ll take you; and wish it was for fifty-pound,” said the policeman. “Frighten me! I should like to see him do it! Let him but come within reach of me, and I’ll make him my prisoner before he knows where he is.”

The man dropped a coin on to the floor, and stooped as if to pick it up, but as he did so he thrust a hideous mask over his face.

Then springing up, and turning to the officer, at the same time flinging back the large folds of his cloak, and revealing its white lining, he exclaimed—

“Boaster! I am Spring-heeled Jack!”

With a cry of terror the officer sprang backwards on to the steps which led up to the house.

“Ha! ha! ha!” laughed Jack. “Follow me if you can—take me if you dare!”

With a terrific bound he sprang up and over the head of the officer right into the centre of the roadway.

Here he paused, and gave vent to a loud laugh, then bounded back again to the officer’s side.

“Why don’t you do your duty?” he exclaimed, leaping on to the policeman’s shoulders and forcing his hat over his eyes.

Then with another laugh he bounded across the road as the men who had partaken

## SPRING-HEEL'D JACK

of his treat rushed from the house towards him.

"I'll have a shy<sup>3</sup> for him," exclaimed the man who had made no secret of his nervousness.

"Come on, my friend," cried Jack. "You are what I thought, after all—the bravest of the lot."

The man ran towards him, and even succeeded in catching hold of his cloak.

But he was unable to retain it, for with a spring Jack bounded away over a hedge into the field beyond, and was lost to view, while in the centre of the road stood the officer, his battered hat in one hand, shouting at the top of his voice, till those who had been with him at the bar were out of sight, and he was left alone.

"Stop him!—stop him! Don't be frightened! Don't let him get away! Stop him!—stop him!"

"That's your duty, my friend; but you are such a coward," exclaimed a voice behind him.

The officer turned, uttered a cry, and fled at the top of his speed, whilst the loud laughter of Spring-heeled Jack rang out on the night air.

### CHAPTER II.

#### THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND—THE FIGURE AT THE WINDOW—THE SCOUNDREL AND HIS VICTIM—A FRIEND IN NEED—THE LEAP—THE SHOT.

IT was about eleven o'clock, and silence reigned in almost every street. Here and there a light, streaming with subdued lustre through the drawn blind out into the roadway, bespoke the fact that the inhabitants had not yet retired to rest, but these were few and far between. The generality of the occupiers of the houses in the neighbourhood of Islington had closed their eyes in slumber, and darkness reigned throughout their dwellings.

In a turning out of the Liverpool-road a faint light flickered in the front garret of a small house. The blind was down over the window, and on this every now and then appeared the shadow of a female as she stood between the window and the light, which rested on a small table in the centre of the room.

It could plainly be seen from the street that she was in grief, for the shadow wrung its hands, then extended them, clasped together in a supplicating attitude, to some person on the opposite side of the room.

Then it would pass hurriedly to and fro across the blind as the female paced the narrow limits of the chamber.

This had been going on a few minutes, when a tall, dark figure, springing out from a doorway, stood on the edge of the pavement opposite to the house in question, and gazed up intently at the blind.

"Humph!" he muttered. "There's something going on there which I should much like to understand—something, perhaps, which my presence might greatly tend to settle to the benefit of the woman, whoever she may be, who seems in great grief. Maybe it's only a domestic quarrel. Husband come home drunk—but, no; the

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<sup>3</sup>Have a shy - "Have a go" (in the context of a "coconut shy" where shy means to "throw").

## THE TERROR OF LONDON

attitudes of that woman are rather those of supplication than anger. I have frightened not a few lately, and now who knows but I might save one from some ill or other? However, be what it may, it will provide food for my adventurous spirit. If I can't do no good, I at least may give them a fright, for there is more than one in that room, unless the figure whose shadow now rests on the blind is some half-mad creature amusing herself by her strange antics."

He strolled across the road and examined the house narrowly. There was a small fore-court, the sides of which were bounded by a brick wall.

