



Treasures
in the
Snow

Imaginary Story

Treasures in the Snow



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CHAPTER ONE

On a desolate moor north of London, a dismal scene was unfolding. The wind-whipped snow obscured the view like a menacing curtain. A dark figure forged his way through the fearsome blizzard, the roughly hewn road on which he trod endlessly disappearing and then reappearing from under its icy blanket of white. His hands clasped something tightly to his chest as if they held his final hope.

On he struggled--against reason, which derided him that there was no sense in going on; against weakness, which taunted him that his last strength was spent; against despair, which screamed at him that all hope was lost.

Still on he struggled, stumbling against the driving winds, propelled deep inside by a tiny ember of faith that no winds could extinguish, by a love that no storm could quench, by a dream that must not be allowed to die.

* * *

The dreary December Friday had started out with frost and continued with sleet, after which fog had descended. It lifted momentarily, only to prepare the way for an avalanche of snow that seemed to pour from the heavens in an unusually bountiful and chilling quantity. In fact, it seemed to Joseph Addington, as he gazed out of the window of his carriage, that Mother Nature had contrived to retain all her most miserable specialties for just such a day, and then rain them gleefully upon the defenceless mortals at will. Perhaps, thought Joseph ruefully, as punishment for not thanking her enough for the warm days of spring, the halcyon* days of summer, and the multitude of hues with which she had so generously adorned the autumn trees.

Joseph reluctantly opened the door of his coach, and a swirl of snow tumbled about him as he shouted out to the carriage driver, "How is it out there, Tom? How much farther to Bishop's Green?"

“I think it be under two miles,” came the reply. “There is nowhere to turn back to now. We'll just have to go on.”

“Go on then, man--go on!” shouted Joseph, as he closed the door. He shivered with cold as he pondered that it would be at least another hour before they would get to their destination. The horses were making slow progress through the thickly falling snow.

“A shame,” he murmured disconsolately, “that the weather does not share old Crittingdon's sense of right and wrong. Why, Mother Nature herself seems bent on obstructing this course of justice!”

Joseph had been dispatched that morning by his employer, Mr. Charles Crittingdon, the senior partner in Crittingdon and Clancy, the solicitors¹ office for which Joseph worked. Joseph smiled wryly as he remembered Mr. Crittingdon's all-too-typical response to his respectful remonstrance* that the weather would be unsuitable for the undertaking of such a journey.

“Mr. Addington,” Crittingdon had replied coldly, “a writ* is due to be served this day, the 15th of December, the year of our Lord 1865, and weather or no weather, the writ will be served. The presence of sleet, hail, snow and fog do not concern the law. So they do not concern me and they do not concern you. The law is the law and the law must stand. Besides which, the matter pertains to the business of a new client of ours whose interests our company is duty-bound to serve to the utmost of our ability.”

1 solicitors and barristers: In English law, solicitors are lawyers who specialize in preparing any needed papers and documents for legal cases. These, in turn, are given to barristers to present in court. Although a solicitor's main concerns are with the office work of the law, they can also act as agents or representatives for their clients, and present cases in lower courts.

But, thought Joseph now, the law will have to wait until the 16th of December, for there is no way on God's earth that I will arrive at Bishop's Green before nightfall. Shivering with cold once more, Joseph attempted to immerse himself in delightful fancies of the warm bath he would enjoy upon his arrival at an inn. He was oblivious to any thoughts of poor Tom Crankle, the coachman, who was by now almost frozen solid as he attempted to guide his two horses through the blizzard.

Then a most insignificant thing happened, but one which was destined to completely alter the course of Joseph's life. Only infinite intelligence can comprehend and only Heaven will reveal with what perfect precision the timing of such seemingly microscopic events are calculated and with what tender care our Father in Heaven sends His ministers to guide us unsuspecting mortals through the maze of His perfect will. We decide to turn left instead of turning right and thereby meet an old acquaintance, begin a conversation, enter a transaction, and thereby lives are changed, voyages made, new experiences encountered. We decide to attend one gathering rather than another and there begin a conversation with one who in the passage of time is destined to become our spouse and parent of our children. These children in turn grow to adulthood and continue to encounter such seemingly chance occasions on whose minuscule wheels the fate and destiny of nations turn. Could it be that in His all-seeing benevolence--even tinged with good humour--our beloved Father delights to effect great changes through such humble messengers?

The harbinger* of change in this case was nothing more than a single snowflake which had blown in with the swirl of snow when Joseph had opened the door. It had successfully managed to alight on the shoulder of his coat, thereupon perching precariously for the next few minutes as Joseph sank into his reverie, staunchly refusing to tumble off and

determined to resist any attempts of the slight warmth of the carriage to melt it, until the precise moment of its destiny when its twinkling caught Joseph's eye. Joseph, fancying himself as a precise and diligent young man, was not one to have a snowflake linger on his topcoat for any longer than was absolutely necessary. He turned his head and proceeded impetuously* to brush the tiny angel-like thing into oblivion.

As he turned, his eyes rested for a moment on the dismal scene outside. He noticed that the carriage was at that moment passing through a crossroads. Joseph started. Through the white curtain of snow he seemed to see a dark form moving. It was almost as if he sensed a presence rather than saw it. Hastily rubbing the window and staring out, he was sure he could indeed discern the form of a person moving towards the road.

Who could be out on a day like this? pondered Joseph. A farmer out in search for his lost cows? But as he thought thus, he seemed to perceive the figure raise one arm as if in a desperate salutation, and then collapse onto the ground.

By this time the carriage had passed through the crossroads. Joseph struggled inwardly for several seconds. What should I do? It seems like a man in considerable distress. But perhaps not. Perhaps it is a ruse of some highwaymen intending to rob me. But then what manner of villain would brave such inclement weather--or who indeed would expect to find any prey on such a day as this? Perhaps it is someone who is in genuine need of my assistance. But what would this mean? Interrupting my journey, having to delay the conduct of my important business--possibly being obliged to travel to a destination other than that which I had planned, possibly contravening, even though indirectly, the orders of my employer.*

Chillingly Joseph pondered, If I do not help this one who seems in such desperate need, for the rest of my life no one will

know of it except myself. I have no legal obligation to fulfil, neither social, but will I be able to live with myself, knowing someone may have died when I could have prevented it?

Without another moment's hesitation Joseph flung open the door of the carriage and rapped sharply with his cane on the doorframe above him. "Tom," he called out, "stop the carriage!"

"What is it, Master Joseph?" came the gruff but surprised reply.

Joseph was already climbing out of the carriage. "Come and help me. Come!" he shouted. "There is someone back there."

Shaking his head at his master's uncharacteristic impetuosity*, Tom clambered down and followed Joseph's tail-coated figure into the white haze. "Stay there, Nelly, Missy," he shouted back to the horses, who were neighing in apparent astonishment at the abrupt halt.

Half-fearing what he would discover, Joseph ran up to the figure that was now lying face down in the snow.

"Help me, Tom!" he cried out.

Together the two men rolled the body over onto its back. Immediately Joseph noticed the finely chiselled, sensitive face of a young man. He was coughing and wheezing almost uncontrollably, and seemed unable to speak.

"Quick, Tom! Let's get him to the carriage!"

Together the two men lifted the limp form between them and struggled back through the ankle-deep drifts of snow and into the waiting carriage. Joseph, now shivering more greatly from the cold, mustered all his strength as he and Tom struggled to lift the young man into the carriage. Once he was inside and propped up on the cushions on one side, Joseph turned and spoke in urgency to Tom.

"We must make speed. Get to the nearest inn. He needs to get somewhere warm--and fast!"

Tom pulled a small flask from under his great coat. "Give him a swig of this, Master Joseph. It is the only stuff that keeps me alive on a day like this." Then, seemingly spurred on to new heights of agility and vigour by the desperate situation, Tom climbed back up on his seat and, as Joseph hastily took his place in the carriage, began to urge the horses onwards.

"Come on, Nelly. Come on, Missy!" he cajoled. "We have got a sick man to take care of."

* * *

The young man was slumped stiffly and silently against the carriage's opposite side as Joseph began to try to revive him. He opened the silver flask that Tom had given him and the warm scent of brandy wafted into the air.

"Here, my friend. Try some of this," he said, placing the lip of the flask to the sick man's mouth and tipping the flask upward. The poor man coughed and sputtered as a small portion of the brandy found its way down his throat. His teeth began chattering violently and he bent forward, doubling over onto his own lap, his arms folded between.

"Come on, man. Come on," said Joseph commandingly. "Don't despair! We will get you to the nearest inn and warm you up." Joseph took off his own scarf and wrapped it around the young man's neck.

The man was still unable to speak but looked up briefly in gratefulness. His clear grey eyes were momentarily lucid before he lapsed once again into a terrible fit of wheezing and coughing. Joseph began to rub the young man's back hoping to warm him up, meanwhile taking in the details of the young man's appearance.

He was simply, though not shabbily dressed, but his threadbare clothes and worn shoes revealed that he was not a man of any means. However, in his eyes, Joseph had sensed a sensitivity and an intelligence somewhat beyond the normal level of the poorer class to which this man seemed

to belong. He was clutching a small leather satchel, which he held tightly to his breast, apparently for the fact that its contents were of great value to him.

After what Joseph estimated to be about fifteen minutes--although he had not bothered to remove his timepiece from his waistcoat pocket to check, having been more concerned with the welfare of the stricken young man beside him--the carriage slowed. Tom had noticed an outer house lamp glowing by the side of the road. As he pulled the horses in towards the building that now loomed up to their right, Tom made out a sign. He quickly tapped on the top of the carriage for his master to read it, literary skills not being among the few that Tom had acquired in his humble existence.

Hastily Joseph rubbed the inside of the carriage's steamed-up window.

"Oh good!" he exclaimed. "'The Wayfarer's Inn'--just what we need."

Tom clambered down again from his perch, and both men struggled to assist the ailing man to the front door of the inn. Joseph rapped loudly on the door with his cane. After several moments--which seemed entirely too long under the circumstances--the door opened slowly and a well-whiskered face peered out cautiously at the three men.

"We have a sick man," exclaimed Joseph, "and we desperately need somewhere warm and dry to bring him!"

"What in God's name are you doing out on a night like this?" came the response. "But come on in, then, and let's see what we can do."

With great relief, Joseph and Tom carried the young man into the inn. A fire crackled cheerfully on the hearth, lending its warmth to the welcoming atmosphere of the inn's sitting room. A few travellers conversed at nearby tables. There was a sofa near the fire, to which Tom and Joseph immediately carried the sick man.

After laying him on the sofa, Joseph turned to the innkeeper.

"Is there a physician in the inn?" he asked anxiously.

"Nay," replied the innkeeper in his gruff accent. "There's nary a doctor here. The nearest be at Bishop's Green--a good two miles down the road. And no chance o' reaching 'im on a night like this, either. You'd be best waitin' till the mornin'."

"I fear the morning may be too late," replied Joseph. "This man seems to be terribly afflicted with consumption."

"I do have some medicines of my own that I can offer him," said the innkeeper, a note of tenderness in his gruff voice.

"Medicines?" Joseph responded.

The innkeeper raised a bushy eyebrow in the direction of a row of bottles behind the bar.

"Ah, yes, I see what you mean," replied Joseph. "I suppose that is the best we can do now."

"Nothing like a good old draught of the finest English rum," replied the innkeeper, as he hurried off towards the bar.

Minutes later he returned with a steaming mug, having poured some of the rum into a kettle and then having heated it on the fire.

"This will warm the cockles of his heart--be sure of it," he said.

Tom propped the sick man up and Joseph brought the mug to his lips. A shiver seemed to shake his entire frame as he took in the warm liquid.

"We'll need a room for the night--three beds and a fireplace. If you'd be so kind as to light the fire right away, then as soon as it is warm we can move our friend in there."

"Count it done, sirs," replied the innkeeper. "It's been a good many years since anyone spoke to me that courteously."

The young man, apparently stimulated by the intake of the warm liquor, now began to mumble.

“Mary ... Mary...”

“He is calling for someone,” said Tom. “Some Mary!”

“Speak, my man,” Joseph urged the young man. “What is your name?”

“Edward,” the man managed to whisper. “F-F-Farrow.”

“Edward Farrow,” repeated Joseph. “Where are you travelling to? Bishop's Green?”

“Yes. Snow began falling ... roads became slippery ... my horse fell ... need to get to Bishop's Green. Need to see Mary.”

“Mary? Who is Mary?”

“My ... wife.” The effort of speaking seemed to become too much for Edward, and he lapsed again into semiconsciousness.

“We must let him rest,” said Joseph, gently laying him down again on the sofa.

Within minutes, the innkeeper reappeared.

“Your room is ready, kind sirs,” he said. “There is a fire roaring in the grate and a nice warm bed prepared for the poor sufferer--with the thickest quilt we have.”

“Thank you! Thank you!” said Joseph. “You shall be well rewarded.”

“God reward you too, for your kindness, sirs,” said the innkeeper. “But may I ask if this fellow is a companion of yours?”

“No. He is a stranger that we picked up at the crossroads. Do you know him? He said he was travelling to Bishop's Green.”

“I must say I don't remember the face,” said the innkeeper. “But then, so many folks pass through here, I dare say I can't remember all of them. Let's get the poor man settled and I'll bring up three bowls of our finest chicken broth.”

“That sounds wonderful,” replied Joseph, who had in his care for the sick stranger momentarily forgotten about his own need for sustenance, but was now quickly reminded of it by the innkeeper's hearty invitation.

“And do you happen to have any warm clothes you could lend this poor man? His garments are soaked through.”

“Happy to oblige, I'm sure,” said the innkeeper.

Tom and Joseph carried Edward to the prepared room, where the innkeeper brought an array of clean woollen clothes. Together they removed delirious Edward's soaked apparel, dressed him warmly, and then tucked him into his bed.

Edward awoke again. “Must get to Mary ... must get to Bishop's Green ... see Mary... my satchel!” He started up, seemingly grasping for the satchel that had been taken from his arms as his clothes were being changed.

“Here it is,” said Tom, picking it up off the floor and giving it to him. “Here is your satchel, sir.”

“Must bring it to Mary, the money...” He rose as if trying to climb out of bed.

Joseph laid a firm hand on his shoulder.

“Settle down, Mr. Farrow. You need to rest. You are very sick. We will have you to Bishop's Green tomorrow. I am going there myself, and you can accompany me in my carriage.”

“Mary ... must get to Mary,” Edward continued. Again he broke into a spell of coughing. Joseph held him as spasms racked his lean body.

“Rest now, Mr. Farrow, rest. Tomorrow we will go to Bishop's Green.”

Edward seemed comforted by Joseph's words and muttered, “Thank you. Thank you!” His voice trailed off as he lapsed once again into unconsciousness.

“I'll go and fetch the broth,” said the innkeeper, and left the room.

With Edward now peacefully asleep, Joseph turned to warm himself by the fire, his own clothes still sodden from his sallies* into the blizzard.

“What can be done for him?” Joseph repined. “I fear for his life.”

“We have done all we can,” said Tom. “There is naught else left but to pray.”

“Ah, Tom,” said Joseph wistfully, “that I might share your simple faith.” Joseph sat down by a chair near the fire and stared somberly into its orange glow. Nothing like this had happened to him before. He was the son of a well-to-do businessman. His life had seemed to be an ordered progression of well-calculated and highly organized events: his studies at law school and graduation with honours had led to his serving under articles¹ with Crittingdon and Clancy, one of the most prestigious solicitors' offices in all of London. Nevertheless, at twenty-six years of age, he already fancied himself as good as any practicing solicitor.

Certainly Joseph was no stranger to poverty and despair; its grey shadow tinged many of the London streets through which he daily travelled. Yet it was always very convenient to look the other direction, pull the curtain across the window of one's carriage whilst perhaps postulating a theory on how to improve the conditions of the masses.

Joseph had been brought up in a good Christian home, his mother being particularly devoted. He believed that one day when his career was firmly established, his propriety assured, and perhaps a modest fortune well on its way to being made, then he would employ his talents for the betterment of mankind. He only had the vaguest notion of how to achieve this goal, but that would all become clear, he told himself, when the time was right.

1 serve under articles: to be in apprenticeship under a practicing solicitor--a mandatory course that can last from three to five years before one can be appointed solicitor.

