

# The Scullery Boy



*from The Foundling by Linda Hayner  
illustrated by Steve Mitchell*

*In seventeenth century London, it was not uncommon to find abandoned children on church doorsteps. During this period of war, soldiers drove respectable peasants from their homes in the country. Forced to flee to the city of London, many of these peasants ended up begging and eventually found themselves unable to feed their own children. To avoid further misery, these peasants often decided to let the parish church care for their children and place them in homes where they would be fed and clothed. These abandoned children were known as foundlings.*

*One such foundling, named Will, was discovered at the age of four and was taken into the temporary care of a kind gentleman named James Perry. During Will's brief stay, Master Perry and his closest friend and employee, Rodgers, gain an attachment to the young foundling. After finding a nurse, Mistress Bessie, to care for Will, Rodgers continues to visit him and to keep up with his progress. Following the death of Mistress Bessie, Rodgers and Master Perry place Will under the care of the local Vicar.<sup>1</sup> Rodgers and Perry agree to pay the Vicar a monthly sum to provide Will with food, clothing, and education. However, the Vicar gives him only loose straw for a bed, takes away his nice clothes and toys, and gives him the dirtiest jobs of the household. Also, the Vicar instructs Will to stay out of sight when visitors come. As a result, Will begins to think Rodgers has forgotten him.*

*Will resigns himself to living in this cruel situation and does what he is told. But one day he finds a way to escape from the harsh world in which he lives, though the escape is only in his imagination.*

---

<sup>1</sup>Vicar—a clergyman of the Church of England who is paid by the government







## Delightful Discovery

Will fetched the last scuttle<sup>2</sup> of coal and went to the library. He had never been in the room before. It was small and dominated<sup>3</sup> by a large fireplace. After laying the fire and sweeping up the coal dust that always flew about no matter how careful he was, Will looked around. Two chairs flanked<sup>4</sup> the fireplace. Their cushions were a deep purple and looked soft and comfortable. In front of each chair was a footstool, and by the right arm of each was a small table with a candlestick for reading. Along one wall stood a small desk covered with papers and books. Most of them were in Latin. The Vicar's scrawling handwriting covered some of the papers. At the top of one was written "Sermon for the Lord's Day, September 23." Will didn't like the Vicar's sermons much.

He straightened up; he'd already spent too much time here. Then he spied a piece of furniture almost hidden in a corner. It was a beautifully carved bookcase with glass doors. And it was full of books whose leather bindings gleamed in the fading afternoon light. If only I could open the doors, he thought, I

could read the titles better. He pressed the door with his finger.

When he took his finger away, the door opened with a snap that made him jump and glance toward the library door. No footsteps. The family was still at supper.

The bookcase door squeaked a bit when he pulled it open. Will ran his fingers along the spines. He breathed in the warm smells of leather and parchment,<sup>5</sup> paper and ink. Most of the titles were in Latin, but he pulled out a small volume anyway to look at it and enjoy its feel. He opened the book and ran his fingers over the heavy vellum,<sup>6</sup> leaving a smudge of coal dust that would not come off no matter how he rubbed it. When he bent to replace the book, he saw another book behind it. In fact, there was a whole row of books behind on every shelf. The Vicar had lots more than a hundred books.

Will reached in and pulled out one of the back books. It was in English, and it was about King Richard and the Crusades. He pulled out several more books of stories, legends, tales of foreign lands, and exploration.

Footsteps sounded in the dining room. Dinner would soon be over. Quickly, Will replaced the books, making as little noise as he could. He picked up the last one and read

---

<sup>2</sup>scuttle—a container for carrying coal

<sup>3</sup>dominated—positioned in an obvious or prominent place

<sup>4</sup>flanked—placed on each side

<sup>5</sup>parchment—writing material of sheepskin or goatskin

<sup>6</sup>vellum—fine parchment made of lambskin or kidskin



the title again. He looked over his shoulder, then slipped the volume about King Richard into his shirt. He closed the squeaky bookcase door slowly, hoping it wouldn't be heard. At the library door he checked both ways and sped quietly down the hall and into the kitchen.

"Where have you been, you bone-idle scamp?" Cook slammed down a large pot. "Begin cleaning the kitchen. You'll get no supper tonight for your laziness."