Taking a spring, he alighted on this as easily as if it had only been a foot high, and then, once more minutely inspecting the house, he took off his cloak, and, turning it, appeared enveloped in a white garment.

Then he took from his coat pocket a repulsive-looking mask, which he placed over his face, and a pair of gloves made of the hide of some animal, at the tips of the fingers of which were nails tapering to a point at the end and very long.

Having drawn these over his hands, he took another bound upwards, and alighted on a small balcony before the windows of the first floor.

Into the window he peered, but the darkness which reigned in the room, albeit the blinds were not drawn, prevented him from examining the interior; so he cast his eyes upwards once more.

"I must be careful not to miss my hold of the coping-stone," he muttered, "or I may get a fall that will break my bones."

Throwing his cloak back, so as to leave him free liberty of his arms, he stood upon the very edge of the balcony, took one bound upwards, and caught at the coping-stone with his gloved hands.

For a moment, and a moment only, he hung suspended thus, then drew himself up till his body rested on the ledge. Rolling his legs quietly over into the gutter just under the window, he sat upon the stone and listened.

A woman's tones came in pleading accents to his ears, but in such a low and tremulous voice did she speak, that he was unable to hear a word.

He shifted his position a little, and endeavoured to peer into the room through the edge of the blind.

On one side it lay so close to the frame that he could not discover a chink of the breadth of a pin; on the other he could only gaze upon the soiled paper of the side wall of the room.

In disappointment, he placed his ear to the window and strove once more to catch the sounds which emanated from within.

Suddenly, the tones of a man's voice broke upon his ears.

They were harsh and discordant.

"Your choice?" was all that he said, but there was such deep meaning in the tones that the disguised figure at the window fairly started.

"There's foul play going on in there," he muttered. "I'm sure of it. I thought so from the attitudes of the shadow when I stood in the street. Well, I may be able to do a good turn in part payment for the many bad ones I've had a hand in. Confound that blind! I wish there was a hole in it, that I might see into the room."

Then drawing the glove from his right hand, he doubled his fist and softly drew the

## SPRING-HEEL'D JACK

back of it down the glass, and a slight scratching sound was produced.

So slight, however, that it was almost imperceptible.

This he repeated two or three times, then holding his left hand under the right, a square piece of glass fell upon the glove.

"I thought my ring would do that nicely," he muttered, as he laid the glass upon the coping-stone at his side.

The voice of the woman now came more clearly to his ears.

"Oh! sir, have pity on me, have pity, for heaven's sake," she said, still in those imploring accents which had before riveted the attention of the strange figure on the outside of the window.

"There's something wrong going on here," murmured the cloaked figure, "and I must see as well as hear."

He took a penknife from his pocket, and opening it, he thrust the point of the small blade through the hole in the window into the blind, and then swiftly drawing it downwards inflicted a long rent therein.

The action of the wind rushing through the square hole widened the slit, and he could see into the room.

At the opposite side of the apartment was a bed, the curtains of which were tied round the ornamental posts, a short distance from it was a small toilet table, and between the bed and this sat a man about fifty years of age, holding in his hand a slip of paper.

On the opposite side of the table, near to the window, stood a young female, apparently about five-and-twenty years of age, poorly, but neatly dressed.

Her face was pale as that of a corpse, her eyes red, and swollen with weeping—the dark lashes fringed with tears. Her hands were clasped supplicatingly together, and her whole air was dejected and sorrowful.

For an instant the figure at the window took in all that was going on in the apartment, and he ground his teeth together as he drew on his glove, and adjusted his mask more tightly to his face.

"You are obstinate," said the man, addressing the woman, who stood trembling before him—"foolishly obstinate—you see this cheque." He held up the paper which he had in his grasp.

"I do, I do!" sobbed the woman.

"It is drawn on the bank, my name, my signature forged, and by your husband—transportation is the penalty of the crime—transportation, do you hear, if I appear against him?"