Perhaps he would donate to charities, or even sponsor an orphanage or school. Perhaps he would use his position to defend the rights of oppressed peoples. But he was certain that it would all take place in a most orderly fashion and should be conducted with the utmost of propriety and within the limits of sensible logic.

He had often wondered how he would react if faced with a situation in which he would be obliged to directly intervene to assist a desperate human being--and thinking back over the past few hours, he was not altogether displeased with himself for his response, although his actions did seem to somewhat contravene the orders of his employer.

Nevertheless, he thought as he half-smiled, it's what Mother would have had me do.

For a few moments he warmly reminisced on golden childhood memories, sitting on his mother's knee in his nightdress by a blazing fire, as Mother read him the story of the Good Samaritan. His pleasant reminiscences were soon interrupted by the return of the innkeeper with the bowls of steaming hot broth and thick slabs of bread.

Edward was still asleep, so they set his food aside and eagerly consumed their portions. Constrained by the innkeeper, the two men then indulged in a small nightcap to "warm the bones," as he quaintly put it. It was yet another digression from Joseph's customary fastidiousness, but he reasoned that this was a day of exceptions.

Thereafter, the two men retired to bed after reassuring themselves that Edward was soundly sleeping.

* * *

Joseph wakened from a deep sleep by the sound of Edward coughing. Immediately he sprang out of bed and went over to him. Edward was lying on his back, coughing violently.

Joseph took his own pillow and propped up Edward's head and neck, hoping to ease the coughing.

There was a jug of water by the bed and he was able to raise it to Edward's lips, helping him to drink a little.

"There is good chicken broth," he said. "Will you eat some?"

Edward gripped Joseph's arm and looked at him beseechingly, shadows from the still-flickering fire dancing across his pale face. He spoke as though every word were an effort to pronounce, but with a definiteness that surprised Joseph.

"I shall not live to see the dawn."

"No, no. You must not say that," said Joseph.

"I know--it is my time," came the feeble reply. "Do this for me." A note of pleading once again entered the dying man's voice. "The satchel, take it to Mary."

"Come, come now, man," said Joseph. "Let's hear none of this talk. Rest and be healed, and you can take it to Mary yourself."

"No," said Edward again, as a tear trickled down his cheek. "Please help me! Please help Mary."

"Where does she live?"

"Cottage ... 12 Potters' Lane, four houses past Mr. Cobb, the blacksmith." With misty eyes, Edward looked into Joseph's face. "Thank you, kind sir. Please take care of ... her." Then, as if a great burden were lifted off his soul, Edward sank down into the pillows. His grip on Joseph's arm loosened.

"Blessed Jesus," Edward whispered, "please take care of my Mary. Please take care of her baby ... blessed Jesus."

A wave of compassion swept over Joseph, and a tear started in his eye. He knelt by the bed whispering fervently: "Edward! Please Edward, no!"

Tom had awakened and now came over with a candle. "What is it, sir?"

"The man is dying!"

Joseph had never felt so totally helpless in his life. His education, his position, his knowledge, his money, all powerless to stop this tragedy that was happening before his eyes.

“Edward,” he said once more.

Once more the hoarse voice whispered, “Blessed Jesus, please take care of her.” Edward smiled weakly. “Thank you,” he said.

A shudder passed through his entire frame, and then he was still.

Joseph felt for a pulse on Edward's limp hand, then sadly shook his head. “He is gone.”

Tom kneeled, not knowing what else to do. He began muttering an improvised absolution: “Dear Lord, we pray that You receive his spirit.” He halted as abruptly as he had begun, not knowing how to continue.

The emotion of the moment overcame Joseph, and he wept. He had never wept openly before, but something in the courage with which Edward uttered his last words deeply stirred him, evoking in him a strange sense of kinship with this man whom he had never met before this day, but whose last hours on Earth he had somehow been destined to share.

One thing was certain to him--whatever Mr. Crittendon's instructions had been, the morrow held a new and different commission for him altogether.

CHAPTER TWO

Joseph slept very little that night. After calling the innkeeper and informing him of poor Edward's passing, it was decided that nothing more would be done till the morning, when they would call the physician and constable to testify and complete the legal details of the matter.

Joseph, not wishing to spend the rest of the night in the room with a dead man, passed the remaining hours until dawn in the sitting room of the inn, alternately pacing back and forth and prostrating himself on the sofa in front of the fire, trying to snatch a few moments of fitful sleep. Those hours definitely seemed to be the longest of his life thus far, as he pondered the heart-wrenching events of that night, and the strange commission that had been given him.

For a few moments he began to castigate himself for foolishly becoming involved in another's business, as now his planned itinerary would be interrupted. Yet, he asked himself, what else could he, in all good conscience, have done? After a period of fretful pondering, he resolved within himself that he would stand by his course of action in helping Edward, no matter what the consequences with Mr. Crittingdon would be. Somehow it just seemed the right and human thing to do.

Finally, like the welcome smile of a long-lost friend, the pink light of dawn crept over the horizon. The rumblings of morning began to stir within the inn, and as news of the night's events spread, there was much whispering, theorizing and postulating as to the reason for the unfortunate tragedy and the identity of the stranger.

As soon as it was fully light, the innkeeper set off to fetch the constable and the physician.

When the heavy oak door of the inn swung shut behind him, a thought suddenly struck Joseph. "The satchel!"

Edward had begged Joseph to take the satchel to his wife in Bishop's Green. But what if its contents were turned over to the constable? As a lawyer, Joseph knew well that without any written power of attorney, the constable would be legally constrained to take possession of the satchel's contents, and it would be up to his discretion how to proceed in the matter.

Joseph quickly went back up to the room where Edward's body lay. The satchel lay still untouched on the table beside Edward's bed. Hastily closing the door behind him, Joseph opened the satchel. In it were some books, a letter, and a small leather pouch. Joseph opened the pouch and counted the contents. There was a total of twenty-four pounds, three shillings and six pence.

"Hmm," mused Joseph. "Hardly a king's ransom--yet enough to keep a poor widow through the winter." He slipped the small pouch into the inside pocket of his coat, then briefly examined the letter, which was addressed to Edward Farrow. It was written in a delicate lady's handwriting, which Joseph assumed to be Mary's.

The books appeared to be full of handwritten leaflets. His curiosity aroused, Joseph cast a glance towards the door, and gingerly opened one of the books. The first page his eyes fell upon contained a poem, written in a sensitive scrawl. Joseph began to read:

*Is there a fairer rose that blooms this spring,
Than thou, whose fragrance makes my heart rejoice?*

Before he could read any further, he heard the sound of horses arriving outside the inn. Quickly he returned the books to the satchel and, hardly knowing why, stuffed it inside his coat, underneath his arm. Then he walked out into the sitting room, closing the door behind him.

Mere seconds after he did so, the door of the inn opened and the innkeeper entered. A burly, red-faced constable walked officiously behind him, importantly clad in a navy blue uniform with bright silver buttons. The constable was followed by a tall, gaunt man in a black frock coat-- obviously the physician.

"And this," said the innkeeper, his plain speech becoming formal in the presence of officialdom, "is the man who was travelling with the now deceased."

"Ah," replied the constable. "We shall need to ask you some questions, we shall." His bushy eyebrows raised themselves in a gesture of implied suspicion. The only thing thicker than his brows, thought Joseph to himself, was his midland accent, which seemed in preposterous contrast to the pomposity of his manner.

"Good morning, good sirs," said Joseph, as calmly as he could. He raised his finger to his nose and sniffed loudly. "If I may beg your indulgence, gentlemen, I must needs fetch a kerchief from my carriage. I fear the cold of last night has seeped into my bones."

"He needs to fetch a kerchief, he does," mused the constable, as he raised himself up on his toes and raised his eyebrows simultaneously, as if his eyebrows were somehow connected by invisible strings to his heels. "We will be back shortly then, won't we?"

"Very shortly," said Joseph, and hastened past the two men to the inn's front door.

As he made his way to the carriage, thoughts flooded into Joseph's mind. *What am I doing?* he thought. *By taking this satchel into my own hands, I am committing a criminal offence. If I were caught now, I could be thrown into jail.* But on the other hand, he knew immediately of what caliber this constable was: the go-by-the-rules, do-it-by-the-book type, who would never budge from correct procedure--not even to save a starving widow.

I am doing the right thing, Joseph told himself, as he opened the carriage door and pulled out his valise from behind the seat. Carefully he placed the satchel in the bottom of the valise and pulled out a large red kerchief. As quickly as he could, he replaced the valise, closed the carriage door and returned to the inn.

* * *

The constable, the doctor and the innkeeper were already seated at a large, round wooden table and a manservant was bringing them tea. Joseph approached the table confidently with one more theatrical snuffle and the subsequent application of the brightly coloured kerchief.

“Good morning, good gentlemen,” he said confidently as he sat down. “Please forgive my incontinence.”

“Take care, young man. Take care,” spoke the physician mournfully, his gaunt face and sunken eyes seeming to reflect the sorrow and suffering he daily faced. “There is many a chill that turns to a cold and a cold that turns to consumption and a consumption that turns to...” His voice trailed off into silence and then, once again, he mournfully intoned, “Take care, young man. Take care.”

“Ah, it's nothing but a little cold,” said Joseph, “and what a fine and pleasant morning it is, after last night's terrible blizzard.” He hoped to turn to the conversation to more pleasant matters.

“Enough with the pleasantries,” said the constable gruffly. “We must proceed, we must.”

The other three men nodded in silent consent.

“Are all the witnesses present?”

“All except the coachman,” said the innkeeper.

“Well, bring him then! Bring him!” ordered the constable.

The innkeeper arose and went to the room and returned with Tom, who had just been aroused from a deep sleep.

“I am Constable Higgins of the Hertfordshire Constabulary, I am. And may I have the names of all the

witnesses present, may I?" His eyebrows once again raised themselves, as he looked expectantly at Joseph.

"I am Joseph Addington," Joseph began, "solicitor-at-law at the London office of Crittingdon and Clancy."

"He is a lawyer, he is," restated the constable gruffly. "And you, sir?" he said to Tom, who had just seated himself at the table.

"My name is Tom Crankle," said Tom, mustering all his eloquence. "I drive the carriage for Mr. Crittingdon an' take care of his horses."

"I am Dr. Horatius Lean," intoned the physician.

The constable proceeded to take notes in a small book that he had taken out of his top pocket. He wrote slowly and ponderously, restating every sentence under his breath as he wrote--a process that seemed eternally long to Joseph, who had to restrain himself several times from mentioning to the constable that a sentence in the English language could be constructed with the use of only one verb, and that it was not a hard-and-fast grammatical rule to end each sentence the same way it had begun. Nevertheless, he surmised that such grammatical instruction would at this juncture be deemed inappropriate, so he allowed the constable to continue in like fashion.

Undoubtedly, if one included the entire contents of the ensuing interview, you, the reader would doubtless be driven to seek a more stimulating form of entertainment elsewhere. Thus, in the interest of literary expediency, I shall proceed to the end of the interview, when, to everyone's great relief, the constable stood up and pompously announced, "Let us now examine the corpse."

The innkeeper led the constable and the physician to the room, while Joseph and Tom remained seated at the table. As soon as the constable and innkeeper were out of sight, Joseph said quietly to Tom, "Tom--trust me. Please don't mention the satchel."

Tom's eyes widened in surprise.

"Please trust me, Tom!"

"If you say so, Master Joseph," replied Tom.

"I will explain later," whispered Joseph.

Presently the three men returned to the table, at which time the physician gave forth his pronouncement, the constable once more taking laboured notes.

"From all I have heard from the witnesses and all I have seen from examining the body, I declare that it was the consumption that took him." The physician paused before once again uttering his dire warning, "Be careful with that cold, young man."

"Now," began the constable, "we must inform the next of kin, mustn't we? What do we know of this man's relations?"

"Last night, before passing away," began Joseph, "Mr. Farrow informed me of the whereabouts and identity of the next of kin and appointed me as de facto* arbiter* of his estate, comprising the conducting and concluding of all personal affairs, pursuant to the aforesaid pro bono* retainment of my services."

The constable was silent for a moment, obviously labouring to unscramble the meaning of the preceding sentence. Once again the eyebrows went up.

"He did, did he?"

"Yes, he did," continued Joseph, "upon receipt of which request, I willingly acquiesced and intend to implement the said agreement according to correct process of law."

The constable had at least understood the words "correct" and "law," and unwilling to admit his ignorance, he nodded his head sagely.

"Well, that is what you will have to do then, won't you? And did the deceased have any possessions?" queried the constable.

Joseph watched as Tom's mouth started to open. Quickly he pulled some bank notes and coins from his own pocket,

interrupting whatever Tom may have been about to say.

“The deceased committed unto my care the transmittance of the sum of four pounds six shillings and three pence, which appeared to be his entire current financial holdings.” He placed the money on the table in front of the constable.

“Now wait a bit,” said the constable. “That money will have to be brought down to the station first and correctly recorded and certified, won't it? And when all the legal documents are completed and all the procedures properly conducted and the relationship to the next of kin correctly established, then the money shall be granted to the deceased's next of kin.”

Joseph smiled. “Precisely! I can see that you are an upstanding member of the Constabulary, bent on upholding the correct procedures of the law.”

“Well...” The constable fought with all his might to suppress a smile. “...it is my duty, it is.”

“And now, if my learned friends will permit me,” Joseph continued, “I have some pressing matters of business to attend to, and request your indulgence to be permitted to settle my account with the good innkeeper and continue on my journey.”

The constable granted his assent as Joseph motioned to Tom to fetch their belongings and stepped aside to settle the bill with the innkeeper. The old man's eyes widened a little as Joseph placed a pound note into his hand and said, “Thank you for all your kindness, sir, and may God be with you and your inn.”

“And may God be with you, too,” replied the innkeeper gratefully.

“I will return later in the day,” said Joseph, “to conclude the business of the...” He said no more. The innkeeper understood what he was referring to. “Farewell.”

Without further hesitation he turned and left the inn. As he mounted the carriage, his heart skipped a beat as the

constable lumbered out of the door and down the steps, waving his hand furiously.

“Wait, wait! You can't leave until I have examined the carriage he was brought in. It's all part of the procedure.”

Joseph's heart began to beat rapidly. “Well then, what must be done, must be done.” He flung open the door of the carriage as the constable approached, flustered and more red-faced than ever from his sudden exertion.

“Hmm,” said the constable, after a careful examination, “nothing unusual.” Then his eye caught on the valise behind the seat. “And what might that be?”

“That is my personal valise,” said Joseph.

“Let me see it then.”

“Forgive me, good constable, but correct procedure dictates that, in the absence of any apparent crime, you must first obtain a warrant to inspect my personal belongings.”

“Obtain a warrant?” The eyebrows travelled skyward, once again. “I must obtain a warrant, must I? In that case, you shall remain here till the afternoon, while I obtain the necessary papers!”

“In that case,” said Joseph, taking a gamble, “for the sake of expediency, I am perfectly willing to waive correct procedure and allow you to inspect my valise.” He pulled it from behind the seat and began to open it.

The constable started towards the valise as Joseph breathed a silent prayer, his first for many years. But just as the constable's hand touched the top layer of clothes, he stopped suddenly, as if an invisible angel of mercy had suddenly laid her hand upon his burly, uniformed arm. He turned, and with the first hint of joviality that Joseph had yet seen in his bulging eyes, chuckled, “Well, that won't be necessary then, will it? They are only your personal goods, and bear no relation to the business of the deceased within this wagon. My inspection is complete. You may proceed.”

“Thank you, kind sir. And a good day to you!” exclaimed Joseph, and then called up, “Bishop's Green, Tom!--And don't spare the horses.” He breathed a sigh of relief as the carriage lurched into motion.

It was indeed a beautiful morning, and in the glint of the sun on the snow-covered fields that sped by, Joseph fancied he saw a reflection of the light of Divine eyes smiling down upon him.

“I have just broken the law for the first time in my life,” he mused ironically, “and for the first time, I know I am doing the right thing.”

CHAPTER THREE

The previous night's snowfall, for all its fury, had not been excessively heavy beyond this point, and Joseph's carriage now made good progress towards Bishop's Green. As they drew closer the thought crossed his mind that he had not yet explained to Tom the reason for his actions at the inn. Once again he opened the carriage door and rapped the side with his cane.