Will ran to his cubby, wrapped the book in his extra shirt, and shoved it under his straw bed. He didn't care about supper. He would clean so fast and so well, Cook wouldn't be able to complain. Then he could read.

But it was two hours before he crept into his cubby. He carried a long splinter of wood from the kitchen fire to light a candle. He'd

never used any of his candles before, so he grabbed one from the small pile near his bed, lit it, and stuck it to the floor with some melted wax. Will kicked the straw into a pile, spread his blanket over it, and lay down. He reached out and pushed the cubby door shut. Almost reverently,<sup>7</sup> he unwrapped and opened the book. The leather felt warm and smooth, but the pages were cool under his fingertips. Will rubbed his hands on his blanket to clean them. He turned page after page, enjoying the contrast of black ink on the creamy vellum. When the anticipation was unbearable, he started to read.

Soon he was lost in the world of King Richard I and the Third Crusade. It didn't matter that he already knew the story from the beginning to end from the times when he and Mistress

---

<sup>7</sup>reverently—having feelings of deep respect





Bessie had read it together. The walls of the tiny cubby disappeared, and he walked through castles and rode through the forests of England and Europe all the way to the Holy Land. With King Richard he charged the Moslems<sup>8</sup> and made a treaty with Saladin the Turk so Christian pilgrims could travel safely in the Holy Land.

He read on and on, shifting from elbow to elbow, rolling on his side, then on his back. Sitting up to read wasn't easy because he had to put the book on the floor between his feet and bend over it to have enough light. Only when the candle guttered did he look away from the page before him and realize where he was and how stiff his muscles were. With a sigh, he

closed the volume, wrapped it up again, and hid it behind the door of his cubby. The candle flared up one last time and went out.

The next morning Cook had to pound on his door to waken him. Why wasn't he up and working? Was he sick? No? Well, then, best have breakfast and get to work.

Will rubbed his eyes. He thought they'd never open. His muscles made him wince when he rolled over. He limped into the kitchen, rubbed his sore shoulders, and stretched his stiff back.

Over the following weeks, Cook wondered at the difference in the scullery<sup>9</sup> boy. He often had a faraway expression and was tired in the morning. But he never had to be told to take the heavy scuttles upstairs. She did not notice the occasional bulge beneath his shirt.

<sup>8</sup>Moslem—a person who believes in the religion of Islam  
<sup>9</sup>scullery—a room for cleaning kitchen dishes and utensils





By the end of December, Will's supply of candles was nearly gone. Fortunately, the holiday parties and celebrations provided a new supply of partially burned candles, too many for the housekeeper or Cook to count. But holidays that brought him the extra candles also made it more difficult to get into the library because of the Vicar's many guests. Will was happy when everyone finally left and the household settled back into its routine.

During the next three months, he read of Marco Polo's visits to the court of Kublai Khan and a book on the Hundred Years' War between England and France. Will felt rather sorry for Joan of Arc. She was so brave leading the French army that he thought it too bad the English army captured her and burned her as a witch. He found a book by a man named Langland who had walked all over England and written down what he saw. It wasn't as exciting as reading William Shakespeare's plays, however. Then he found a volume of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The "Knight's Tale" was the best of all, and Will set himself the task of memorizing the passages of the great battles. He memorized up to the last battle of the knight Arcite, who had fallen from his horse, hit his head, broken his ribs, and lay dying. Will would have finished, but by the end of March, he was nearly out of candles again. This time it was Cook

herself who helped him out. She sent him to clean all the candlesticks in the house and put new candles in them. At any other time Will would have hated cleaning the wax left behind by dripping candles. Now he picked up the large basket and went through all the rooms collecting candlesticks without complaining.

He entered the room of Elspeth, the Vicar's daughter. Will did not like her at all. She was always calling him a maid because he cleaned the pots and pans in the scullery. She bullied him every chance she had and made him do all sorts of irksome<sup>10</sup> tasks for her. Today, however, he decided to be nice, because it was her turn to contribute to his candle collection.

"I say, there. What are you doing?"

Will spun around with a candlestick in his hand. She really is sneaky, he thought. Aloud he said, "Taking this candlestick to be cleaned. It's awfully messy."

