

Chapter Ten

The crowd moved out of the way for our parents. The four missing watchmen were with them. They were in bad shape. Their heads were cut and bruised. One had his arm around Father's shoulder to keep himself from falling. They sat on the grass while Father spoke to the crowd.



"The watchmen were attacked by a large gang of thieves around midnight. We found them tied up by Richard-the-Smith's."

"Well? What are we waiting for Goodfellow?" said Wat's father. "Let's go catch them, and then we can hang them from a tree!"

"No!" cried Nick's father. "First we'll thrash them with our flails, and then we'll hang them."

"These are good ideas," said Father calmly, "but does anyone know which way the thieves went?" Nobody answered, so Father kept going. "They've had

a big head start, so they'll be miles ahead of us."

"I'll bet they're from Martock," said Nick's father. "We should go there and look for them!"

"Did someone from Martock rob you?" asked Father.

"No, but I bet the Martock men are hiding them in return for some of our stolen property!" said Francis.

"Let's go to Martock," shouted his friend, Richard-the-Colt, and the crowd cheered.

"Let's not start another brawl with Martock," said Father. "We have no reason to suspect them."

"Sure we do," said Nick's father. "They're always trying to steal our land, and they cheat at football!"



Just two weeks ago, the people of Tintinhull and Martock met on the boundary between our villages during the yearly beating-of-the-bounds parade.

There was a nasty argument about whose side of the road the boundary was on.

There was pushing and shoving, and soon a brawl had started. Even the village priests joined in, swinging their parade crosses as weapons. Nobody from our village has dared go to Martock since, and none of them have come to Tintinhull either.

"I don't like Martock any more than the rest of you," said Father, "but I can't believe they would do this. Helping thieves will get you hanged. They are wealthy farmers. They wouldn't risk their lives just to get back at us."

"Sure they would," someone shouted.

"And besides," said Father, "If we go there and start a fight we'll be charged with breaking the King's Peace. Then the whole village will have to pay a big fine." Father turned to Francis Wolf. "Do you want to lose more money tonight?"

Francis had been about to say something, but now he stopped. Father kept talking.

"I will go to Ilchester right away and report this to the sheriff. He will want to hunt this gang down before they strike again. Those of you who were robbed stay here and tell me anything about the thieves that you can remember. The rest of you can go back to your beds."

There was lots of grumbling, but the crowd began to leave. Mother came up to us. "Let's go home now," she said. "Your father's going to be up the rest of the night, so we won't wait for him."

“Daddy’s a great constable, isn’t he?” said Edward.

“Yes,” said Mother with a sigh. “He handled that pretty well. Most constables would have led that mob to Martock. I just hope the sheriff takes this seriously. There will be trouble for him if the thieves get away.”

We crossed the street to our home and got back into our beds. We started talking about what had happened, but then Mother thumped on the wall and put an end to that. Soon we all fell asleep.

Chapter 11

I was awake again before I knew it. The sun was already up, and the cows were mooing with hunger. We normally get up before dawn, when the roosters are crowing. Mother came into our room and started shaking us. “Time to get up you lazy badgers! Elizabeth and Emily, the cows are waiting for you.”

Then she went back to the big room to get the fire going. We slowly got out of bed, put on our tunics, and followed Mother.

“Where’s Father?” asked Margaret.

“He hasn’t come back from Ilchester yet,” said Mother. “If he’s lucky, he’ll just be seeing the sheriff now, so he won’t be home for a while.”

Elizabeth and Emily went out the back door to milk the cows. The cattle barn is joined to our house. You can look after the cows, oxen, and horse without going outside. It’s

really handy in winter, but now rich farmers are moving their barns away from their homes. It's the new way.

"Robert and William," said Mother, "You'd better get Congar and Wulfric ready to work." Those are our oxen. By the way, Mother names all our farm animals, and she always names them after saints.

Robert and I went out to the granary. This is a small shed for storing grain. It sits on mushroom-shaped stones that mice and rats can't climb up over. Our cat, Dominic, helps keep the mice away too. The granary is a neat place. Sometimes I hide in there. I love the smell of all the grain.

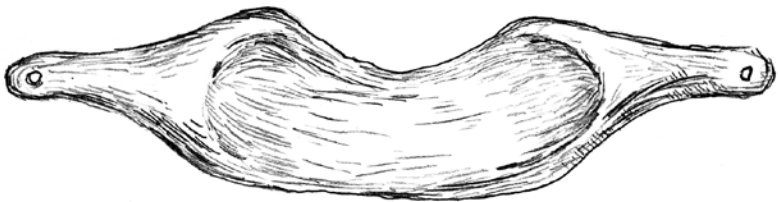
The day was starting out fine. I love this time of year. There were no clouds to be seen. All the birds were singing loudly. We went into the granary. Elizabeth and Emily were already there filling buckets with oats.

"We need oats too," said Robert. "Let's fill these buckets right up full so we can feed all the cattle at once."

"Alright," said Elizabeth. "But we were here first, so you have to carry them."

Robert doesn't usually argue with Elizabeth. She is a few years older than him, and she's still stronger. I don't argue with her either. One time she threw me into the manure pile.

"Fine," said Robert. "William, go get me the bucket yoke." I don't argue with Robert. I quickly ran to the well



and got him the yoke. He put it on his shoulders and used it to carry the buckets.



“Don’t spill any,” said Elizabeth.

“Please don’t nag at me,” said Robert angrily.

The barn was really noisy. The oxen and cows were bawling, and our horse Wilfred was neighing too. I checked the charms to make sure the animals were still safe from evil. The onions and the holed stones were still hanging from the rafters, and there were still pieces of wicken tree on the animals’ collars. Thank goodness! The beasts were just hungry; not bewitched.

We fed them their oats. Elizabeth and Emily set up their milking stools and buckets. Soon all you could hear was the sound of the milk filling the buckets and the beasts eating their oats.

“William, start filling the water trough. I’ll yoke the oxen,”

said Robert as he lifted the big wooden ox yoke off of its pegs on the wall. I went to the well and began cranking the bucket up from the bottom. I had to do this many times. Oxen drink a lot of water.

I saw Edward come out of the house. He was carrying a bucket full of kitchen scraps. He dumped the slop into the pigsty, and our three hogs quickly ate it up. Edward watched them eat. He loves those hogs.

Margaret came out of the chicken coop with a small basket of eggs. I wondered if any hens pecked her. Soon Robert brought the oxen to the well for their drink.

“We’ll just leave them here until Uncle Roger comes,” said Robert. “They’ll be fine. Elizabeth can get more water for the cows herself. Let’s go eat.”

I knew this was asking for trouble, but I was really hungry so I went inside with him. Edward and Margaret were already sitting on the benches at the trestle table. Mother gave us some bread, herring, and leeks, with cider to drink. Emily and Elizabeth came in a bit later.

“You should have put more water in the trough William,” said Elizabeth.

“Sorry,” I said quietly.

“Robert and Edward,” said Mother, “I want you to take the cows and the horse out to Westfield pasture this morning.” Westfield is a large common pasture west of Tintinhull. Anyone in the village can take their animals there to eat the grass.

“Why can’t Elizabeth do that?” said Robert.

“Elizabeth is helping me here this morning,” said Mother. “Do you think it’s a holy day for you just because your father

is away? When he gets back and has some food and rest you can go to the fields with him to plow.”

“Emily and Margaret, I am sending you over to Prince’s Woods to pick some plants with your grandmother. William will go with you and gather a basket of fire wood. You should gather one . . .”

There was a knock at the door. “What now?” said Mother as she went to answer it.