Tom slowed his horses down and then stopped at his master's signal, wondering what would be next in the series of unprecedented happenings that he had encountered over the past twelve hours.

Joseph's next move definitely was uncharacteristic, and he surprised even himself as he alighted from the door of the coach and swung himself up by the side of the driver's seat.

"Go on, Tom," he said. "I thought I would sit up here with you for a while and take in some of this crisp morning air."

"Yes, sir! ... Er ... be my guest ... sir," stammered Tom, not knowing how to respond.

"Tom," Joseph began, as the coach once again lurched into motion, "I thought I should explain."

"Explain?" replied Tom, with his eyebrows raised. "About the money, you mean?"

"Yes."

"And the satchel," Tom continued.

"Yes."

"Mr. Addington," said Tom, "I'm a God-fearin' man and if you think it would be easier for me, perhaps you should not explain. I don't think I would be able to keep any secrets under oath."

Joseph laughed. "That won't be necessary. You see, Edward--God rest his soul--was on his way to bring his hard-earned money to his poor wife--at least, that is as far as I

can understand. Now our dear friend the constable, as well-meaning as he is, would have seen it as his duty to confiscate the money and subject it to all manner of legal proceedings, which could possibly have left the poor widow in a very difficult situation.

“Last night Edward asked me to take care of his affairs and I agreed to do so, so in a sense what I am doing is merely complying with a dying man's request. However, our dear constable friend would not quite have seen it that way. Unfortunately, sometimes when you give a man a uniform and a position, he becomes a little bit like a...” Joseph waved his hand, searching for a metaphor. “...a dog, guarding his little tree and not allowing any other dogs to come near it.”

The quizzical expression on Tom's weather-beaten face changed to one of enlightened amusement and he let out a hearty laugh.

“Master Joseph, you certainly have a way with words,” he chuckled. “Did they learn you that in the university?”

“Yes,” said Joseph with a smile. “They did learn me that sort of thing in the university.”

“But the four pounds and six shillings, did that belong to Edward?”

“Oh,” said Joseph, “that was mine. I had to give him something, as he wouldn't have believed that Edward was travelling totally penniless.”

Tom seemed satisfied with the explanation, and nodded his head contentedly.

“A kindly deed indeed, sir, a kindly deed.”

At this point, the carriage came around a bend in the road and the village came into sight.

“Now first,” instructed Joseph, “we must proceed to Hammertons Street, where I am to deliver some papers, after which we will continue on to meet with Edward's widow and give her his belongings.”

Within minutes the carriage drew to a halt outside the first destination. Joseph had briefly glanced over the writ that he had been instructed to deliver. It was a standard procedure with which he was well familiar. He would meet with the person to whom the writ was addressed, read him its contents, then deliver the paper into his hands, and his role in the transaction would be complete.

He climbed down from the driver's seat and straightened himself, assuming the posture of a lawyer on official business. He drew the paper carefully out of his valise, smoothed out his coat and began to walk stiffly down the garden path towards Number 6, Hammertons Street.

A swift, peremptory knock on the door brought a muffled response.

"Who is it?"

"Joseph Addington, solicitor at law," he replied curtly.

A few moments later the door creaked opened. A plump, middle-aged woman with slightly greying hair opened the door. A pair of brown eyes that seemed they had not laughed for a long time peered out from her worry-lined face.

"Good morning, madam," began Joseph, according to customary procedure. "Is this the residence of one Samuel Chadwick?"

"If you'd be meaning if this is where my 'usband Sam lives, then the answer is yes and no."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yes, this is my 'usband Sam's home, and no, 'e is not 'ere right now. 'E's in London trying to find hisself some work."

"Then I take it that you are Mrs. Chadwick?"

"That's right. Martha Chadwick, that's me name."

"In that case, I am instructed to read in your presence the following writ." He cleared his throat.

“To Mr. Samuel Chadwick, 6 Hammertons Street, Bishop's Green. We, the undersigned, Crittingdon and Clancy, solicitors of law, regretfully inform you on behalf of our client, Mr. Nathaniel Snyder of Bishop's Green, that due to your infidelity in meeting the payment on your cottage, the contract of rent is hereby terminated and you are to be evicted after a period of no less than eight days from the receipt of this writ, not including the day of its delivery. Sincerely yours, Charles Crittingdon, acting on behalf of Nathaniel Snyder.”

“And what is all that supposed to mean?”

“As the writ informed you, madam,” replied Joseph as courteously as he could, “your husband and his family are to be evicted within eight days.”

“My Samuel, evicted? 'E ain't done nothin' wrong--'e's got nothing to be evicted of. You mean you're wantin' to send 'im to Australia with all those other convicts?”

“Madam,” Joseph patiently explained, “your husband has not been *convicted* of a crime, merely *evicted* from this particular house because of his inability to pay the rent.”

“What? You mean in eight days we's to be thrown out of our 'ouse?” Tears started up in her eyes, “Thrown out in the cold?” Fumbling, she counted on her fingers. “That's two days before Christmas? How can you do this to us?”

“Uhh...” Joseph's legal demeanour began to slacken. “I am sorry, madam, I am not responsible for the contents of this writ. I am merely delivering it from my employer.”

“How could he do this to us? That Snyder! My poor Samuel has been working his fingers to the bone for ten years to pay the rent on this cottage. 'E's a good man, 'e is, a weaver by trade, and a good weaver at that. But with all these new weaving machines and them factories and whatnot, he couldn't keep up with the trade. 'E just couldn't keep up. 'E tried to go to work at the factory, but Snyder owns the factory too, and wouldn't give 'im a job. We only

missed paying our rent one month and 'e went to talk to Mr. Snyder and asked 'im for mercy just for one month, just until 'e found some work in London. Now 'e's been gone a good some days and 'asn't come back. I suspect that he will be finding a job soon. We have been ten years in this cottage, but never missed a month's rent until now."

"I am sorry, madam," replied Joseph, "there is really nothing I can do to help."

"You lawyers, you are all the same!" With that, Mrs. Chadwick snatched the piece of paper out of Joseph's now trembling hand and slammed the door in his face.

Much perturbed, Joseph turned and walked back to his carriage. This was certainly not turning out to be as simple an expedition as he had anticipated. He pondered what he knew of Nathaniel Snyder. He was one of the firm's newest clients, who had only recently been able to afford such a prestigious law firm as Crittingdon and Clancy. As Joseph understood, he had made a considerable fortune quickly by capitalizing on the newly invented industrial machines. He already owned several factories and workhouses in this particular area, and was now beginning to make his mark in the world of business.

"I shall have to look into this further," he pondered. "All right then, Tom. On to Potters' Lane."

As the carriage rattled and cluttered its way through the narrow streets of the rural village, Joseph began to feel quite uneasy about his next assignment. Certainly his legal eloquence would not suffice in such a situation. However polished his oratory, he realized it would not fill the aching void left in the heart of a widow by such unexpected tragic news. A highly unusual feeling began to envelop him, that of being totally incapable of the task set before him. Almost without realizing it, he began to utter a prayer. "Dear God, please give me the words to say. Please give me the strength. Please give Mrs. Farrow the grace to bear it."

As the carriage passed Cobb's shop, Joseph nervously counted the houses, "One, two, three, four..." As he did, a strange sense of anticipation began to overtake the feelings of nervousness and unease, as the gold overtakes the grey in the dawning sky.

Joseph hesitated once more on the porch of the house before summoning his resolve and knocking. Almost immediately a young woman's voice answered from within.

"Who is it?"

"Joseph Addington, solicitor at law."

The door opened a crack, and Joseph could dimly make out a pair of soft blue eyes peering out at him--with not a little trepidation, he thought.

"Forgive my intrusion, madam, but I have a rather grave matter to discuss with you, which concerns your husband."

"Edward! Is he alright?"

"Ah ... I ... may I come in?"

Mary, gathering by now that the stranger at her door bore her no evil intent, opened it wide.

"Please, Mr. ... er, Addington, was it?"

Joseph was not a little surprised at the cultured accent and obviously gracious manners of the young woman who stood before him. In fact, he was a little ashamed of the fact that on such a grave mission, his first thought was to be quite taken aback by her beauty.

Her wavy golden curls were gathered at the back, although some strands escaped and hung loose, framing a delicate face whose classic beauty Joseph thought could well have adorned a portrait by one of the great masters. Her beseeching eyes were as deep forest pools into which Joseph would rather have liked to gaze for an hour or two. They seemed in an instant to communicate an inner beauty of the soul that only enhanced her exquisite outward form. Her simple dress revealed a slim, graceful form, although Joseph could tell that she was with child, possibly four or five months along.

“Please sit down, Mr. Addington.”

“Thank you, er...”

“Mary. Mary Farrow.”

“Yes. Edward spoke of you.”

“Tell me, what news do you have of Edward?”

“Mrs. Farrow, I barely know how to begin. ... I am so sorry. ... I did all I could.”

Mary's eyes widened and her mouth fell open in anxious anticipation.

“I found him, trudging through the snowstorm on the road just before Wayfarer's Inn. He was very ill. I took him to the inn, but the storm was so heavy a physician could not be summoned. We tried to keep him warm, put him to bed. In the night Edward ... awoke, coughing terribly. I held him in my arms. I did all I could to comfort him, but alas ... he succumbed. Mrs. Farrow ... his last words were of you--a prayer. He prayed that the Lord would protect you ... and ... your little one. He died bravely and I believe peacefully.”

Mary buried her face in her hands and let out a stifled sob.

“Oh, Edward! That it should all end like this!”

She remained with her face bowed, and covered by her hands, for quite some time, while Joseph, struck by the pathos of the moment, could not restrain the tears that filled his own eyes.

At last Mary looked up, her face wet with tears.

“Thank you, kind sir, for your attentions,” she faltered.

“Edward asked me to give you this.” Joseph produced the satchel and handed it to her.

Silently she opened the satchel, briefly apprising herself of the contents. The money and the letters she only briefly acknowledged as if their interest was merely incidental. The book, however, she took into her hands with reverence. She placed the satchel on the floor and, seemingly oblivious to Joseph's presence, opened the book to the first page and

began to read. Fresh tears started from her eyes, and this time she turned her face Heavenward and spoke as one whispering to her beloved:

“Oh Edward, you were so good to me, so kind. Your love was so pure...”

Joseph shifted a little uncomfortably, wondering if he should leave.

Mary seemed to sense his movement, and spoke again.

“Forgive me, Mr....”

“Addington, Joseph Addington.”

“Forgive me, I am quite overcome by grief. This was so sudden, although...” Her voice dropped. “...not totally unexpected. Edward was never robust.”

“Mrs. Farrow, if there is anything I can do to be of assistance, please don't hesitate to let me know.”

“Where is he now?”

“His ... body is still at the Wayfarer's Inn.”

“Could you take me there?”

“Madam,” replied Joseph soberly, “I am at your service. But I must caution you about one thing. It was Edward who asked me to deliver the satchel to you, and in all good conscience I could not render it to the constable who came to investigate your husband's death, for this would have greatly delayed it coming into your hands. I would advise you, therefore, to make no mention of it--for your sake as well as mine.”

“But of course,” said Mary congenially. “I understand, Mr. Addington. And once again, thank you.”

Joseph waited while Mary excused herself. She reappeared a short while later in black apparel. Joseph escorted her to the carriage and they set out for the inn. Once again Tom found his master seated beside him, as Joseph felt it inappropriate to ride in the carriage alone with the young lady, particularly in light of her bereavement.

As the carriage once again sped towards the inn, Joseph began to count the cost of his actions. The trip to the inn, attending to the details, and then, of necessity returning Mrs. Farrow to her home in Bishop's Green would take the best part of the day. There would be no chance of reaching London that evening. Mr. Crittingdon would expect him to report before closing time on the week's end; failure to do so would most likely result in severe reprimand at the least, or punitive action at the worst.

But how could I desert this poor woman in the hour of her greatest distress? No, the course was set, the decision taken, and there was no turning back. Joseph would have to bear the consequences of his deeds as bravely as he could.

And thus was spent the rest of Joseph's day, in transporting Mary Farrow to and fro, attempting as best as he knew how to be of comfort to her. Strangely, it appeared that neither Mary nor her departed beloved had any further relations to assist in seeing to the details of the funeral and all the attending matters. Since she did not volunteer any information, Joseph thought it unwise to inquire, but nevertheless felt a growing concern for her situation.

Yet, he reasoned, after having seen her safely back to her cottage, bid her goodbye, accepted her profuse thanks deferentially and departed, I've done what I could. Best to let the matter rest now, and prepare to face old Crittingdon on Monday.

It was well after midnight when he arrived back at his apartment in London, and light snow was falling.

What a strange and momentous journey this has been, he thought, as an odd mixture of sadness, warmth and compassion for the plight of the bereft widow settled over him.

CHAPTER FOUR

At precisely eight o'clock that Monday morning, Joseph arrived at the chambers of Crittingdon and Clancy, and at precisely eight fifteen, he was summoned to report to Mr. Crittingdon's office. Joseph was almost certain of the subject matter of the interview, but had not yet the slightest idea how he would answer for himself.

Mr. Crittingdon was characteristically soft-spoken. Joseph had never heard him raise his voice, but had often observed the refined accent deliver, with perfect grammar, such barbs as would cut the poor recipient to the very core, and remain painfully lodged in the wounded heart for many days after. He braced himself as he opened the heavy oak door.

"Ah, Mr. Addington. Thank you for gracing us with your presence. How impetuous of me to expect your return before the week's end, when obviously you had more important matters to attend to."

"Forgive me, sir, I was constrained to assist a bereaved widow--"

"Ah! An act of charity, I see. Perhaps Mr. Addington would like to be reminded that Crittingdon and Clancy gives fifty pounds a year to a respected charity--a sum which is deducted equally from all of our wages, yours and mine included. Fifty pounds, Mr. Addington. A goodly sum--not a penny less and not a penny more. If you would like to increase your contribution to such worthy causes, you are perfectly entitled to do so--but at your own expense, and on your own time, not at the expense or on the time of the company."

"Forgive me, sir, but the matter was urgent and could not be deferred."

"If after hardly a year of employment Mr. Addington no longer wishes to adhere to the policies of the company, perhaps he would like to seek his opportunities elsewhere--"

and being so given to acts of charity, as a minister perhaps!"

Joseph bit his lip to restrain himself.

"I believed that my assistance to this unfortunate woman in her time of need was the correct thing to do, and I am willing to personally accept all responsibility, financial and otherwise."

"Very well then, let me see..." Crittingdon began to write on the note pad at his right hand as he muttered under his breath. "Use of company time for personal pursuits, six shillings. Use of company carriage, one pound. Use of company carriage driver, six shillings. ... Mr. Andrews!"

The pale, dyspeptic-looking accountant scurried in from an adjoining room.

"Yes, Mr. Crittingdon?" came the nasal squeak.

"See that you deduct two pounds from Mr. Addington's wages this month."

"Very good, sir." He scurried back into his room.

"That will be all, Mr. Addington. And remember that the correct thing to do is to follow your instructions implicitly, serve our clients faithfully, and uphold the policy of the company fastidiously."

Joseph bit his lip again and backed out of the room, closing the oak door with a sigh.

He returned to his desk, fuming inwardly. The next two hours were spent pretending to work, staring blankly through the legal briefs before him.

His reverie was interrupted by a cheery voice.

"Like to feel all warm and cosy? Get your cup of tea from Rosey!"

Rosey, as was her name, was the chambermaid at Crittingdon and Clancy. Her duty was to bring tea and refreshments at ten thirty in the morning and four thirty in the afternoon. Rosey had been making her daily rounds of the chambers for as long as anyone could remember, but for some inexplicable reason she never seemed to weary of her

mundane tasks. She was as plump as a pudding and as sweet-natured too, and Joseph, for one, never tired of her visits. She placed the tea and small serving table next to Joseph's desk and began to pour him a cup.

Joseph, staring imperviously at the wall in front of him, only muttered, "No, thank you."

Rosey let out a little gasp and froze momentarily.

"Well, well," she chided, "now what has gotten into Mr. Addington this morning?"

"Nothing."

"Well, if nothing has, then it's time that something did," said Rosey, continuing to pour.

Joseph remained silent.

"Well, well, well," said Rosey, "it's a fine state that he has gotten himself into. Now what could it be? Ummm, let me guess." She glanced around her to assure that no one was eavesdropping on their conversation, and then said in a low whisper, "Mr. Crittingdon gave you a piece of his mind, right?"