"It also has nearly half a candle in it." Her eyes closed ever so little when she smiled. "Are you selling the ends back to the candle maker and keeping the money? I shall tell Father at once."

"No, I haven't been selling the ends back to the candle maker," Will said mimicking her. "You can ask Cook. She sent me to collect and

---

<sup>10</sup>irksome—annoying



clean these. Now if you don't want this one cleaned . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, shrugged, and moved to replace the candlestick on the mantle.

"Oh, no. Please do clean it," Elspeth fairly purred. "I'm going to follow you, though, until I find out whether or not you're selling those candle bits. This will be more fun than my embroidery and music lessons."

Will watched her.

"You may go." She motioned him away.

From then on Elspeth appeared at the most unexpected times and

places. Will started looking around corners and peeking through doorways before he took another step. Still she surprised him, once with a full coal scuttle. He spun around so fast, lumps of coal went rolling onto the floor, scattering black dust. Elspeth stood over him while he picked up the coal and wiped the floor. She also visited the kitchen more often, much to Cook's annoyance.







## Spying Elspeth

Lady Day came and Will went with the other parishioners<sup>11</sup> to hear another of the Vicar's sermons. Lady Day was not only the day the angel told the virgin Mary she would be the mother of Jesus but March 25 was also New Year's, the first day of 1653. After the service everyone ate in the churchyard and played games. The Green Man visited, decorated with leaves and vines from the woods, to wish good crops for the farmers. When the sun set, a huge bonfire lit the churchyard, and the young people sang and celebrated the end of winter. A late shower did not dampen their spirits. It only sent the older folks home to tuck the children into bed.

Shortly after Lady Day, Will finished memorizing his favorite parts of the "Knight's Tale." When the days grew longer and he spent more time tending the herb garden, he recited the battles over and over again. When he escaped down the lane, he used stick knights and horses and set up whole battlefields.

When summer came, Will frequently went and sat on the hill overlooking the London Road. He took his book with him because he was now memorizing the exploits<sup>12</sup> of King Richard the Lion-Hearted in the Third Crusade. The rumble of the traffic, the shouts and calls of the

<sup>11</sup>parishioners—members of a parish (a church district)

<sup>12</sup>exploits—heroic or daring deeds



people became the clamor of great campaigns. And as long as he didn't look up from the story, he lived at the end of the twelfth century and rode at King Richard's side.

Later on he went back to the library and took the volume about King Arthur. So much of King Arthur's trouble was caused by the wicked witch, Morgan le Fay. She reminded Will of Elspeth because they were both sneaky.

Elspeth's spying had kept him from returning to the library as often as he liked. Only by going very early one morning was he able to return the volume about Arthur and remove the history of Charlemagne. Even then, he was certain he heard the rustle of cloth. The squeak from the hinge on the bookcase door sounded like a scream when he pushed the door shut. Will tucked the new book into his shirt and tiptoed down the stairs toward the kitchen.

His hand was out to open the door. Then he froze where he was.

"Elspeth, you leave that boy alone!"

"You can't tell me what to do. This is my house. You merely work here!"

Will stepped back into the corner behind the door. Maybe Elspeth had seen him go into the library. Maybe he hadn't just imagined the noises. He had no time to put his newest book back now. Besides, he wanted

to hear everything that was going on in the kitchen. Elspeth was no match for Cook.

"Your scullery boy is stealing everyone's candles."

"Really?" Cook smoothed her voice to the consistency of honey. She frequently found the Vicar's children a nuisance, but Elspeth wanted bunging<sup>13</sup> out the kitchen door for all her high and mighty ways. "I allow him all the candle ends he digs out of the candlesticks."

"Look what I found in his cubby! Several candle ends and half a good candle as well! I think he's selling the ends to the candle maker."

Will clutched the book in his shirt. What if he had not taken his book back this morning? She would have found it. His heart began to beat so hard that he was sure the whole house could hear. He held his breath and crunched himself farther into the corner.

"That's his half candle he gets each week. If you must know, I give him the odd broken ones as well. Now stop being a silly goose."

"Why does he need these candles? Have you thought of that?"

"You've been into his cubby. How many windows did you count?" Cook snapped back.

"He's up to something. He sneaks around the house, you know."

