

Chapter Six

The crowd moved out of the way so our parents could get onto the green. They helped the four missing watchmen walk to the stocks. It looked like the watchmen had been given a good beating by the thieves. Some had their heads bandaged, and 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. They were found tied up down by Richard-the-Smith’s.”

“Well? What are we waiting for Goodfellow?” shouted big sweaty Bartholemew Puffer. “You’re the constable. Start the chase! When we catch them we’ll hang them from the nearest tree!”

“No!” cried Francis. “First we’ll give them a good thrashing 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 before we start

chasing them?"

Nobody answered and all was quiet. Then it hit me. Maybe I knew which way they went. "I think I know," I said.

"What's that William?" said Father, who looked surprised. Before I could speak, Francis answered for me.

"He says he knows where the thieves went."

"Well why didn't you tell someone when you saw them?" said Bartholemew. "We could have caught them."

I didn't know what to say. I felt very foolish now.

"Be quiet Puffer," said Father. "Give the boy a chance to explain."

Everybody was staring at me now. My face felt like it was on fire. I tried to explain. "I was coming back from the privy and I thought I saw some ghosts go into the churchyard."

Bartholemew Puffer began pushing people out of his way as he ran towards the church. "Maybe the theives are hiding there!" he shouted. Francis Wolf and some others followed. They came back a few moments later. They looked more angry than ever.

"There's nothing at the church!" said Francis. "So this Goodfellow brat is lying, or he's a fool."

Bartholemew began pushing his way towards me.

"Or maybe the Goodfellows are in on the robbery, and the boy's been paid to trick us," he said.

Before I could get away, the big man grabbed hold of my arm. He shouted, "Where's my money, you little dung-weasel?" Then he started shaking me. "Tell me now!"

Chapter Seven

In the blink of an eye, Father plowed through the crowd to help William. He grabbed Bartholemew's free arm and twisted it up behind his back. The big man cried out in pain.

"Let go of my boy now Puffer," said Father, "or I'll twist your arm off and feed it to your own pigs."

Bartholemew let go of me, and Father pushed him to the ground. As he got up again Father said, "Never lay hands on any of my family again Puffer." Then he turned and went back to the middle of the green. He spoke to the crowd again as if nothing had happened.

"Since we don't know where the thieves went, we can't chase them now. We need to . . ." Father was cut off by Francis Wolf.

"I'll bet they're from the village of Martock," he said. "We should go there and look for them!"

"Did you see someone from Martock when you were robbed?" asked Father.

"No, but I bet the thieves are hiding in Martock. They're likely getting a cut of our stolen goods in return!"

"Yeah! Let's go to Martock," shouted his friend, Richard-the-Colt. Many in the crowd liked this idea, and they started cheering.

"Let's not make things worse by starting another brawl with Martock," said Father. "We have no good

reason to blame them.”

“Sure we do,” said Francis. “They’re always trying to move the parish boundary and 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. It was the beating-of-the-bounds parade that happens every year. There was a big argument about which side of the road the boundary is on.

Soon fists were flying, and then a huge brawl started. Even the village priests joined in. They swung their large crosses as weapons. Nobody from our village has dared go into Martock since, and none of them have set foot in Tintinhull.

“I don’t like Martock any more than the rest of

you," said Father, "but I can't believe they would help thieves. It's a hanging crime. They are wealthy farmers. They wouldn't risk their lives just to harm 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. "And hasn't enough money been lost 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. Anybody who was robbed stay here and tell me everything you can about the thieves. The rest of you can go back to your beds."

There was a lot of grumbling, but the crowd began to leave. Mother came over 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 good 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. If village constables were paid for their work, we'd be rich. I just hope the sheriff does something to catch those thieves, or else your father will be in trouble."

We crossed the street to our home and got

back into bed. 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 Eight

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 rich farmers are moving their barns away from their homes now. 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.

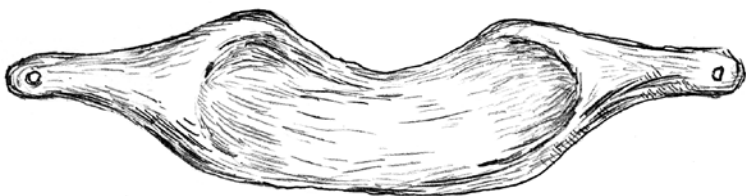
The day was starting out fine. I love this time of year. There were no clouds to be seen. All the birds were singing loudly. We went into the granary. Elizabeth and Emily were already there filling buckets with oats.

"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, run over to the well and get the bucket yoke. I might as well make this easier." I don't argue with Robert. I quickly got him the yoke. He put it on his shoulders and used it to carry the oats to the cattle barn.



"Don't spill any," said Elizabeth. "We're going to run out of oats before harvest and Father will have to buy

more.”

“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.

We poured the oats into the manger at the front of the stalls where the beasts were tied. Elizabeth and Emily set up their three-legged stools and milk buckets. Soon all you could hear was the sound of the milk filling the buckets and the beasts eating their oats.

“William, you’d better 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 the slop bucket, and it was full of kitchen scraps. He dumped it into the pigsty, and our three hogs quickly ate it up. Edward watched them eat. He loves those hogs. Father thinks he'll make a fine swineherd one day. Maybe he will work for the Lord of the Manor

Margaret came out of our little chicken coop with a small basket of eggs she had gathered. I wondered if she got pecked by any of the hens. Soon Robert had the oxen yoked and he brought them to the trough at the well to drink.

"We'll just leave them here until Uncle Roger comes," said Robert. "They'll be fine. If they drink all the water before the cows get here then Elizabeth can get more herself. Let's go eat."

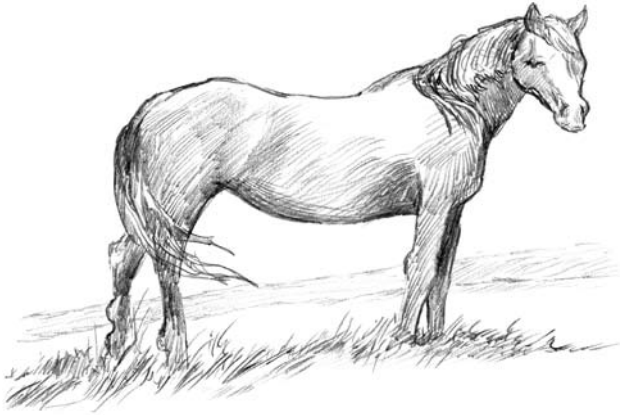
I knew that this was asking for trouble, but I was really hungry so I went inside with him. Edward and Margaret were already sitting on the benches at the trestle table. Mother gave us some bread, herring, and leeks, with cider to drink. Emily and Elizabeth came in a bit later.

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

"Sorry," I said quietly..

"Robert and Edward," said Mother, "Since your father won't be back for a while, 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 firewood. You should gather one . . .”

There was a knock at the door.

“What now?” said Mother as she went to answer it.