"H-how did you know?" Joseph stuttered.

"Ah!" she said triumphantly. "Very little escapes the notice of Rosey. Not that I am a nosy Rosey," she said with a twinkle in her eye, "but if the facts are staring you in the face, what can you say?"

"Facts?" said Joseph.

"Well," said Rosey, "at five o'clock last Saturday afternoon, Mr. Crittingdon paced out of his office, asking impatiently if Mr. Addington had returned yet. No word of you. He asked again several times before he closed up the company at eight o'clock and everyone went home. Now Mr. Crittingdon is not one to show his anger, but believe you me, Rosey knows when he is all agitated about something. And Mr. Crittingdon is not one to forget his agitation on Sundays either, though it wouldn't do him any harm if he did.

“So I suspect first thing this morning he called you into his office and gave you a good dressing down.”

“He certainly did,” said Joseph glumly.

“Don't take it too badly, Mr. Addington. There are very few in this office that have escaped such a fate--your dear Rosey included. Not that I understood 'alf of what he was going on about, nevertheless...” For a moment she mimicked Mr. Crittingdon's impeccable accent, “...the point was made abundantly clear that Rosey had been delinquent in her duties. That was the last time I was 'alf an hour late with my tea rounds.”

“What is it that causes him to be so harsh?”

“Well,” said Rosey, with a knowing nod, “I have heard a thing or two. It was about five years ago it all happened. Mr. Crittingdon went through a very difficult time with his family.” Rosey's voice dropped to a whisper. “You see, he and Mrs. Crittingdon had two beautiful daughters.”

“Oh yes,” said Joseph, “I have met Sarah. I did not know she had a sister.”

“Precisely the point--she *had* a sister. What a tragedy, the poor dear thing! She was Mr. Crittingdon's pride and joy, until right in the prime of her beautiful young life, she...”

“Died?” asked Joseph.

“Well, Mr. Crittingdon never talked about it, but I later heard she'd come to some unfortunate accident while riding with one of her suitors--thrown to her death from her horse. Dreadful, terribly dreadful. The young man fled, and they never heard from him again. Must have been stricken with the most terrible of frights, the poor soul, having the guilt of her death on his conscience. After that, Mr. Crittingdon never breathed a word of his daughter again to anyone.

“But you know what they say. Sorrow of the heart causes some folks to grow sweeter, but others, it makes them hard--hard and cold. Hard as this jam tart if no one eats it and cold as this cup of tea if no one drinks it.” So saying, she

picked the said items off of the tray and placed them in front of Joseph on his desk.

“Go on then,” she said. “Ave your tea and jam tart and take old Crittingdon with a pinch of salt.”

“Thank you, Rosey, for those words of wisdom,” said Joseph philosophically.

“Glad to be of service, sir,” she replied cheerfully, as she picked up her tray.

“Feeling sleepy, feeling dozy? Get your cup of tea from Rosey!” she chortled, as she entered the next chamber.

* * *

Joseph's encounter with Rosey helped his thoughts to take a more positive turn. The sudden insight into Mr. Crittingdon's tragic past helped to alleviate his own chagrin, and he began instead to feel some compassion for a man so hardened by the tragedies of life that he dared not even speak of his grief to others, but rather threw himself with the utmost zeal into the conduct of his business.

Joseph's thoughts soon drifted to Sarah, Mr. Crittingdon's daughter. She was quite beautiful in a correct sort of way, always tastefully and immaculately attired--as perfect as Mr. Crittingdon's punctilious* grammar. It was as though she were his handiwork, the fulfilment of his every wish. Not a hair out of place, not a crease in her dress that wasn't specifically designed to be there, always saying the socially appropriate thing. Sarah Crittingdon was in every sense an impeccable gentlewoman.

The thought had crossed Joseph's mind that he might perhaps one day marry Miss Crittingdon. They had met at several social occasions at the Crittingdons' and elsewhere, and their conversations had seemed pleasant enough. Joseph could well imagine her as a good and worthy wife, undoubtedly keeping an irreproachable house, raising perfectly well-disciplined and groomed children, and gracing every social function with her modest charm. A true

adornment to a successful career, he thought.

Unbeknownst to him, Sarah had also considered the prospect of Joseph as an industrious and prosperous husband, and even Crittingdon himself had given inward consent to the possibility of giving his daughter's hand to this ambitious and aspiring young man in his employ. However, none of the three had ever spoken of the union, for all of them realized full well that the time was not yet right.

Joseph's parents had passed away several years earlier, leaving him quite well established, but it would still be a few years of diligence and industriousness before he would attain to the appropriate financial standing to be able to enter into such a union. As far as being "in love" with Sarah, Joseph had never so much as given it a second thought. It seemed quite beside the point. He surmised that such a thing, if it were to happen, would be quite independent of and subservient to the most important goal of obtaining a socially acceptable wife.

Thus it was that, engaged in these more pleasant thoughts, Joseph set about his day's work with a renewed vigour.

CHAPTER FIVE

As the week wore on, the memories of his traumatic encounter with Edward Farrow began to fade from the forefront of Joseph's mind, and he threw himself into his responsibilities with more determination than ever. Even Mr. Crittingdon noted with some pleasure that his young protégé seemed to be proving his worth in every task. The events of that fateful night began to seem like a strange dream whose memory fades, and whose meaning becomes irrelevant in the light of the day.

It was not until the following Friday morning, a full six days after those momentous events, that Joseph's memories of Mary Farrow were once again stirred during a chance encounter with Mr. Clancy, the other partner whose name the company bore.

Mr. Clancy was entirely different from Mr. Crittingdon. In fact, one might wonder how two such seemingly incompatible personalities could operate in the same company. Mr. Clancy was quite a few years older than Mr. Crittingdon, and as far as Joseph understood, had originally been the senior partner in the firm. However, now being almost at the age of retirement, he was not often seen in the chambers. He usually visited once a week on Friday mornings, at which time he would privately confer with Mr. Crittingdon, in the latter's office.

What they could have talked about was a mystery to Joseph, as he often thought that Crittingdon and Clancy were as different as chalk from cheese--however even more so, thought Joseph, as at the very least cheese is sometimes white and chalk is sometimes yellow.

If Joseph had been forced to describe Mr. Clancy, he would have said that he floated, rather than walked. He always seemed to be smiling, and radiated a sort of benign

tranquillity that Joseph could not quite put his finger on. Mr. Crittingdon would often utter eloquently expressed opinions that seemed to lodge somewhere in the listener's mind, but never quite reached the heart. Mr. Clancy, by contrast, had a way of speaking, in the simplest possible language, words that massaged and rejuvenated the deepest recesses of one's soul.

On this occasion, Joseph encountered Mr. Clancy as he emerged from Crittingdon's office. With a benign smile and slightly raised eyebrows, Clancy looked inquisitively at Joseph.

"Was she pretty?" he asked.

"Was who pretty?" replied Joseph, a trifle uncomfortable.

"Who indeed?" replied Mr. Clancy impishly. "Why, the poor widow, of course."

"Oh," said Joseph, thinking for a moment and clearing his throat. "I suppose you might say she was quite pretty."

Mr. Clancy's only reply was another raised eyebrow and a twinkle of his eye, accompanied by a friendly tap on Joseph's shoulder from a scroll of paper he held in his hand, before he exited the chambers.

Mystified, Joseph returned to his desk and his work. Throughout the day a strange sensation began to overturn him. It was as if a sentence was forming in his mind, word by word: "There is something you must do." He even began to wonder if Mr. Clancy had actually uttered those words to him that morning--"There is something you must do!"--but no, he could not recall hearing the phrase. At one stage Joseph even spoke the words out loud, "There is something I must do. There is something I must do!"

That evening as he arrived at his apartments and descended from his coach, he looked up briefly into the clear, star-filled sky and said quietly, "What is it that I must do?"

Now Joseph Addington was, like most, not a man given to supernatural experiences. He had never in his life seen a ghost, or, for that matter, any form of apparition. He had never seen a vision, had a portentous dream or otherwise experienced anything that could be considered the slightest bit transcendental. Nevertheless, all that evening, a strange uneasy feeling lay over him. Around midnight he fell into a restless sleep.

It was at three o'clock in the morning when Joseph awoke with a start and in a cold sweat. The apparition had been so real, so vivid. If it had indeed been a dream, it was the clearest dream Joseph had ever had, and so close to reality as to be almost indistinguishable from it. He lay perfectly still on his bed for a moment, hearing only the sound of his own breathing and the ticking of the grandfather clock in the hall outside his room, as he recalled every detail about the dream--or was it a vision?--that he had just experienced.

First he had beheld a white-clad figure standing at some distance from himself. Around the figure all was dark, as if he were standing on some sort of stage in a large, empty auditorium. A single ray of light shone from above, illuminating him.

Joseph found himself inexorably* drawn towards the strange white form, who appeared to be holding a bundle tightly to his breast. As Joseph approached, the figure seemed to sense his presence and began to turn. It was then that Joseph realized that it was Edward.

As their eyes met, Edward smiled in gratitude. Joseph began to wonder what he was clutching against his breast, assuming it to be the satchel. Yet as his eyes were drawn towards it, Joseph realized that it was in fact a tiny babe.

At once he looked up into Edward's face, questioning. This time he saw tears starting from Edward's eyes.

"Please," Edward implored, "take care of Mary!"

It was at that point that Joseph had awakened suddenly, and now he lay still, his eyes wide open and his mind beset by a host of thoughts and questions that seemed to crowd in on him from every side. Was all this just his imagination, the thoughts and business of the day intruding upon his sleep? Or had he seen Edward's ghost, and was this some pleading communication from beyond the grave? One thing Joseph could not doubt was that something very unusual was happening to him.

* * *

The next morning at work, Joseph was once again called to Mr. Crittingdon's office. Once again he knocked on the door with not a little trepidation. But to his relief, Mr. Crittingdon spoke to him with an almost imperceptible trace of warmth in his voice.

"Mr. Addington, if you are not otherwise occupied tomorrow night, I would be pleased if you would accept an invitation to dine with me, Mrs. Crittingdon and our family for Christmas Eve. There will be a number of other colleagues and relatives present, among them Mr. Clancy."

"Why, thank you, sir," replied Joseph. "I would be very pleased indeed to accept."

"Very well, then," replied Crittingdon, "you know the address. Seven thirty sharp tomorrow evening. Don't be late."

"No, of course not, sir. Thank you, sir." Joseph, momentarily flabbergasted by Mr. Crittingdon's invitation, hesitated an instant too long.

"That will be all, Mr. Addington. You have much work to be done. See to it that it is completed today--Christmas is nearly upon us. Oh, and Mr. Addington, can you please submit to me a written report concerning the progress of Mr. Snyder's business?"

"Yes, sir. Will that be all?"

"Yes, that will be all, Mr. Addington."

As the office door closed behind him, Joseph's step was a little more buoyant than usual as he walked back to his desk. "What a strange and eventful week this has been," he chuckled to himself. "Christmas dinner at the Crittingdons'. What a high honour." He began practicing the first lines he would speak when introduced to Miss Sarah. "How delightful to renew our acquaintance.' Perhaps a trifle too formal. 'You look lovely tonight, Miss Crittingdon.' No, rather too forward. Hmm, we shall have to give this some serious thought," he mused.

"Ah, the turkey!" he exclaimed. He had ordered his servant James to buy a turkey for Christmas Eve in the hope of persuading some friends to join him for dinner at his apartment. "I shall have to cancel the order, but perhaps it is too late. Oh well..." A slow smile spread across his face as he thought of another good use to which he might put the turkey.

"Back to work," he chided himself. "No time for thoughts of turkey! So much to do and so little time to do it."

Joseph collected all the documents pertaining to Mr. Snyder's affairs and summarized them for Mr. Crittingdon's perusal. At the bottom of the page he wrote:

*In the case of the eviction notice delivered to Mr. Samuel Chadwick and family of Bishop's Green, I propose that we recommend to our client that he grant clemency to his tenants in the light of their longstanding diligence in paying their rent, and also due to the fact that Mr. Chadwick is temporarily unemployed. Furthermore, may I add that such an action would seem appropriate in the light of this, the Christmas season of good will and benevolence?
Recommended this Saturday, 23rd December, Joseph Addington.*

Fastening the documents together with a pin he placed them on Mr. Crittendon's secretary's table.

Little did he know of the heart-rending scene that was taking place at that very moment in Bishop's Green.

* * *

Nathaniel Snyder, seated on his black gelding* and dressed in his finest suit, watched in disdain as three of his heftily-built men carried the Chadwick family's belongings piece by piece out into the snow.

He grinned and his eyes glinted as he heard Mrs. Chadwick's impassioned pleas from within the house. Soon she herself emerged with her two sons behind her. Making her way through the snow to Snyder's horse, she implored with tears in her eyes,

"Can you not have mercy, sir? I beg of you, my poor boys and I will die of cold out here! Can you not spare us just one more month? Surely my Samuel will find work and we will pay all the rest in arrears, sir. We promise we will."

Snyder sneered, impervious to her pleas. Without a word, he pulled on the reins of his horse and then spurred it off down the street.

Mrs. Chadwick fell to her knees, her eyes brimming with tears. Her two boys, ages eight and five, could do nothing but throw their arms around her neck and weep with her. "Mama, where shall we sleep tonight? Mama, what shall we eat?" came their pitiful cries. "Please tell us that we won't have to go to the poorhouse, Mama, please?"

"Oh, my boys, my boys," she sobbed, as her hot tears melted little pockets in the thick snow.

* * *

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when Joseph received a curt handwritten reply from Mr. Crittingdon's desk. It read:

Mr. Addington, in reference to your recommendation concerning our client, Mr. Snyder, may I remind you that we are lawyers, not fairy godmothers. Our duty is to serve the best interest of our client and to uphold due legal process--nothing more, nothing less.

Joseph's heart sank as he read.

So this is the price that one must pay for getting ahead in one's profession? he thought as he tore the note in two and flung it into his wastepaper basket.

CHAPTER SIX

Christmas Eve at the Crittingdons' was as modest and formal an affair as Mr. Crittingdon could possibly have contrived. This took quite some effort, as some of his relatives were of a much jollier disposition. Indeed, his wife, Grace Crittingdon, was much given to entertaining and enjoying the society of friends. Having done all he could to limit the expenditure of the evening to what was absolutely necessary, curtail the projected time span of the festivities, and where possible without unnecessarily offending others, trim the guest list, Mr. Crittingdon then proceeded to console himself with the thought that Christmas Eve only came once a year, and that perhaps a little merriment could even be considered a necessity of human existence--though he could find nothing in all his law books to support such a claim.

Joseph arrived at the austere, yet elegant mansion at precisely seven thirty and was ushered into the sitting room, where a cheery fire was blazing in the hearth.

Mr. Crittingdon, seated in an armchair smoking his pipe, peremptorily introduced him to all present and waved him to a chair in the corner. Joseph sat somewhat uncomfortably and began to take in the scene before him. Crittingdon was engaged in a conversation with a younger man of similar appearance, who Joseph assumed to be one of his brothers. Numerous other gentlemen and ladies were seated engaged in polite conversation, and a group of children played in another corner of the room.

Yet the one who most caught Joseph's interest was Mr. Clancy, who had abandoned the adult company and was seated on a low stool over in the corner listening intently, with a broad smile on his face, to some of Mr. Crittingdon's nephews. Eagerly they were telling tales of what they were hoping to receive for Christmas, what they had saved up to

buy for their brothers and sisters, the games they played in the snow and such.

Presently Mr. Clancy seemed to feel Joseph's gaze upon him and turned to acknowledge him with a smile and a friendly nod, before returning his attention to the children's stories.

Joseph's eyes once again scanned the faces in the room and came back to Mr. Crittingdon. He could vaguely make out what Crittingdon was saying.

"...And what I don't understand is why we are bothering to send missionaries to educate the heathen who have no knowledge of civilized law. They don't need religion; they need to be taught strict adherence to moral, ethic and legal codes, which are the basis of our civilization. What point is there in teaching uneducated heathen about grace when they have not the slightest idea of law? Instead of missionaries we ought to be sending our police and if that's not sufficient, our armies..."