---

<sup>13</sup>bunging—(British) flinging or tossing



“And who’s creeping about?”  
Cook’s eyebrows flew up. “Put those bits and pieces of candle back where you found them.” Cook’s knife expertly quartered an onion for the evening’s meat pie.

“I’m not going in there. It stinks.”

“You went in there to pry.”

Elsbeth stood at the door and tossed the candles into the cubby.

“Now you’ll go in there and sort those candles out and leave them as you found them. Then you’ll leave my kitchen, or I’ll put you to work in the scullery.” Cook’s words were slow and calm.

Even if Elspeth didn’t realize that Cook had reached the end of her patience, Will knew. From his corner he wondered if Cook would really thrash Elspeth. He hoped so, and he moved closer to the door so he wouldn’t miss anything.

“Ugh!” Elspeth came out of the cubby shaking her skirts. “Doesn’t he ever change his straw?”

“Once a month or as often as your father allows him new.”

Elsbeth stood silent for a moment. She knew, as well as Cook, that it was her mother who ran the house. She pinched every penny and would never allow new straw every month. Elspeth had enough trouble

wheeling a new bodice<sup>14</sup> for the midsummer celebrations next week.

“Well, doesn’t he ever bathe?”

“Once a week except in winter. And if you recall,” Cook’s tone was not friendly, “it was a long, cold winter.” Her knife chopped a carrot in two. “Now, off with you; out of my kitchen.”

Elsbeth flounced<sup>15</sup> through the door, hitting it so hard that it cracked against the stone wall behind. Will didn’t dare move until she reached the top of the stairs. He reached out for the door handle, but thought better of it. He didn’t want to have to explain to Cook

why he had been upstairs so early in the day. So he tiptoed back up the stairs, slipped out a side door, walked around through the garden, and entered the kitchen through the back door.

“Get about your business, boy.”

Will stepped into his cubby to hide his new book. It definitely did not stink in there.

“Get to work, I say.” Cook watched Will go into the scullery. When she heard pots and pans clanging and the steady scrubbing of sand against metal, she turned back to the vegetables.

<sup>14</sup>bodice—a woman’s vest worn over a blouse

<sup>15</sup>flounced—used bouncy, exaggerated movement





The long summer days passed slowly for Will. Cook decided that every inch of the kitchen needed cleaning. Will emptied all the cupboards and moved them so the walls and floors could be washed down. Then he dusted the cupboards and polished them with beeswax. He was surprised that Cook didn't make him wipe off the ceiling beams. Even the fireplace and chimney received a cleaning. Will breathed a sigh of relief when a chimney sweep came to do that.

When he wasn't in the kitchen, Will worked long hours in the gardens. There were berries, apples, and pears to be picked. The herb garden needed constant attention to keep the weeds from taking over. The gardener was as hard a taskmaster as Cook, and he soon had Will lopping branches off trees and trimming the bushes and hedges<sup>16</sup> as well.

Will decided he liked the outside work the best. It was easier to stay away from the Vicar's family, particularly Elspeth. It was easier to recite the passages from his books too. He had only to look into the tangle of a hedge to imagine himself in a forest. Sometimes he finished his work hardly remembering what he'd been doing.

He tried hard not to think too much of Rodgers anymore. In the

year since Mistress Bessie had died and he'd lived at the vicarage, Rodgers had never come visiting once. And when visitors did call, Will was always sent to the scullery or on a long errand. It soon became clear that he was never to be around when guests arrived. So when the wagon wheels crunched in the driveway, or horses' hooves clattered up to the front gate, Will left his work and disappeared for an hour or two.



<sup>16</sup>hedges—rows of closely planted shrubs or small trees



One late August afternoon when he heard a rider stop, Will picked up his book and set off down the lane. The day was warm under a blue sky dotted with only a few small clouds. In the lane, wildflowers bloomed in the tall grasses and the smell of freshly cut hay blew over the low stone walls.

He sat on the hill overlooking the highway, reading and memorizing until his eyes began to close. Then he leaned back on his elbows to watch the world passing below him. A few minutes later a man carrying a small boy on his shoulders caught his eye. They were very poor. Their clothes had holes and didn't fit very well. The boy drooped over the man's head, not even bothering to hang on. The man shuffled at the edge of the highway, never slowing down or hurrying along no matter who shouted at him.