"Oh! sir, but you will not, your heart is not all stone, you will have mercy, mercy on him, on me!" cried the young woman, raising her clasped hands, then dropping them with a deep sigh.

"It was because I wished to do," said the man, looking hard in her face, "that I requested you to come to me to-night. I am willing to have mercy on him, more willing than you are."

"Oh! no! no!" cried the woman.

"Oh! yes!" said the man. "Here is that which will tear him from you—send him across the seas with the brand of traitor upon him—to associate and work with men of the most base and degraded passions; this will blast his reputation, consign him to a gaol—

## THE TERROR OF LONDON

the bulks; make his wife a thing at which the finger of scorn is pointed. Will you see him dragged from you to infamy and disgrace? Will you make yourself a thing of pity, of contempt, when by that little word yes, you may gain possession of this paper, and defy the law to touch him?"

"Oh! God!" exclaimed the woman, "what, what shall I do?"

"What?" said the man, and his grey eyes twinkled as he spoke; "what would a sensible woman do, but consent?"

"But the shame, the disgrace, the injury to the man I have sworn to love!"

"Bah!" said the old man, "he did not hesitate to disgrace you by this act; he did not stop to think of the pain and injury he would inflict on you."

"No—no; but"—

"But he did it; he rushed into the crime. Will you be worse than he if you consent to my wishes? No, better a thousand times, for you will save him."

"Is there no other way? Oh! there is, there must be," she cried.

"None—emphatically none!" said the man. "Consent, and I place this forged cheque in your hand—refuse, and, by all the devils in hell, I will prosecute him with the utmost rigour of the law. Take your choice. Be mine for one short hour, or be widowed for years by your accursed obstinacy."

"Mercy, sir—mercy!"

"I have said, consent, or reject my proposals; I give you one minute to decide whether you will save or destroy your husband."

And the hoary headed old sinner took his gold watch from his pocket, and held it in his hand.

To and fro before that little table, wringing her hands in agony, paced that trembling woman, the tears streaming copiously from her eyes, and her bosom rising and falling like a stormy sea.

And through the slit in the blind gazed the masked figure on the coping stone, but his hands were clutching the framework of the window, and his breath came thick and short through his repulsive mask.

"Damn him!" he muttered to himself, "people look upon me as a villain,<sup>4</sup> but they know not what villainy is. The hoary-headed scoundrel! But I'll spoil his play as sure as I am called Spring-heeled Jack."

The minute passed away, and the man at the table placed the watch in his pocket, and leaped to his feet.

"Your answer!" he exclaimed; "yes or no?"

The woman turned towards him, pale as death, and with a look so imploring that none but a fiend could have resisted that mute appeal.

"Spare me—spare him!" she gasped.

"Have you decided?"

"For the love of heaven!" she pleaded.

But the man stopped her by an impatient gesture.

"For the last time," he said, "I ask you, have you decided? I ask no more, and on your answer depends his fate."

There was that in the tones of the speaker that assured both the agonized woman

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<sup>4</sup> Low or base person – from the French *villain* –peasant; particularly insulting to an aristocrat.

## SPRING-HEEL'D JACK

and the anxious listener that he was determined, and that no appeal, no prayer, could alter his resolve.

The woman shuddered, looked into his face, dropped her eyes to the floor, and gasped forth in tones so piteous, so yearning, that it seemed as if her heart's strings burst with the effort—

“To save him I must—I must consent!”

Then a groan broke from her lips, and she staggered and would have fallen, but the arms of the now smiling libertine encircled her waist.

“You are mine!” he said.

And with a grin of devilish triumph on his face, he bore her towards the bed.

But a crash caused him to pause and turn, and with a shriek of horror, he let go his hold of the young woman, who fell insensible to the floor.

There, before him, stood a figure which caused his heart to almost stand still, every drop of blood in his veins to run through their channels like icy water; his iron-gray hair fairly stood on end, whilst his eyeballs, distorted by terror, seemed about to burst from their sockets.