At that moment the door to the parlour swung open and Mrs. Grace Crittingdon entered the room, accompanied by Sarah. They took their time greeting the various guests, and in turn, came to Joseph.

Joseph fidgeted a little nervously as the two women approached him.

"Mr. Addington," began Mrs. Crittingdon warmly, "how nice of you to come. I believe you and Sarah have met?"

Joseph stumbled to his feet and managed a less than graceful bow. "Why, yes. Thank you so very kindly for inviting me, madam. Er ... good evening, Miss Crittingdon."

"Good evening, Mr. Addington," replied Sarah, somewhat more formally than Joseph would have wished. Sarah then proceeded to busy herself with greeting others of the guests. Her mother, however, remained in conversation with Joseph.

"And how is your business, Mr. Addington?"

"I believe all is proceeding smoothly, but I am sure Mr. Crittingdon keeps you well informed."

"Oh," she replied, casting her eyes upward with a little shrug, and a giggle which Joseph thought remarkably girlish for a woman her age, "he never involves me in the important business of his 'man's world.'" She laughed, and Joseph wondered that her crystal tones seemed so free of rancour and bitterness. "Merry Christmas, Mr. Addington, and please, please make yourself at home."

Joseph resumed his seat and watched her for a few more minutes, as she moved around the room, smiling and warmly greeting the remaining guests.

How appropriately named she is, he thought.

His interest soon turned back to Sarah, who was now engaged in conversation with one of her aunts. He wondered at her cool response to his greeting. Of course, to exchange more than superficial pleasantries at such a gathering would have been highly inappropriate, yet he had hoped for at least one fraction of a second of contact with her hazel-grey eyes--at least a faint spark or glimmer of interest. But he had found none.

Well, he surmised, either she is totally disinterested in me, or a very controlled young lady. Or possibly both.

Soon it was announced that dinner was served, and the guests proceeded towards the dining room. The room was tastefully furnished, and the table was bountifully and immaculately prepared.

How Mrs. Crittingdon and her servants must have laboured to prepare such a feast, thought Joseph. He couldn't help noticing that Mr. Crittingdon was privately remonstrating* his wife about some aspect of the setting which appeared to not be perfectly according to his liking. She flushed slightly, smiled and turned to instruct the servants.

Soon all were seated, grace was said, and the repast* began. Joseph's hopes of sitting near Sarah were dashed by

two of her affectionate cousins who hauled her off to the other side of the table. Thereupon the three girls proceeded to embark on an interminably long and frivolous conversation on the benefits of various types of bonnets and crimping pins, who was wearing what at whose ball, and what were the most desirable houses of fashion. Joseph, overhearing parts of the conversation, contemplated his ability to endure a lifetime of such trivial banter.

Joseph himself was surrounded by some of Crittingdon's younger nieces and nephews, who were a pleasant and lively enough bunch, and spent much of his dinnertime in conversation with them.

From time to time he glanced towards the end of the table, and couldn't help noticing the occasions on which Mr. Crittingdon seemed to continue to instruct his wife on details of the meal that were not to his liking--the turkey being a bit too tough, or perhaps too soft; the stuffing containing too many spices; the gravy a trifle too runny, or perhaps too thick.

In Joseph's mind it was the finest Christmas dinner he could remember eating, and yet he wondered at Grace Crittingdon's patience and smiling acceptance of her husband's faultfinding.

What is her secret? he mused. *I should like to learn it, as if I am to get on in my career, I must certainly apprehend the art of suffering such an employer.*

Finally, the last slice of plum pudding having been served, pecked at by the ladies and eagerly devoured by the nephews and nieces, Mr. Crittingdon glanced somewhat impatiently at his timepiece, signaling the end of the evening's festivities.

Joseph bid farewell to the other guests, and as he clasped Mr. Clancy's hand, the latter looked at him benignly and inquired, "And what do you plan to do over Christmas and Boxing Day, Mr. Addington?"

Joseph thought for a moment. "Perhaps a visit to friends in the country."

"Oh really? How pleasant. Where exactly?"

"H ... Hertfordshire, perhaps," stammered Joseph.

Mr. Clancy raised his eyebrows suggestively as his lips formed the words, "Bishop's Green?"

Joseph once more faltered. "Perhaps. I have some acquaintances."

Mr. Clancy patted him warmly on the shoulder. "A man must do what a man must do," he said with a chuckle, and moved on with his greetings.

Joseph was nonplussed*. Mr. Clancy's words were so similar to the words that had been forming in his mind the last few days, and so reminiscent of his dream.

He was jolted out of his thoughts by Mrs. Crittingdon, who clasped his hand warmly.

"Mr. Addington, if you are not otherwise engaged, would you care to join us at the midnight service at St Paul's tonight? I believe the orchestra and choir will be magnificent."

Joseph thought for a moment before replying. "Madam, I would be honoured."

* * *

The massive cathedral was packed with Christmas worshippers. Joseph sat in the pew beside some of the other Crittingdon family, although once again quite well removed from Sarah, whose indifference towards him only seemed to be increasing.

However, his thoughts were soon distracted from such earthly matters as the orchestra and choir rang forth with renditions of pieces from Handel's *Messiah*, which, as Mrs. Crittingdon had predicted, were truly magnificent.

Then a hush fell over the cathedral, as the soprano and alto walked to the front of the stage to sing *He Shall Feed His Flock Like a Shepherd*.

Joseph was entranced by the beautiful melody, and as the words "...and shall gently lead those which are with young..." echoed around the walls and stained glass windows, Joseph felt a lump rise in his throat and tears start in his eyes.

The singing ended, the preacher took his place in the pulpit to deliver his Christmas sermon. He spoke wonderfully and eloquently of the meaning and symbolism of the birth of our beloved Lord, but his final words seemed to pierce Joseph's very being like an arrow.

"And on this holiest of all days, let us remember the words of the apostle James, 'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction.'"

The service ended, Joseph hastily bid farewell to his hosts and hailed a carriage to take him back to his apartment. He noted that it was a clear night. Even the faintest stars shone with a noticeable brilliance in the moonless sky. *Uncommonly good weather*, he observed to himself. He raised his eyes Heavenwards. "Thank You," he whispered.

Back at his apartments, his servant, James, met him as he opened the front door. The slightly past-middle-aged man was attired smartly, and yet not so elegantly as to appear superior to his younger master.

"Everything is done as you instructed, Mr. Addington. The turkey and the pudding are prepared and still warm, and the carriage and horses are ready. Shall I be driving for you, Mr. Addington?"

"Don't worry about that, James," said Joseph. "I have already arranged another driver. You go and have a nice Christmas with your family. Here." Joseph placed a one-pound note into James' wrinkled hands.

"Why, thank you kindly, sir."

"Good night James, and God bless you."

"God bless you too, sir."

Joseph entered the kitchen of the apartment and found everything as James had said. One by one he carried the large silver trays out of the rear entrance, and down a flight of steps to the stables at the back. There stood his carriage, ready to depart. One by one he placed the trays inside the carriage, fetched his valise, locked the front and back doors, and all was ready.

For a moment he stood motionless beside the carriage. The two horses snorted and pawed the ground softly. Then, without a second thought, he hoisted himself up into the driver's seat, grabbed the reins and drove the horses down the lane and out onto the main street.

As the carriage jostled northward through the streets of London and then out into the countryside, Joseph pulled his scarf up across his face and tightened his topcoat around him. "Now I understand the half of how poor Tom must have felt driving through that freezing blizzard."

A coach passed him heading the opposite direction and the coachman lifted his whip in salute.

Joseph returned the salute, chuckling to himself. "If he but knew," he laughed, "that I am no coachman, but a lawyer-- and my only passengers a stuffed turkey and a plum pudding!" His full-throated laugh echoed heartily across the snow-covered fields, unheeded by any mortal men.

* * *

The sun had already risen when Joseph pulled his carriage outside the Wayfarer's Inn. At his knock, the heavy oak door opened and he saw the same pair of eyes peering out at him as he had a fortnight before. Instantly the innkeeper recognized him.

"Oh, Mr. Addington! Please come in, sir."

"Good morning and Merry Christmas to you," said Joseph jovially.

"From whence have you travelled?"

"I came from London last night, for I have business today in Bishop's Green."

"And how can I be of service, sir?" asked the innkeeper curiously.

"I would reside with you tonight, and wish that you would save me a room."

"By all means! A guest such as yourself is always welcome at my inn. So that will be for you and your coachman, then?"

"As a matter of fact, I sent my coachman home for the Christmas nights, and manned the reins myself. I daresay if he had ridden, we would have got here sooner. But now I fear I must beg your indulgence to take a hot bath, for I must make calls in Bishop's Green, and I fear that my appearance as it is might cause more fright than pleasure."

"But of course," said the innkeeper warmly.

Joseph was considerably dishevelled, having sat all night in the coachman's seat, and felt that his nose was well-nigh frozen off. He sank with welcome relief into the hot bath which the innkeeper prepared for him, but did not linger long, as he eagerly desired to get on with the business of his day.

Before long he was dressed and in his right mind. "Or at least I believe I am," he quipped to himself.

After thanking the innkeeper, he once more resumed his seat on the coach and set off towards Bishop's Green. The innkeeper scratched his head as he watched the eccentric young Londoner drive off down the country lane.

"They can be awful strange, these London folk," he mused. "But he does seem like a good and kindly man."

CHAPTER SEVEN

It was precisely ten o'clock on Christmas morning when Joseph's carriage pulled up outside Mary's cottage. Although he had not slept all night, Joseph felt remarkably refreshed and he tingled with a sort of boyish anticipation at the errand on which he had embarked. Quickly he alighted from the carriage, opened the door and picked up the largest tray, which contained the now cold turkey. Carrying it carefully down the path, so as not to soil his freshly changed clothes with any spots of gravy, he somehow contrived to balance one edge of the tray on one of the fence posts and knock with his other hand.

"Who is it?" came the muffled response, a few seconds later.

"Mr. Addington from London," he said, noticing a slightly strange quiver in his own voice. The door opened and there stood Mary, wearing a simple black gown, her hair tied back. Immediately her mouth opened in astonishment.

"Why, Mr. Addington..."

"Mrs. Farrow," began Joseph, "I hope that you will forgive my presumption and importunity, and if my intrusion is beyond all common courtesy, then I beg your indulgence. Nevertheless, being that this is Christmas, the season in which such excesses may perhaps be forgiven in the name of good will and Yuletide cheer, I have purposed in my heart--since I imagined that you would have little Christmas of your own--to bring some of mine to you." Joseph paused. His hastily improvised speech had been somewhat longer and more unwieldy than he had originally intended, and he waited with bated breath to see Mary's reaction.

All at once, she bit her lip and a tear came into her eye. She quickly held up a handkerchief to her nose to stifle a sob.

Joseph's face fell. "Mrs. Farrow ... please forgive me. I in no way meant to upset you."

Mary recovered her composure.

"No, no, Mr. Addington, I am not the least bit upset. You see ... this is just the kind of extravagant, impulsive, spontaneous and ridiculous..." She managed a laugh through her tears. "...sort of thing that Edward would always be doing. Mr. Addington, you have brought me great..." She faltered and buried her face in her hands and wept a little more. Once again, she dried her eyes and said with a quivering voice, "Please, please! Don't just stand there--come in."

Joseph entered the neatly furnished little cottage and placed the large dish on the table in the centre of the room, which seemed to be for the purpose of dining. Proudly he lifted the cover revealing a large turkey, complete with stuffing and gravy.

"Oh my!" said Mary, her eyes widening.

"Wait!" said Joseph. "There is more!" Quickly he returned to the carriage, bringing in succession a second dish with sliced ham and vegetables, dumplings and baked potatoes, and a third dish with the Christmas pudding.

Mary sat speechless. One more trip to the carriage, and Joseph produced a sprig of holly, which he hung on the doorknob, and a small, carved, wooden manger scene, which he placed carefully on the mantel above the fireplace.

"Mrs. Farrow, Merry Christmas!"

"Mr. Addington, what have you done? I don't know whether to laugh or cry," said Mary, doing both.

"Well, you can thank Edward," said Joseph.

"I beg your pardon?" said Mary.

Joseph stopped mid-sentence, wondering if he had gone too far.

"His ... his last words to me, you know, were to take care of you."

“That’s just like Edward,” said Mary.

Joseph thought he would not venture further to try to explain his strange apparition.

“I do hope you like turkey,” he offered.

“Mr. Addington,” Mary began, “I don’t know if you have had any experience with women in my condition...” She motioned downward, to where the bulge in her dress was somewhat more telltale than it had been two weeks previously. “But at certain seasons, for reasons unbeknownst even to ourselves, we develop an almost uncontrollable desire for a certain food, and feel that we must have it. And as chance would have it, this whole past night I could think of nothing but turkey with gravy and potatoes, and plum pudding.” She broke out in a girlish peal of laughter, and Joseph smiled broadly. He began to feel a warmth inside that fluttered through his entire being and more than compensated for the intense cold that he had experienced during the journey of the night before.

“But Mr. Addington, I do believe there is enough here for twenty people.”

“Well,” said Joseph, “I thought perhaps you might have relations visiting or friends, or acquaintances.”

“Well,” Mary began, “I have only newly moved to this village and my circle of acquaintances is rather small. Financial limitations being somewhat extreme, I ... er...”

“Of course,” Joseph replied hastily, “I understand fully.”

“But,” said Mary, with a little twinkle coming into her eye, “if you would not object, Mr. Addington, there is something that would bring me even greater joy than your visit to me today.”

“Yes?” said Joseph.

“There is a small orphanage in Bishop’s Green, run by a sincere man of God. They have encountered difficult times and I know that this meal would be an answer to their prayers. If it isn’t too much to ask, Mr. Addington, you could

accompany me and we could share these abundant blessings with the children.”

“On one condition,” responded Joseph warmly.

“And what might that be?” said Mary.

“That you promise me that you yourself will take a very, very good portion of turkey, potatoes, gravy, and plum pudding.”

“I believe, Mr. Addington, I shall be able to comply to that request with little or no hesitation. But we must leave soon, before the poor wretches sit down to their ghastly lunch of bread and drippings. But first let me warm the food in my oven, and they shall have it piping hot.”

“Excellent!” said Joseph. “Let me help.”

Without further ado, the two set about warming the food, and within half an hour all was prepared. Joseph once again carried the large trays out to the carriage.

“Mr. Addington, where is your coachman?” asked Mary inquisitively, as she approached the vehicle.

“Madam,” Joseph bowed graciously, “allow me to introduce ... myself. Today I am the coachman.”

“Mr. Addington, you are the most surprising lawyer I have ever encountered!”

“And have you encountered many lawyers?” replied Joseph, his curiosity aroused.

“Perhaps a few too many,” replied Mary ruefully. “But we shall not speak of such things on this day. Let us be off. Now it's down the road, straight, first turn to the right, along half a mile or so, then to the left, and you will see a white house between two poplar trees. That is our destination.”

“Madam, your wish is my command,” said Joseph playfully, as Mary giggled.

* * *

By noon the carriage was pulling up outside the orphanage. Gallantly, Joseph leapt down and opened the carriage door for Mary, who graciously accepted his hand and walked down the path towards the front door. Sounds of childish laughter could be heard emanating from the simple white wooden house.

“Reverend Miller! Reverend Miller!” Mary cried out as she rang the bell by the door. The door opened revealing a pleasant, somewhat portly middle-aged man with thin, greying hair. Immediately he smiled broadly and sympathetically.

“Ah, Mary! My dear Mary. Merry Christmas, and how are you? How are you faring?”

Though he was observing from a fair distance, Joseph could discern an obvious bond between the two.

“Thank you, Reverend Miller. I am very well.”

“My dear Mary, you are looking so much better.”

“Reverend Miller, I *am* much bettered today, largely through the benevolence of a good friend of mine...” She turned and gestured towards Joseph. “...Mr. Addington of London.”

Joseph approached them.

“Merry Christmas to you, sir,” began Joseph respectfully.

Reverend Miller stretched out his hand and warmly shook Joseph's.

“And a Merry Christmas to you too, Mr. Addington. Welcome to our humble orphanage.”

“Reverend Miller,” began Mary, “Mr. Addington...,” she said, then hesitated. “How shall I explain this? Mr. Addington has a surprise for the children.”

“A surprise?” Reverend Miller's face lit up.