Rodgers carried me like that on our way to Mistress Bessie's, Will thought. He could still remember sitting on Rodgers's shoulders and being able to look down on all the people around him. He recalled turning into the lane that led to Mistress Bessie's cottage. Will's mind filled with pictures of the cottage, of Button, the cat, curled up on the warm hearth, and of Mistress working in her rose garden. He thought of their trips to market for groceries and clothes. He glanced down at his shirt and breeches. His wrists and an-

kles stuck out because he had grown so much, and he'd had only one new shirt and pair of shoes all winter.

I had proper clothes at Mistress Bessie's, he thought, and all I wanted to eat of bread and preserves and thick stews and meat pies. The memories faded into the churchyard where he had stood with Rodgers at her grave.

When he finally sat up, the traffic moved as it had before under the yellow sun. Nobody looked in his direction. Oxen still bellowed, and dust drifted up from the wheels of the carts and wagons they pulled. Whips cracked. Horses whinnied. Draymen<sup>17</sup> shouted. Will took a deep breath.

"So this is where you come!"

Will jerked up and looked over his shoulder. Elspeth! The book tucked inside his shirt pressed against his ribs. He turned back to the road and slid the book more securely into his waistband.

"Go away."

"I knew I'd find where you ran off to if I followed you long enough." She stood over him. "You should be working."

"Cook doesn't need me until afternoon. Besides, someone called at the vicarage, and I always get sent away."

"The gardener was looking for you."

---

<sup>17</sup>draymen—drivers of a dray (a heavy cart used for hauling things)



“He can do his old garden himself.”

“I shall tell Father you’ve been running off. You’ll be locked in your cubby—with no candle ends at all.”

A carriage of some important man caught Will’s eye. Four horsemen protected it. Once it reached the wild countryside, robber gangs might attack. He studied the horses prancing and tossing their heads. They wanted to gallop straight away. Elspeth was still talking, and her tone became angrier. Will’s eye was drawn to the livery<sup>18</sup> worn by the outriders. The purple and silver cloth, shining buttons, and jaunty

---

<sup>18</sup>livery—uniform worn by male servants of a household

hats with huge feathers were grander than any he had ever seen.

“Ow!”

Elspeth had his ear and was dragging him up. She pinched harder when he slapped her hand.

“Let go!” Will tried to get up to relieve the pressure on his ear. He couldn’t get his feet to catch up. When her skirt caught on a piece of rusted metal, she yanked it free without missing a step.

Will reversed tactics. Instead of pulling away from Elspeth, he ran straight at her, his fists waving. He swung twice, but she straightened her arm and held him away. He thought his ear would be torn off. A picture of Mistress Bessie holding





tightly to Peter's ear flashed through his mind. He laughed out loud.

Elsbeth stopped. "Laugh at me, will you?" She brought her other hand around to slap Will, but the sudden movement allowed him to slip free. He ran back toward the vicarage, half-laughing, half-crying, holding his ear with one hand and the book in his waistband with the other. He ran through the garden gate, around the vicarage, and stumbled into the hedge at the side of the house.

"You, boy! Get out of there and back to the scullery!"

The Vicar turned to his guest, who had just arrived. "I hardly know what to think of the world today. . . ."

The guest wasn't listening. He was staring at the scullery boy. The Vicar cleared his throat for a more authoritative tone.

"Be gone, boy. You know you're not to be seen when we have visitors."

The guest's eyebrows flew up, and he looked quickly from the Vicar to the boy who was fighting to free himself from the hedge. "I say, isn't that—"

"My apologies, my friend. Such carryings on are simply not permitted in my household. Mrs. Richards takes all the help in hand to teach each one his place, but some are more difficult than others." The Vicar coughed apologetically. "Elsbeth?"





The Vicar's daughter came round the side of the house, brandishing a switch. Her cap was askew<sup>19</sup> and wisps of straight, brown hair hung to her shoulders. Part of her hem trailed in the grass.

"Where is he? Slap at me, run away from me, laugh at me, will he? Where is the little toad?" She paused for breath. "I'll give him a lesson he'll soon not forget." She tripped over a tree root and fell against the house.

Will collapsed in the hedge and laughed until his sides hurt.