With such terror was he seized that his knees knocked together, and the cry upon his lips was stifled by his tongue cleaving with horror to his mouth, whilst large drops of perspiration stood in beads upon his now colourless face.

“Villain! villain!” came in hollow tones from that hideous mouth.

The next moment the long claws of the terrible visitor seized his throat, and lacerated the flesh.

Then a shriek of horror escaped the man's lips, a shriek so wild and piercing, that it almost caused his strange visitor to relax his hold, and then down he fell upon his knees on the floor, beside the insensible woman.

“Mer—mer—mercy!” he gasped.

“As much as you showed to her,” said the fearful looking stranger.

“Mercy! I—I meant no harm, I”—

“Liar!”

“Upon my!”—

“Hold! wretch! give me that cheque, or I will”—

“No, no,” gasped the terror-stricken wretch—“spare me—spare me. There—there is the cheque—take it, but spare me—oh! spare me.”

With trembling hands the man took the cheque from his waistcoat pocket, and held it up to Jack, who in an instant tore it from his hold, and thrust it into his breast.

Then, with an exclamation of contempt, he kicked the man aside, and stooped over the insensible woman.

“Poor thing!” he muttered; “I am not so bad after all.”

The shivering wretch crawled towards the door of the apartment on perceiving that his strange and fearful visitor was paying no heed to him, by an effort he sprung to his feet, and opening the door, bounded from the room, screaming for help with all his might.

Jack seized the girl in his arms, and raised her from the floor.

“Curse the fellow,” he said, “I wish I had choked him.”

There was the quick opening of doors, and voices were heard inquiring what was the matter.

“It's Spring-heeled Jack!” exclaimed a voice. “I was told he was about—where is he?”

## THE TERROR OF LONDON

“In my room!”

“I’ll have a shot at him!” said the other.

“Will you, my fine fellow!” muttered Jack, bearing the girl to the window, and tearing down the blind.

Thrusting the window back (which opened inwards) to its full extent, he sprang with her upon the coping-stone, and cast one look below.

He could hear the footsteps of two persons hurriedly ascending the stairs, and one of them exclaiming—

“He has robbed me, shoot him—shoot him!”

Grasping the young woman firmly in his arms, he sprang from the parapet, and alighted on the footpath in front of the house, as the report of a pistol broke the stillness of the night, and a bullet flew harmlessly over his head.

“I’ll mark you for that,” he said to himself, as he tore away at a rapid pace, bearing the girl in his arms.

The report of the pistol he knew would arouse the whole neighbourhood; and he sped on till the houses gave place to fields and hedgerows.

“It is not so easy a matter to leap up with a woman in your arms as it is to leap down,” he muttered. “I have saved her from that villain’s wiles, and her husband from a gaol if I am not mistaken; but I must not leave her till she recovers, so that I can place the cheque in her hand, and make the heart, which a few minutes since was bowed with grief, pant with hope and joy. Hillo! there is some one in pursuit. I must not be taken with the accusation of robbery.”

He lifted the woman over a low portion of the hedge, and let her form slip quietly down on the opposite side, then hounded over after her.

“Stop him—stop thief!” came in a shout to his ears; and he crouched down under the hedge, tore off his gloves and mask, and turned his cloak.

The footsteps came nearer and nearer, then passed him, and were soon lost in the distance.

A sigh broke from the woman’s lips.

“Are you better?” he asked.

The woman sprang to her feet.

“Who are you? Where am I?” she asked, in terror.

“Where you are safe, and with one who saved you from that scoundrel. Yes, and saved your husband, too; for here is the cheque—destroy it. Make your way home as quick as you can!”

“Oh! heaven!” gasped the woman, quietly, “who are you, my preserver?”

“One who is not so black as he is painted—Spring-heeled Jack.”

And pressing the cheque into her hand, he sprang over the hedge into the road.