“Yes,” Joseph continued. “Reverend Miller, how would you and your children like to enjoy a piping hot turkey dinner this Christmas?”

The reverend's mouth and eyes opened in astonishment, then words seemed to burst forth as from his inner being. "Praise be to God! How did you know? How did...? Mary, last night, before going to bed, I knelt and prayed ever so fervently, that something special would happen for the children today. Mr. Addington, you are the answer to those prayers."

Joseph's eyes grew moist. "I ... I cannot take any credit to myself, sir. It was Mrs. Farrow whose kindness led us to this place."

"Mr. Addington, you do yourself a disservice," began Mary.

Reverend Miller laughed wholeheartedly. "Come, come, now children! Let us not squabble. The food will grow cold!"

"Reverend Miller, do you have a couple of strapping young lads who could help me?"

"That I do, Mr. Addington."

"John! Harry! There is a gentleman here with a surprise for us, and he needs a hand."

"Surprise? Surprise?" echoed some eager voices from within the house. Within seconds, the quiet Christmas morning of Bishop's Green was treated to a cheer, the like of which had not been heard thereabouts for many years. Two fine young lads emerged from the house and helped Joseph bring in the trays.

"Mrs. Miller!" the reverend called out as Joseph entered. "Away with the bread and drippings--we shall have a Christmas feast set before us today!"

Joseph was immediately engulfed in a sea of bright young faces.

"Merry Christmas, kind sir! Thank you!"

"Thank you so much, kind sir!"

Joseph's heart felt like it could burst for joy. Just then a kindly, grey-haired lady emerged from the kitchen carrying a large stack of plates.

“And this is Mrs. Miller,” announced the reverend over the din, as she set the humble dining room table.

“Reverend Miller,” said Joseph, “I have one small request.”

“And what would that be?” he asked.

“That Mrs. Farrow and I be permitted to dine with you-- for we would not miss this joy for all the world.”

“But of course, but of course! You are more than welcome.”

Soon the table was all set. A couple of chairs were brought to accommodate the extra guests, and all sat reverently as Reverend Miller bowed his head.

“Dear Lord,” he prayed, “we thank You for Your many blessings, especially this token of Your love that You have provided on this day through the kind charity of our dear friends. Make us truly thankful, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.”

“Amen!” echoed a chorus of childish voices.

Joseph estimated that there were roughly twenty children seated around the large table. There were both boys and girls, from ages five up to about fifteen. Their clothes, though not elegant, and threadbare in some cases, were clean. Their faces and fingernails were well scrubbed and their hair was neatly combed.

“What a fine group of children you have here, Reverend and Mrs. Miller,” said Joseph. “So lively, yet so well mannered. It is a credit to your training.”

“Thank you, Mr. Addington,” replied the reverend humbly. “It is Mrs. Miller's meticulous attention to the children's needs that has resulted in such a fine assortment of little ones.”

Joseph watched in eager pleasure as the hungry little mouths began to devour the food that was served out to them.

“You must not forget your part of the bargain, Mrs. Farrow,” Joseph said benevolently, helping her to a large

portion of turkey, potatoes, gravy and vegetables. Then he turned to the reverend. "Reverend Miller, I must say this is a most charming little orphanage."

"Mrs. Miller and I have been engaged in this work for well-nigh fifteen years now. We have no children of our own, and felt the call of God to take care of those less fortunate."

"Call of God?" Joseph said, starting a little. "And in what form did this call come?"

"Well, it was nothing so dramatic really," said Reverend Miller. "No lights in the sky or thunder, lightning or voices or anything of the sort. I always wanted to do something for God and my fellowman, and when I read about George Mueller of Bristol and his wonderful work with the orphans there, I simply felt that I was called to try, in my own small way, to emulate his wonderful example here. Though as you can see, our own humble efforts fall far short of Mueller's magnificent accomplishments."

"Come, come now, John," his wife remonstrated. "You must not talk so deprecatingly. You are a tremendous father to these children, a wonderful husband, and I wouldn't trade you for dear George Mueller--not even for one day!"

"Thank you, Susan." Reverend Miller smiled and squeezed her hand. "Unfortunately, in recent years we have suffered a few setbacks. Nevertheless, the dear Lord is with us and cares for us, as He has so abundantly proven today."

"Aye, that He has," continued Mrs. Miller. "And thank you, good kind sir, for your charity. But do tell us, what brought you all the way from London."

"Well," said Joseph, "the story is strange and somewhat mysterious, even to myself. I can only say that I have followed ... unaccountable urges."

"Ah, the still small voice," said Reverend Miller. He and his wife looked at each other knowingly, as if sharing a deeply treasured secret. "The inner voices that Brother Mueller

speaks of. Yes, we too are learning more and more to follow these leadings.”

“From what I see before me today, you have done very well.”

“Ah, yes,” said Reverend Miller, “but there is still so much more to learn.”

“The 'still small voice' ... is that something from Shakespeare?” inquired Joseph.

“From the Bible, Mr. Addington. The Book of Second Kings, chapter nineteen, I believe. Let me see if I can recall it correctly.” He cleared his throat and began to speak, his voice reverberating with increasingly passionate dramatic intensity. “And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice.”

A reverent hush had fallen around the table, as all seemed suddenly to be contemplating the profundity of the words. All of a sudden the silence was broken by a still small voice from the other end of the table.

“Excuse me, Reverend Miller, I am finished. May I please have some more?”

The entire table immediately dissolved into fits of laughter. Tears streamed down Reverend Miller's face as he guffawed*.

“Why of course, my dear little Billy, you shall have more! We shall all have some more. We shall eat and eat and eat until the turkey is all devoured and the stuffing is but a happy memory and the gravy and potatoes are all gone, and then ... after that...” Reverend Miller paused for dramatic effect, as excited gasps escaped from the little ones' mouths. “...we shall bring out the plum pudding!”

Once again a loud hurra shook the house. Reverend Miller wiped the tears from his eyes on the sleeve of his coat. Shaking his head, he said, "Ah, dear Lord, that we may all learn to have faith like little Billy in our asking."

Joseph shook his head in wonder. *What a difference from the Crittindons' Christmas dinner last night!* He glanced at Mary, who sat radiantly smiling, though a tear trickled down her cheek. *Truly this is the happiest day of my life,* thought Joseph.

For a moment Mary's eyes met his, as if she suddenly acknowledged and could feel his joy.

"Thank you, Mr. Addington. Thank you," she said.

* * *

After the plum pudding, which the children eagerly devoured and almost as eagerly searched for the sixpence which Joseph had instructed James to hide in there, one of the older boys respectfully raised his hand.

"Reverend Miller, may we go outside and make a snowman?"

"Why, of course!" said the reverend.

"Make sure all your hats, scarves and jackets are on," said Mrs. Miller.

Soon all of the children were properly fitted out and began to spill out of the house into the adjacent field, where they eagerly began collecting snow.

Joseph could not resist. "Reverend Miller, would I be permitted to join the children?"

"Of course," said Reverend Miller. "Be my guest."

After he had left the room, Mary began at once to address the question she knew must have been burning in the reverend and Mrs. Miller's thoughts.

"Mr. Addington is the gentleman who found Edward and who was so kind to me on that terrible day."

"Ah," said the reverend.

“A fine young man,” said Mrs. Miller. “A trifle eccentric perhaps, but delightfully so.”

“Yes, delightfully so,” echoed Reverend Miller, as the three turned to look out the window at the sight of Joseph engaging in hearty snow play with some of the older boys.

For the next hour Joseph threw snowballs, was on the receiving end of a fair few, and helped the children to build the largest snowman that any of them had ever seen. Before they knew it, the sun was beginning to sink behind the poplars. Joseph arrived at the door of the building, covered from head to toe in snow and grinning from ear to ear.

“I believe I have made a total fool of myself today,” he stammered.

“Think nothing of it,” said Reverend Miller warmly. “Mrs. Miller will fetch you a towel.”

Mrs. Miller hurried out and came back with a clean towel. Joseph managed to dry himself off and regain some semblance of respectability before entering the house once more.

“Reverend and Mrs. Miller, I must thank you for one of the most wonderful days I have ever had.”

“No, truly, Mr. Addington, we are indebted to you for being an instrument to reaffirm our faith that God does care for us and looks upon our humble little mission with great benevolence. And thank you, Mary, for coming. It was so nice to talk to you again.”

A chorus of “thank yous” and “God bless yous” were exchanged. Mrs. Miller hurried to the kitchen and returned with the silver trays. Joseph lifted up his hand.

“Mrs. Miller, please allow me. I have extra--perhaps these trays will be useful to you in your kitchen. Allow me to make this small contribution to your mission.”

“Mr. Addington,” she protested, “you have already been so kind to us. We can't possibly accept.”

“I insist, Mrs. Miller.”

Reverend Miller raised his hand. “Susan, remember little Billy?”

“Little Billy?” She raised her eyebrows.

“Yes, my dear. Let us learn from him and have the faith to accept with joy when God would give us more.” There was another hearty round of laughter, and then Joseph and Mary said their final good-byes.

Once more Joseph escorted Mary to the carriage. He smiled all the way back to her cottage, brimming with happiness. At the cottage, he saw her to the door.

“Mr. Addington, will you come in and take tea?” she inquired.

“Mrs. Farrow, I fear I am suddenly beginning to succumb to the effects of my sleepless night and should return to the inn.” Joseph noticed Mary's face fall a little. “However, I shan't be returning to London until tomorrow afternoon and I would...”

“Then morning tea tomorrow?” she inquired.

“If it is not an imposition.”

“It would be my pleasure and my honour,” said Mary.

With that the two bade farewell and Joseph returned to the Wayfarer's Inn, where he ate a light supper and returned to his room, falling fast asleep shortly afterwards with a broad smile on his face.

CHAPTER EIGHT

When Joseph awoke the next morning, he purposed in his heart to go to the house of Mrs. Chadwick and see how she fared. Instead of taking his carriage, Joseph decided instead to saddle one of the horses and leave the carriage at Wayfarer's Inn until he should return to London.

His consternation was considerably aroused as he approached the Chadwicks' house. A pile of furniture and household goods sat forlornly in the lane outside, with a few tattered sheets draped over them, which were now lightly covered with snow.

Then it is worse than I feared, thought Joseph. Quickly he dismounted and ran up to the front door. His importunate knocking was answered a few moments later. Before him stood an unshaven, unkempt, uncouth-looking fellow, who stared at him with a sort of sneering disdain.

"Sir," began Joseph, "is not this the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Chadwick?"

"They's been evicted these last three days."

"And who are you?" inquired Joseph sharply.

"I work for Mr. Snyder. He told me to stay in this house and be sure that no Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick tries to come back. And 'oo are you?" he retorted.

Joseph thought quickly, and assumed a near-truth alias.

"I am Mr. Arlington, Mr. Chadwick's attorney-at-law."

"Well, I am sorry. Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick don't live 'ere anymore. She an' 'er sons 'ave gone to the poor 'ouse where they all goes that don't pay their rent no more."

"And are these Mrs. Chadwick's possessions?" Joseph motioned towards the pile of furniture outside.

"Aye, an' if she don't come and possess 'em mighty soon, someone else will come and possess 'em," he said with a belligerent snicker.

"And where might I find this poorhouse?"

“Easiest thing in the world. Go out of 'ammertons Street, turn to the left and ask anyone. Everyone knows it well, and I 'alf suspect there will be more folks comin' to know it as days go by.” Without another word the man closed the door in Joseph's face.

Quickly Joseph ran and mounted his horse again. Within ten minutes he was standing outside a forlorn, drab-looking building. Cracked, peeling paint and broken windowpanes revealed a sad lack of care on the part of the owner. As Joseph approached the door, it opened a crack.

“Who are you and what do you want?” a low voice hissed out at him.

“Good day, madam. I am looking for a Mrs. Chadwick.”

“Martha,” the voice shouted disdainfully, “there is a gentleman here to see you.”

Cackles of laughter rang out from within the murky depths of the building. The door opened to reveal a pitiful sight. Joseph peered into a dimly lit room. There was no furniture, only bare floorboards which were black with filth. Cobwebs hung as thick as blankets on the ceiling, and whatever windowpanes were still intact looked as though they had not been washed in a decade. There were threadbare blankets lying on the floor, where Joseph only assumed that children slept at night. Although he could see no children, four or five women sat leaning against the walls. Some mournfully knitted or sewed whilst others sat staring into space, as if imprisoned in blank despair.

Mrs. Chadwick emerged from another room, her worn hands covered with soapsuds.

“Good morning, Mrs. Chadwick,” began Joseph.

Immediately she raised a dripping accusatory finger and pointed at him.

“You're the one that caused all this.”

“'Oo is it, Martha?”

“He's the one, Em! He's the one that works for that evil

viper Snyder. He is the one that come to my house and threw me and my boys out.”

“Madam,” Joseph began to protest.

Before he could continue, the lady who had opened the door--evidently named Em, or Emily--whispered sarcastically to Martha, “Watch out that you say nothing against the good master of this house.”

A hush came over the room.

“The master of the house?” Joseph was thunderstruck.

“You mean Mr. Snyder owns this place as well?”

“Well, you work for 'im. You ought to know,” said Martha, her voice still raised in anger.

“Madam, I had no idea.”

“Well, he not only owns this 'orrible den, but he also owns the factory out the back where my boys are now working fourteen hours a day for a sixpence a week,” Martha continued.

“Mrs. Chadwick, I beg you--”

“And you--you are the one that caused it all. Get out of here and go back to your Snyder!”

“Madam,” Joseph pleaded, “I do not work for Mr. Snyder, I am merely a solicitor under the office he hired to conduct his business.”

“Does it matter?” she continued scornfully. “You are all of the same ilk. Just like the Good Book says, woe unto you lawyers.”

“Ooh, quoting the Good Book to the gentleman, are we?” taunted Emily, to the cheers of several other women who had by this time gathered to watch the exchange.

“Martha,” said another, “aren't you going to offer the gentleman some tea?” Once again, the room erupted into gleeful laughter.

“Mrs. Chadwick, I beg you, give me some time and I will attempt to set the matter straight.”

"That's what you all say. Promises, promises!" said Martha vehemently and stormed out of the room.

"Anything else we can offer you, sir?" said the first woman with mock graciousness.

"Thank you, that will be all," said Joseph, as he turned and walked despondently back out into the morning air.

* * *

So *this was Mr. Snyder's business!* Joseph was appalled by the cruelty and inhumanity of it all. "Making merchandise of the souls of men," he muttered to himself, as he mounted his horse. The morning's events had cast a dark shadow across the euphoric happiness he had felt the day before.

He pulled a silver watch out of his waistcoat pocket and glanced at it. It was still only nine o'clock in the morning. "I cannot let this pass, I must do something," he resolved.

Within twenty minutes, Joseph was sitting astride his horse making his way to Mr. Snyder's palatial mansion. Joseph found the residence without any difficulty. Indeed, it seemed to him that Nathaniel Snyder was beginning to take on the attributes of a feudal lord over the village.

Joseph spoke with authority to the porter at the gate.

"Good day to you, sir, and a merry Boxing Day. I have rather urgent business with Mr. Nathaniel Snyder. I have come from London."

"Mr. Snyder will not want to be disturbed. You may call again later."

"If I may speak frankly," said Joseph, "it is a matter of some urgency which will be of financial gain to Mr. Snyder, and he may be interested in attending to it immediately."

"Ah," said the porter with his eyes raised. "Very well then, sir. Who shall I say is calling?"

"Arlington," said Joseph. "Mr. Arlington from London."

Within minutes Joseph was shown into a plush study. An elegantly dressed, dark-haired young man, who Joseph reckoned could not be more than five years older than

himself, sat perusing a paper. The butler cleared his throat.

“Mr. Arlington, sir.”

Without even raising his eyes, Snyder gestured with his head towards a chair.

“So, what is it?” he said shortly.

“Good day, sir. I presume I am speaking to Mr. Nathaniel Snyder.”

“Yes, you are.” He had not yet looked up from his paper.

“I am the attorney of Mr. and Mrs. Chadwick.”

Snyder abruptly dropped the paper and looked up with an amused, but malevolent gleam in his eye.

“Chadwick? And since when has Mr. Chadwick had the means to afford an attorney?”