Elspeth righted herself and raised the switch. "I'll sort you out!" She was nearly shouting.

Will tore himself free of the hedge, ducked Elspeth's switch, and ran to the back of the house and into the kitchen. He stumbled into his cubby and collapsed on the straw, still laughing.

Meanwhile, the Vicar was trying to bring some order to what he could only describe as a social disaster.

---

<sup>19</sup>askew—not lined up or straight

"Elspeth . . . my dear! Elspeth, my pet. We have a visitor."

Elspeth stopped in midstride and whirled around. She looked up. Her face registered her thought: handsome! Elspeth dropped the switch and ran her fingers around her cap, trying to tuck her hair in, and kicked the trailing hem behind her. She approached the two men with what she believed was her most becoming expression, a slight smile that just showed her teeth and made her dimples appear. She'd practiced it in front of her glass for hours.

Rodgers looked past her. "I'd like to see the . . . toad . . . if I may."

The Vicar harrumphed. "Yes, indeed. . . . Are you quite sure? Yes, of course you are. Ah, Elspeth, who was that . . . that?"

"He's the scullery boy, Father." Elspeth never took her eyes from Rodgers.

"Oh, yes . . . quite." The Vicar led Rodgers up the garden walk. "If you please, sir. Elspeth, please bring us refreshments in the library."

Will didn't care if the Vicar beat him for running from Elspeth or appearing when a guest was present. It was worth it to see that girl all mussed and tattered. He rubbed his sore ear. He still owed her for that.





## Not Forgotten!

Cook called him. “The house-keeper wants you to clean the fire-places this afternoon. See that you don’t scatter ash all over. Put any live coals in the kitchen fire.”

Will took the canvas, bucket, and shovel and started up the stairs. Ahead of him he could hear the Vicar holding forth on the evils of an unlettered<sup>20</sup> younger generation, and that was why he consented, at great inconvenience to himself, mind you, to take in local youngsters and set them on their way with lessons in reading and writing, both English and Latin. He played no favorites as some did, but taught boys and girls

alike. Of course, the girls didn’t need as much education. . . . The Vicar warmed to his topic.

Will spread the canvas on the dining room hearth. He was supposed to have had those lessons.

“And how is Will coming along? I have been disappointed that he has not been here whenever I have visited.” Will turned to stone at the sound of that voice.

Vicar Richards said in his most reassuring voice, “Oh, famously, quite. In a few more years, he’ll be ready for the university if that’s

---

<sup>20</sup>unlettered—illiterate; unable to read well



your intention, or ready to be put to apprentice<sup>21</sup> much sooner.”

Will knelt in front of the fireplace, shovel in hand. Rodgers! He’s been here before! I’ve been sent off every time, he thought. Will held his breath.

“And has the allowance been sufficient for all his needs?” Rodgers asked.

“Of course, of course. I immediately turn all monies over to Mrs. Richards, you know. My wife and the housekeeper discuss each child’s needs and strive to meet them within the limits of the fees. I must say they do extremely well.”

Will wanted to jump up and shout to Rodgers that he was in the dining room. And he might have done it, if he hadn’t looked down at his dirty and ill-fitting clothes. Suddenly, he was embarrassed and didn’t want Rodgers to see him at all. Not looking like this!

Rodgers spoke again. “You have other children staying with you? Do they get on with Will?”

“None at the moment, but when they’re here, they do tend to get on well together. I like to think it’s the loving atmosphere of the house. Aha!” Will could hear the smile in the Vicar’s voice. “A case in point. My daughter and the light of my life.”

“Oh, Father.”

Will could imagine her curtsying to Rodgers and wearing that silly expression. He sat waiting for the conversation across the hall to resume.<sup>22</sup>

“No, it’s true, my dear.” In the stillness of the old house, Will heard the Vicar pat his daughter’s hand. “A good match you’ll be for any young man. Raised with love, yet well educated. A good match.” The Vicar paused. “Don’t you agree, sir?”

“Quite.” Rodgers said. “I’m sure she’ll be more than a match for any young man.”

“Wouldn’t have to be a young man, would it my dear? It is frequently advantageous for a young lady to . . . ah . . . marry a man somewhat beyond her years, a man settled in his work with more than two coins to rub together. Someone more like yourself, sir.”

“Surely, there’s a man perfect for her,” Rodgers said briskly. “Now about Will—”

“Will you pour, Elspeth, before you return to your duties?”

The clatter of cups and saucers was followed by Elspeth’s retreating footsteps.

“Some people have hard hearts, and no mistake, but not that girl. Worrying herself over a stray kitten just yesterday, she was.”

“Now about Will.” After a moment of silence, Rodgers raised his voice a bit. “The boy!”

“What? Yes, what about him? I believe I’ve told you all I can.”

---

<sup>21</sup>apprentice—person who learns a skill or trade by working for a skilled craftsman

<sup>22</sup>resume—to begin again; continue



“I demand to hear him recite his lessons before I leave. I do have a bit of personal interest in him, as does Mr. Perry, and so far we’ve no satisfaction that he’s doing as well as you say he is.”

Not forgotten! Will’s heart pounded. Not alone! And Rodgers wants to hear me recite! I could read to him from King Richard, but it’s in my cubby. I could recite from the “Knight’s Tale.” That’s what I’ll do—the part where Arcite dies. Or maybe—

In the library, Rodgers leaned forward and put his cup and saucer on the tray.

“What has he been studying, if you please?” Rodgers said. “He always loved knights, dragons, and all sorts of exploration and adventure.”

“Just so.” The Vicar wheezed as he rose from his chair. “I’ll show you the library available to the boy as soon as he’s ready for it. Quite the

follower of such reading myself, I am. Mind I keep those volumes in the back. Don’t want to appear frivolous<sup>23</sup> or put them before my other, more learned theological studies.” He opened the bookcase. “How odd. It appears these volumes have been moved. And just a fortnight<sup>24</sup> ago I found a truly bad smudge on one of the pages of my Tacitus. Most distressed I was and took it right to the printer, for it looked like the result of poor quality ink. Horrible smudge. I’m very particular about who handles my books.” He pulled some from the front row. “Notice the quality. Each year I personally set them all in front of the fire to dry the vellum. It absorbs the damp so. What’s this? One is missing! Someone has taken a book!”

---

<sup>23</sup>frivolous—not serious or important

<sup>24</sup>fortnight—two weeks

---







The Vicar pulled out book after book. Rodgers held the growing stack until it threatened to topple.

“Might I just put these on your desk?”

The Vicar’s voice rose. “Look! Look at the condition of these bindings—finger marks, water spotted, pages soiled. Now who—” He ran to the library door and shouted, “Elspeth, Mrs. Richards, come here at once, and bring the housekeeper. Bring everyone! I will know who’s responsible for this. Whoever it is will pay dearly.”

Footsteps hurried from several rooms. Elspeth arrived first. “Father, Father,” she nearly shrieked, “look what I found in Will’s cubby! Your

volume of King Richard. And look at the stains on it, Father; he should be whipped! How dare a scullery boy steal, or even presume<sup>25</sup> to read your books!”

Will cringed. Did he dare run? Could he hide?

Mrs. Richards joined her daughter. “Why, Rodgers, good day to you. And how are the Perrys? I understand they’ve just added a son to their family.”

Rodgers bowed slightly. “Thank you for your interest. The Perrys have indeed a new son, a welcome addition, I assure you.”

“And the twins?”

---

<sup>25</sup>presume—to act without permission or authority



“Very well, thank you. They’ve just turned five.”

“Madame!” exclaimed the Vicar. “Kindly bring the amenities<sup>26</sup> to an end. I’ve called to discover who might have been in my bookcase without permission. Just look at the damage!” He waved the volume of King Richard in front of her face. When she tried to take it, he handed it to Rodgers. “Just look at that!”

“Mother, he’ll have an apoplexy!”<sup>27</sup> Elspeth said.

The Vicar’s voice nearly rattled the windows. “Where did you say you found this book?”

“The scullery boy. I told you I found that book in his cubby. I knew he was up to something with all those candles.”

“Eh? What candles? Look at my books! Get him. Now! Bring him here. I’m of a mind to have him arrested right after I give him the beating he deserves. He’ll work off every penny of their value. He’ll be in the scullery until he’s fifty!”