Unperturbed, Joseph continued. “I have been instructed by my client to protest against the eviction of his wife and children, which was carried out contrary to the law. Furthermore, I am instructed to deliver to you the sum of two pounds three shillings as payment in arrears for rent owed and for the current month, and for the coming month of January, herewith.”

Joseph placed the money on the desk. Snyder looked up with contempt.

“Mr. ... uh...”

“Arlington,” replied Joseph.

“The eviction, having been carried out, cannot be reversed.”

“But,” replied Joseph, “the eviction was carried out illegally.”

“Ah, but it was not. A legal writ was served, giving the tenant eight days’ notice.”

“Not including the day of serving the writ.”

“The writ was served on the 15th, and the client was evicted on the 23rd.”

“Pardon me, sir, but I have it on good authority that the writ was not served until the 16th.”

“What?”

“It appears that, because of inclement weather, the writ was not served until the morning of the 16th.”

“What difference does one day make?” snapped Snyder.

“A lot of difference, sir. You see, an eviction cannot be carried out on a public holiday, such as Christmas Eve.”

“Exactly,” snapped Snyder, “which is why I had them taken out on the 23rd.”

“Yes, but the 23rd was still within the eight days granted by law to the client to find a new dwelling place.”

“What difference does it make?” snapped Snyder again. “She would never have been able to find anywhere to stay. Her husband is out of work.”

“Nevertheless,” replied Joseph, “my client is still within his legal rights to demand overturning of the eviction--and you, sir, are compelled by the law to comply.”

“And if I don't?” snapped Snyder,

“Then I shall have no recourse but to bring the full weight of the law against you, sir, which will include an investigation of all of your transactions. My client has agreed, however, to be lenient, since this is a first offence. If you choose to accept the rent payment and restore the premise to its rightful lessee, my client has agreed to overlook your breach and will not prosecute.”

“The ungrateful wretches,” growled Snyder, snapping up the money. “And this after I extended a hand of mercy to Mrs. Chadwick and her sons, helping them to find employment in one of my own charitable institutions.”

Joseph's blood began to boil, but he bit his tongue.

“Thank you, Mr. Snyder, for your time. I will inform Mrs. Chadwick that she and her sons may reoccupy the premises. I would appreciate your compliance in immediately dispatching a message to that effect to your representative who is now residing there.”

"You will pay for this, Mr. Arlington," growled Snyder.

"Be careful with your words, Mr. Snyder," said Joseph calmly. "Good day to you, sir, and a merry Boxing Day."

* * *

Triumphantly Joseph returned to the poorhouse. He did not need to knock at the door, for the beady eyes watched his approach and called out, "Martha, your gentleman friend is here again."

"Don't forget the tea this time," called out another voice.

Martha once again stormed into the room, as Joseph entered through the front door.

"And what is it this time?"

"I have come to inform you, madam, that the matter is settled with Mr. Snyder. You may move back into your house."

Immediately her demeanour changed.

"Wh-what ... and h-how?"

"Never mind what or how," said Joseph. "The matter is settled and you are to move back into your house right away."

"Thank you, sir," said Martha, tears welling up in her eyes.

Quickly she called her boys. Then it was Joseph's turn to be misty-eyed, as he saw the two ragged boys emerging from the back room, their eyes puffy from lack of sleep, their faces grimy from long hours work at the factory, hands stained from the ceaseless toil.

"Henry! Samuel!" said Mrs. Chadwick. "Say thank you to the gentleman. We are going back home."

* * *

Joseph arrived half an hour late for tea at Mary Farrow's cottage, having personally gone to oversee Mrs. Chadwick's return to her home. Mr. Snyder's uncouth employee and the equally unseemly messenger who had reluctantly brought tidings of Mrs. Chadwick's return, stood idly by and refused

to lift a finger to help move the furniture back into the house. So Joseph had assisted Mrs. Chadwick and her two boys in so doing.

It was therefore once again that Joseph attempted to brush the snow off his coat and rearrange his dishevelled appearance as he approached Mary Farrow's cottage door.

She opened the door with an inquisitive smile.

"Mrs. Farrow, I must beg your indulgence for being late once again. Unfortunately, I was detained this morning on business."

"Mr. Addington," she giggled, "have you played again in the snow, or perhaps engaged in a snow fight?"

"Well, no ... er ... in a manner of speaking, yes," he replied.

"Please come in," she said. "You are not too late, the water has just boiled."

Joseph sat down on a chair by the fire, while Mary brought tea and hot scones with strawberry jam.

"This is just the medicine the physician prescribed," said Joseph cheerfully.

"So what urgent business have you been conducting on Boxing Day morning?" inquired Mary.

"I had an errand in the village," replied Joseph.

"Somewhat of the same nature that originally brought me here."

"I see," said Mary, not wishing to pry further.

The two sipped their tea quietly for a minute and then both suddenly spoke at the same instant.

"Mr. Addington--"

"Mrs. Farrow--"

Both laughed.

"Do go on, Mr. Addington."

"Oh, please, Mrs. Farrow."

"No, Mr. Addington--you first."

"Mrs. Farrow, I beg you will forgive my intrusion, as I certainly would not want to pry into your private affairs, but since making your acquaintance, something has troubled me."

"Yes," said Mary.

"You are ... well, if I may speak plainly, you are obviously a cultured, educated and may I say spirited young lady. How is it that you have come to find yourself in such a state of relative penury? I do not ask out of mere curiosity, but I must confess, I feel a strange sort of kinship with Edward, though I only knew him for a few short hours. Thus I feel compelled to understand your situation."

"Very well then," said Mary, and began to speak in soft tones. "I am originally from London, from a good family. Not exactly landed gentry or aristocracy, but nevertheless, a well-respected London family. Edward was an orphan."

"Oh," said Joseph, sitting forward, his curiosity kindled further.

"As a matter of fact, you may have observed a close bond of kinship between myself and Reverend Miller."

"Yes, I did."

"That is because, quite simply, Edward is a product of Reverend Miller's orphanage."

"Ah," said Joseph, "and how did you come to..."

"To marry Edward? In other words, why would a high-born girl like myself marry a penniless orphan?"

Joseph blushed a little. "To be frank, yes."

"My mother was, and still is, a person given to acts of charity. Quite some years ago she heard of Reverend Miller's humble efforts and wished to help. So twice yearly she and I would travel up to the orphanage and make a donation. As well as money, she would bring food and gifts for the children. She even knit clothes for them. Being, as you observed, the high-spirited girl that I am, I would always ask Mother if I could play with the other children. She saw no evil in it.

“At that time I was about sixteen, and that’s when I met Edward. He was seventeen. He had been with Reverend Miller since he was eight. His mother died shortly after his birth, and his father in the cholera epidemic. Reverend Miller found him working in the poorhouse, took a liking to him, and brought him to the orphanage. He took care of the boy and educated him--very, very well, I must say.”

“Yes,” said Joseph. “Edward did seem to be a well-spoken young man.”

“Oh, and more than that,” said Mary, “you see, Edward was fast developing a wonderful gift for poetry. He had a natural gift with words. I would say it was a God-given talent. Reverend Miller saw it early and spent many hours with him, teaching him the Bible and spiritual matters, and also encouraging him in his literary efforts. A special friendship began to blossom between Edward and me, and it was on our third visit there--I was then seventeen--that Edward took me aside privately and shyly handed me this.” So saying, Mary went to a dresser at the side of the room, opened the drawer and gently drew out a well-worn sheet of paper. “Here, Mr. Addington, you read it.”

Joseph carefully took the paper, and began to read. Immediately he recognized the first two lines as those which he had read in Edward’s book two weeks earlier. It was inscribed simply:

Sonnet for Mary

*Is there a fairer rose that blooms this spring
Than thou, whose fragrance makes my heart rejoice?
Is there a sapphire of more pure turquoise
Than thy blue eyes? A bird upon the wing,
Who more exquisite melody doth sing
Than this, the lilting music of thy voice?
Is there a gem so rare, so pure, so choice
In any crown, or diadem or ring?
Is there a cornfield of more vibrant gold
Than the lovely tresses of thy hair?
Or yet one ruby more resplendent fair
Than thy red lips? And yet my eyes behold
A wonder more entrancing, strange and rare:
The mystery of thy beauteous heart untold.*

Joseph paused: "It is beautiful indeed--a rare talent in one so young."

"Ah yes," Mary continued. "Edward was a true romantic. Needless to say, I was smitten with such words, and all year long I longed for our Christmas and Easter visits. I began to write to Edward--though secretly, for I feared if my father found out that I was developing a liaison with anyone other than the rich young man he had planned for me, I should have incurred his great wrath. Edward was a sensitive soul, a true poet, but he was never physically strong. The hardships of his early life took a lasting toll on him, I fear, despite Mrs. Miller's kindly attentions. But he had a strong, determined spirit.

"It was on one of our visits to the orphanage that Edward and I were able to escape for a few hours into the woods where we declared our love for each other. At that time he asked me if I would marry him. It was time for him to leave the orphanage, so he said he would come to London, get a job and try to establish himself. I was faced with a choice.

"I knew that to marry Edward would be to go against every wish that my father had for me. Oh, he wouldn't have minded if Edward were a rich young landowner who dabbled in poetry, but a poor orphan?"

"Well, my mother was of a kinder disposition, as well as being very perceptive. She realized that something was developing between Edward and me, although I am sure she said nothing to Father, as she knew him too well to risk arousing his wrath. However, she did finally talk to me, telling me that she understood my feelings, but that in this world that we live in, such things were not possible.

"I cried and I pleaded with her. I asked her why, why should not we be free to love? Why should not love transcend the bounds of our earthly limitations? I challenged her as a Christian--and indeed she was a true Christian, who loved God very deeply. I asked her why couldn't we behave as Christ did, who loved the poor, the publicans and the sinners, and treated them as His own friends and disciples.

"She was silent. She was trapped, bound by her own place, by her marriage, by the conventions of the society that surrounded her. She knew what I was saying was true, she could not deny it, and I think that she could see that Edward and I truly loved one another. Yet she saw no future for us as a marriage."

Joseph was still leaning forward, listening intently.

"So Edward came to London and got himself a job, working as a printer's apprentice. I think he felt that perhaps through his contact with the publishing houses, he might eventually start to get his poetry and his articles published. Edward and I had to meet in secret and we couldn't do it so often--a young lady's movements are, as you well know, quite carefully monitored.

“Father would bring young suitors to the house, who I spurned with every ounce of determination in me. I had pledged my love to Edward and I knew that if I broke his heart, he could not endure it. Not only that, but I could not see myself living with one of these stuffy young aristocrats--existing perhaps, but living, no. Edward was so genuine, so real, and so sincere. He spent his spare time reading his Bible and literature, and writing poetry. He would always show them to me to ask my opinion. I must admit, I was one of his greatest devotees and began to collect, transcribe and collate his poems. I felt it was all I could do to help him. For dear Edward, inspiration left him little time for the practical affairs of life.

“But he was an honest, hardworking employee at his company and soon received a trusted position with a reasonable salary. As he saw more of the world around him, his poems changed. They began to get deeper and more serious. The lyricism of his early years was replaced by a social conscience which was at times stinging, yet retained a deep respect and love for God, and godly values. It seemed the more he saw of the world, the more he realized that the answer was in seeking and following God, and not man.

“Finally he could bear it no longer. Edward was twenty-one now and he begged me to let him ask Father for my hand in marriage. I implored him to wait, to hold off until he was a little bit more established. But Edward was so impulsive and he believed so much in the righteousness of his cause. He believed that somehow God would come through for him. So he bought himself a new suit, groomed himself as well as he was able and came to my father's house to ask for my hand in marriage.” Mary laughed ruefully. “You can imagine what transpired. Father told him to leave the house and never set his foot there again and that if he ever tried to contact or set eyes on me again, he would personally see to it that his career was ruined.

“Then Father came to my room. I will never forget that day. He forbade me ever to see Edward again. I wept and pleaded and told Father of my love, but he would not hear of it. He even locked me in my room for two weeks. During that time, I had time to think and to pray, to decide what I was going to do. I read my Bible, and asked Jesus what He wanted me to do. Eventually my mind was made up. I knew that God had called me to look after Edward, to take care of him, to be by his side.

“He was becoming more than a poet. I believe that his gift was truly from God. And not only did I love him personally, but I loved the way God spoke through him in his writings. You know, Edward truly believed that it was a power greater than himself that helped him. He said that every time he sat down to write, he would ask God for His leading and blessing, and he felt often that it was like the pen was taken out of his hand. Sometimes he didn't even quite understand some things that he wrote. Here let me read you this.” She went to the same drawer and took out a stack of neatly bound papers. “Listen to this:”

Lines written on first observing a steam engine

*I turned to see the monster as it roared,
The black and silver steel, the belching fire,
And thought I glimpsed amidst the smoke outpoured
The seeds of civilization's funeral pyre.
I thought on bold designs, yet unfulfilled,
That carriages one day would cross the sky.
And weapons yet unthought of, we would build,
And wondered, “Would men have more grace to die?”
And should it be that some day distant, far,
We shall contrive to cleave the azure skies
And plant our sordid flags upon the stars,
Will we be then more gentle, or more wise?
Where it will end, this frantic upward spiral,*

*This endless quest for knowledge, wealth and power?
Is our desire for Heaven's peace eternal?
Or brazenly rebuilding Babel's tower?*

Joseph pondered a moment. “Fanciful indeed,” he said. “Carriages crossing the sky. Flags planted among the stars. Perhaps he was speaking symbolically.”

“Maybe so,” said Mary. “It certainly does seem highly improbable that man will ever be able to build flying carriages. Perhaps it has a metaphorical meaning.”

“Yes, that is what I think,” said Joseph. “Still, it is impressive and the message is clear.”

“Well, Edward thought very deeply about things and tried to see what was going on beneath the surface.” She paused and took a deep breath.

“Well, back to my story. Eventually I resolved that I could not live with myself if I did not go to be with Edward, no matter what the consequences. I read the Bible and came upon the passage, ‘Let us go forth unto Him without the gate, bearing His reproach¹.’ I read about Moses who could have been a prince of Egypt, but spurned it all, choosing rather to suffer the reproach of Christ². So though I knew what the consequences would be, I was resolved to act. And so after a few weeks, I feigned submission to my father's wishes and was eventually let out again. And one day at a convenient opportunity, I took a few belongings, wrote my father and mother a letter, and left the house, never to return.

“To my dying day, I will remember the look in Edward's eyes when I walked into his apartment, with my belongings. It was like the boys at the orphanage yesterday getting their plate of plum pudding. I was blissfully happy that I could make him so happy. We both knew that my father

¹ Hebrews 13:13.

² Hebrews 11:26.

would be livid, and I felt more than anything for my poor mother. I knew her heart would be broken. I wrote in my letter to her as lovingly as possible and continued to write to her, though I had to conceal my whereabouts, for if my father ever heard about them, he would doubtless come and God knows what he would have inflicted upon poor Edward.

“But we two were rapturously happy together, and Edward's work was prospering. My thoughts were to compile his poems and submit them for publication. Of course, it would enhance our income, but more than that, I felt the world needed to hear what Edward had to say--particularly dear, stuffy old England. I tried first one publisher, then a second, then a third. One said that the poems were too religious, but not spiritual enough, whatever that means,” she laughed. “Another said that they weren't progressive, not moving with the spirit of the times. Another found them too radical and desired more reference to the classics.

“Finally, a kindly man named Mr. Willard, who runs a publishing house, agreed to look over Edward's poems. Soon afterwards he called me into his office. He told me that he admired Edward's talent greatly, but he said, 'Let me speak frankly with you, Mrs. Farrow. I don't think the world is ready for these poems. There is just...'--then he paused--'...too much truth in them.' In a way I think he sort of sympathized with Edward, as if he knew that what Edward was saying was right, but didn't feel that the public would respect it. He did mention to come back and see him and he would give the matter more consideration, but I never did.

“Edward was disheartened, but I tried to encourage him. I reminded him that many great men weren't at first appreciated in their labours, in the arts and even in the sciences, and particularly in religion, and those that spoke out for the truth were very often persecuted. So he took heart and continued to write. It was then that a very unfortunate thing happened.

“One day by happenstance, Edward encountered my father coming out of a building in London. Father recognized him and a terrible quarrel ensued, my father making all sorts of outrageous threats, saying he would find out where Edward was and come and take me away by force. My father is a man of some influence and we didn't feel ready for such a battle. Edward and I decided that I should move out of the city, where I would be safe, and that he should continue to work until things could be settled a bit better.