“Yes, Vicar, let’s see this scullery boy named Will.” Rodgers snapped the words across the room. “I believe we’ll find more problems than a few well-read books.” He went to the door and called so the whole house shook. “Will! Will. It’s Rodgers. I must speak with you now!”

Will slowly stepped from behind the dining room door and into the hallway.

Rodgers motioned with the book he held. “Will, come into the library . . . Yes, come along.” He motioned them all to chairs. “You too, Will.”

“No, he mustn’t sit on the cushion—” Mrs. Richards began.

“Get him out of my sight. He’s worse than a thief.” The Vicar sat on the edge of his chair.

“He’ll stay while I speak,” Rodgers began. “It was with the distinct understanding when you took Will on after Margaret Bessie’s death that you would treat him as a family member and continue his lessons.”

Rodgers held up his hand at the beginning of a protest from the Vicar’s wife. “Master Perry provided you with ample funds for his room, board, and clothing. Indeed I have three pounds, fourteen shillings, sixpence in my pocket to pay last quarter’s charges.”

“It’ll not begin to cover the cost of my books!”

Rodgers ignored the interruption. “Instead what I find is a dirty, poorly fed, abominably clothed boy forced to do the heaviest household labor and to forgo his lessons as well.” He turned to Will. “How many lessons have you had this past year?”

“None,” Will said and rushed on, “that’s why I took the books—”

---

<sup>26</sup>amenities—pleasant or polite conversation; “small talk”

<sup>27</sup>apoplexy—(äp’ə pläk’sē) a stroke or sudden attack on the brain

---



“Shh.” Rodgers addressed the Vicar and his wife. “If you two were in a proper business, you’d be imprisoned for embezzlement<sup>28</sup> and breach<sup>29</sup> of contract. Don’t get red in the face. I believe you’ve misspent the money meant to support Will. Heaven only knows what you’ve done with the clothing provided for him.

“Because you have not honored your commitment to Will for this past year and more, you will receive no more of Master Perry’s money. Nor will he, I should add, recommend you as a teacher in the future. Will, go collect your belongings.”

Will looked down at his clothes and shrugged.

“That’s it? You have nothing more? . . . One should not leave such a hospitable home with such a thin valise.”<sup>30</sup> Rodgers held up a book. “I believe he’s earned this and one other of his choice many times over, don’t you, Vicar?”

“No, I do not. He’s earned nothing and been nothing but trouble. I’ll have the constable on you!”

Rodgers stood. “Master Perry could take you in suit before the law for what you’ve done here.”

“My dear, no!” whispered Mrs. Richards from her seat. “I was depending on the last quarter’s fees to cover the expenses of a new gown

and party for Elspeth for her sixteenth birthday. If we lose our position here at the vicarage, how can we afford—”

“Hush, Barbara!” Vicar Richards looked at Will, then Rodgers. “All right, take the boy and the book and good riddance.”

Rodgers smiled and held up two fingers.

“Two books.”

“He’s not touching my books again.”

“Very well.” Rodgers stepped over to the stack of books on the desk. “Which one, Will? And I will take it for you.”



<sup>28</sup>embezzlement—the act of stealing money in the course of a job

<sup>29</sup>breach—breaking, as of a rule or contract

<sup>30</sup>valise—small suitcase or luggage



Will stepped over to the desk and bent his head sideways so he could read the titles. "The third from the bottom."

"Of course, you want the thick one at the bottom." Rodgers set the other books aside. "Chaucer, eh? Beautiful binding. Great stories, aren't they? 'Wife of Bath' interest you?"

The Vicar fairly exploded. "Not the Chaucer!"

"The 'Knight's Tale,'" Will answered.

"Not my Chaucer!"

"Correct, it is no longer *your* Chaucer. Let's be off, Will. It is clear we are in no proper Vicar's house."



*Will returns to the temporary care of Master Perry and Rodgers until a suitable arrangement can be made. Perry and Rodgers decide to go ahead and apprentice Will to an ironmonger, or blacksmith, even though he is still a bit young and small. Once more, Will loses contact with Rodgers, this time under the agreement of his apprenticeship.*

*Will does well with his new trade and even befriends three other apprentices. However, he unintentionally leads them into trouble, which results in a great adventure. This adventure proves the true friendship of Rodgers as he once again rescues Will in his time of need.*