“I wrote to my father again, pleading for him to change his opinion, but alas nothing prevailed. So Edward and I decided that I should move here to Bishop's Green, where I could at least be close to the Millers who Edward knew had a kindly disposition towards me. It was Reverend Miller who had performed our marriage.

“This didn't make things any easier for Reverend Miller. That man has seen his fair share of setbacks in life, but none quite as bad as after my father got ahold of him. After my father heard of Edward's background, he forbade my mother ever to help this orphanage again, and even spread some slanderous reports about Reverend Miller and his wife, which considerably curtailed their support. However, the reverend, the brave man that he is, refused to abandon Edward and me, and stood by us through it all, even to his own detriment. Thus it was that we came to dwell in Bishop's Green in this very cottage, some two years ago.

“It was only two months ago that I found out that I was expecting. Edward was overjoyed and determined to work harder than ever to provide for his coming child. However, his health was poor. I begged him to stay and to find an easier job here, but he was afraid that if he lost his position at the printing company, it would mean hard times for us, and most of all for our child. So he persisted, against all of my entreaties. He was so noble; sometimes I almost thought he was too noble. He gave of himself unceasingly to care for us.

“Edward had become increasingly disheartened and disillusioned with the world around him. More and more we talked about how we wished to do more in service for God. We had visited with the Millers and discussed all sorts of plans. Edward even talked of becoming a missionary. Poor dear Edward in his frail health, I wonder what good he would have been in Africa or India. Though I suppose you never can tell--perhaps the tropical climate would have done him good.” She shook her head sadly. “But it wasn't to be. You know the tragic end of the story, Mr. Addington.”

Joseph sat pensively staring into the fire for a few minutes. “What an amazing tale,” he finally said, with a sigh. “Ah, if men could only understand the tragic results of their hardness of heart.”

“Truly spoken, Mr. Addington. It seemed this very hardness is what angered our dear Lord and Saviour more than anything else when He was on Earth.”

“And seeing the results in the lives of the poor wretches who it affects, can we not well see why,” said Joseph. “Mrs. Farrow, may I be so bold as to make a request?”

“What is it, Mr. Addington?”

“Do you have a copy of Edward's poems?”

“Why yes, I have copied and collected them all, and I still have all the originals in Edward's book.”

“Would you permit me to attempt one more time on your behalf to have the poems published?”

“Mr. Addington, I hardly think--”

“Mrs. Farrow, is it not worth the attempt? It seems such a pity that such talent should be lost with Edward's death--and if we were to succeed, the royalties could well provide some support for you and your child.”

“Mr. Addington, you have already done so much.”

“Mrs. Farrow, I prevail upon you to allow me to do this one more thing. I believe with all my heart that it's what Edward would have wanted.”

At those words, Mary fell silent.

“Mr. Addington,” she said after a short pause, “I don't know if there is any way that I will ever be able to repay your kindness.”

“What you have given me,” said Joseph, “has already more than repaid a hundred times any small kindness I may have bestowed upon you.”

Once again Mary went to the dresser. She took out a large stack of neatly bound papers, adding them to the ones she had already retrieved. She handed them to Joseph.

“Here are the poems--more than one hundred. Edward was quite prolific.”

“Is this all?”

“I believe so,” said Mary. “But there may be one or two more at his apartment in London.”

“Ah,” said Joseph, “you have not yet visited his quarters to collect his belongings?”

“I am intending to shortly,” said Mary, attempting to parry what she knew was coming.

“Mrs. Farrow, please allow me to assist you.”

“Mr. Addington, your assistance is--”

“Mrs. Farrow, I am merely honouring the wishes of a dying man and doing what any good Christian man would do.”

“Ah,” said Mary, “there are many good Christian men who wouldn't lift a finger to help a poor widow like myself.”

“It's settled then,” said Joseph. “Direct me to his apartment, give me the keys and I shall take care of the business.”

“But ... how?”

“Very simply, Mrs. Farrow. All you need to do is appoint me as your attorney. I can then handle the business of closing Edward's lodging, any details concerning his estate and, of course, the publishing of his poetry.”

“But Mr. Addington, I could never afford an attorney.”

Joseph smiled. “My rates are very reasonable. In this case I choose to accept my payment in...” He paused and waved his hand as he thought. After a moment, his eyes fell on the table before him. “...tea and scones. First installment and deposit received already today, next installment to be collected, shall we say a fortnight from now, upon my next visit to Bishop's Green?”

“Mr. Addington, you are an unbelievable man.”

“Mrs. Farrow, I am doing nothing more than I was instructed to do by my employer, Mr. Farrow. Nothing more, nothing less.”

A brief shadow passed across Mary's face.

Joseph noticed the look, surprised.

Mary realized that he had observed her reaction.

“Forgive me, Mr. Addington. Your words stirred in me a faint, but painful reminiscence. It is gone now.”

“Strange is it not how such reminiscences occur? I feel sometimes that I have known you longer than merely two weeks. Such a strange feeling! Perhaps I have become closer to Edward than even I myself realized.” At this Mary turned her eyes downward and blushed a little.

“Forgive me,” said Joseph quickly, “have I been too forward?”

Mary looked up again with shining eyes. “No, no, Mr. Addington. I feel towards you nothing but the deepest gratitude.”

“So it is settled then, my appointment?”

“Settled,” Mary acquiesced. Once again she went to the dresser. “Here are Edward's keys and here is his address, on this envelope.”

“Excellent. Now, if you would mind to write me a letter authorizing me as your attorney...”

The business concluded, Joseph thought it best to take his leave.

Mary watched gratefully and waved as Joseph spurred his mare off down the country lane in the direction of the Wayfarer's Inn. After she returned to the sitting room, she went over to the mantelpiece and stood, admiring the small wooden manger scene which Joseph had placed there the day before. As she gazed admiringly at the infant Jesus, she suddenly caught sight of a white corner protruding from behind the wooden edge of the small wooden barn. Quickly she reached behind and discovered an envelope addressed to her. She opened it and found in it five crisp one-pound notes, and a neatly written letter. It read:

Dear Mrs. Farrow,

Forgive once again my presumption and intrusion into your affairs, but I thought that this small token might be of assistance to you during this difficult time. If you should need to contact me urgently, please find enclosed my card. I am ready to be of assistance always.

Sincerely,

Joseph Addington

Fumbling through her tears, Mary pulled the card out of the envelope. It read:

Joseph Addington

Solicitor at Law

Crittingdon and Clancy and Associates

Slowly Mary sank down into the armchair in front of the fire. As the letter and card fell to the floor, she buried her face in her hands and wept.

CHAPTER NINE

Joseph arrived at work the next morning with customary punctuality, though something seemed strangely different. He had passed a long and difficult night, sleeping only a little and tossing and turning as he reviewed the events of the past few days. He had been overjoyed to be able to assist Mary Farrow, to provide some enjoyment to the orphans at Reverend Miller's, as well as help Mrs. Chadwick and her sons.

But his thoughts of the last night had troubled him. How could he continue to work at Crittingdon's law firm when he knew that they entertained clients such as Nathaniel Snyder? But if he were to quit the firm, what would happen to his career? It would without doubt be a serious blow, as any future employer would require references and Crittingdon was unlikely to give them if Joseph left against his will. Additionally, being one of the most respected and feared senior members of the London law community, a word spoken by Crittingdon against anyone was hardly an encouragement for further progress.

And what of Sarah Crittingdon and his intentions to marry her? Was she even interested?

And, Joseph, wondered, *am I even interested?* Joseph could not deny the fact that he was beginning to feel a deep sympathy for Mary Farrow. *Of course, he tried to tell himself, it is nothing more than a desire to fulfil Edward's dying wishes of caring for her.* He struggled vainly to eliminate the image of her lovely face, her haunting blue eyes from his mind. Her vivacity, her courage, her lively irrepressible spirit in the face of such tragedy seemed so admirable. But to think thus on one so recently widowed!

"Oh, Edward," he moaned, "forgive me for thinking such thoughts! Oh, if only Sarah were a little bit more like Mary."

The thought shocked him so much that he resolved that future transactions with her would be purely businesslike in nature. He would take care of Mrs. Farrow's affairs, attempt to find a publisher for Edward's poems, attend to any details concerning his estate, and that would be the conclusion of the matter. As far as working for Crittingdon was concerned, that was simply one of those lesser evils that one has to bear with in life, he concluded, and marrying Sarah still seemed to be the most logical option. Having made those uneasy resolutions, he had then drifted into a somewhat peaceful sleep.

It was in this frame of mind that Joseph arrived at work that next morning and sat at his desk, desperately trying to apply himself to his papers. At ten thirty, his wandering thoughts were called to attention again by a familiar voice.

"Outside the weather's all cold and snowsy. So get your cup of tea from Rosey.--Good morning, Mr. Addington. And did you enjoy your Christmas? I heard you were invited to dinner at Mr. Crittingdon's. That must have been quite a splendid affair, I suppose. And how was Miss Sarah?" She raised her eyebrows.

"Well," said Joseph, pretending to be writing something on the paper in front of him, "pleasant ... polite ... distant." He slapped his pen down impetuously. "To be quite frank, well, she totally ignored me."

"Well, take a tip from Rosey, dear, about these young ladies--and I should know, because I was once one myself, you know, a few short years ago." She chuckled. "Young ladies have the tendency to act exactly the opposite of how they feel. Rule number one for dealing with womankind: never, ever judge by the outward appearance. Now how would you like your tea--the usual?"

Rosey's comments about Mr. Crittingdon's dinner awakened a memory in Joseph's mind concerning Mr. Clancy, and having begun to recognize Rosey as an inexhaustible

source of information and undeniable authority on the affairs of the company, he ventured:

“What is it about Mr. Clancy that is so different? He seems so diametrically opposite in character to Mr. Crittingdon. It seems so unlikely that Mr. Crittingdon would ever employ him.”

“Ah,” said Rosey, relishing this opportunity to once more enthrall her listener with an account of information to which she had made herself privy. “Well, you see, Mr. Addington, that’s because it wasn’t Mr. Crittingdon who employed Mr. Clancy, but the other way ’round.”

“Oh, really?” Joseph inquired, his curiosity immediately aroused. “And how could that be?”

“Ah, I remember it well, having been as it were myself one of the founding members of the company.” She cleared her throat. “It was first Mr. Clancy that opened the company, and then after about a year it was that Mr. Crittingdon joined him. After a while the two became partners and that’s when the firm was called *Clancy and Crittingdon*.”

“Mr. Crittingdon was an ambitious young man and worked very hard. They say that his wife and his children barely ever saw him, except for instruction or reproof. However, he did get on well in his career and became one of the finest young lawyers in London. Something like you, Mr. Addington,” she added jovially.

She continued, “What happened next is a sad story, but to my way of thinking has somewhat of a happy ending.”

“Oh?” said Joseph.

“Mr. Clancy had a dear wife, Elizabeth--and a most beautiful creature she was, so kind to Mr. Clancy and kind to us all. Why, she treated us as if we were all her family. But the poor thing was taken ill with consumption--fragile she was, like a beautiful little butterfly. Poor Mr. Clancy loved her to distraction, but as the days went by she grew sicker and sicker.

Mr. Clancy had been a bright and ambitious young man too, but I watched him change. It seemed like getting on in the world didn't matter to him so much anymore. He was less and less in the office and more and more at home nursing Mrs. Clancy himself, seeing her through to the final hour. He stood by her, he did, all that time.

"All the meanwhile Mr. Crittingdon was forging ahead with his career, winning cases left and right, getting richer by the minute. By the time Mr. Clancy had seen his dear Elizabeth to her Heavenly reward, Crittingdon had amassed enough wealth to buy the major share in the company. Mr. Clancy's position was not strong anymore, having spent a great deal in caring for his wife--not only of his hard-earned savings, but also of his own time and energy. So he did not resist when Mr. Crittingdon insisted that he be named the new senior partner, in essence taking over the company for himself.

"I still remember the day when they took that old sign down and Mr. Crittingdon replaced it with his new sign, 'Crittingdon and Clancy,' rather than 'Clancy and Crittingdon.' Quite a childish thing to do, if you ask me. But Mr. Clancy was a changed man. It didn't really matter to him anymore. I remember the great day of Crittingdon's triumph. All the staff was standing there applauding, and Crittingdon standing there looking ever so smug, but Mr. Clancy just smiled and congratulated him, standing right there under that sign. He bore it like a true gentleman. It was almost as if seeing Mrs. Clancy to her Heavenly reward had removed from him such ambitions.

"And that's why I say that in my view of things, the story didn't end so tragically after all. Mr. Clancy came out better, not like some people we know who turned out bitter--which is exactly what is going to happen to this cup of tea, unless I put some milk in it. You want milk now, don't you? And talking about that, would you like a bit o' butter on your

batter? Oh, ho ho!" Rosey thoroughly enjoyed her own joke, as she slapped a large slab of butter on a pancake, slid it unceremoniously onto a plate and handed it to Joseph.

"Ah, thank you, Rosey. So that explains Mr. Clancy. What an amazing man!"

"Ah yes. You would do well to get to know him, for he has a good mind. Although Crittingdon acts most self-reliant, in grave matters he will still listen to Mr. Clancy's counsel-- though he would never admit it," she whispered.

"Hmm, interesting," said Joseph.

"Well, I must be off on my rounds," she said cheerily. "Got me teapot, got me cosy, got me pikelets and 'ere comes Rosey!"

* * *

Upon consuming his morning refreshments, Joseph left the offices to attend a court hearing, the subject matter of which is of no consequence to this narrative. Upon his return, he was once again summoned to Mr. Crittingdon's office. As soon as he entered, he sensed that the news would not be good. He braced himself inwardly.

Crittingdon silently motioned for him to sit down.

"As much as it pains me, Mr. Addington," Crittingdon began without the slightest hint of pain in his voice, "I have cause once again to reprimand you."

A cold chill ran down Joseph's neck.

"Today I had a visit from a very angry young Mr. Snyder. He informed me that because of a mistake on our part, he was subjected to considerable inconvenience and loss of business. Because a certain solicitor in the employ of our office was late in delivering a writ, one of his clients, a certain Mr. ..." He glanced down at a page. "...Chadwick was able to overturn the eviction notice and reclaim the premises, resulting in Mr. Snyder being forced to apologetically remove the new client, by all accounts a distinguished gentlemen who graciously agreed to find

accommodations elsewhere.

“Apparently his tenant, Mr. Chadwick, had contrived, by what means none of us have any idea, to hire an attorney who argued--and correctly, may I say, according to the law--that the writ being served one day late...” He paused for emphasis. “...rendered the eviction that took place on the 23rd of December invalid. He then threatened to sue our client. Rather ingenious defence don't you think, Mr. Addington? Apparently this young attorney is rather talented, though highly impertinent. Snyder didn't remember his name very well, something like Arlingsworth, he said.”

Joseph heaved a sigh of a relief inwardly.

“Do you know of any lawyers by the name of Arlingsworth practicing in London?”

“No,” answered Joseph truthfully. “I don't think I've ever heard that name before.”

“Well, if you hear of him, let me know. I should like to hire him,” said Crittingdon.

Joseph fought with all that he had to suppress a smile.

“Nevertheless, unfortunately, Mr. Addington, the culpability lies at our door, for if you had delivered the writ as I had instructed you on the 15th of December, the eviction on the 23rd would have been valid.”

“Mr. Crittingdon,” Joseph began patiently, “I believe I explained to you at the time that the weather on the 15th of December was quite frankly impassable. The law provides for such extenuating circumstances, sir, calling them acts of God.”

“An act of God it may have been, nevertheless Mr. Snyder has angrily demanded that we make restitution to him of the revenue of two pounds and three shillings, or he will take his business elsewhere.”

“Perhaps that would be for the better, sir,” said Joseph before he could stop himself.

“I beg your pardon?”

Joseph took a deep breath.

“Well, I have hesitated to report this matter to you, sir, realizing that Mr. Snyder is a valuable client. But during my visit to Bishop's Green, I heard ... shall I say, rumours ... that cast serious aspersions on Mr. Snyder's character--and indeed the nature of some of his business enterprises.”

“Rumours? And what have we to do with rumours, Mr. Addington? And character? Character is neither here nor there where the law is concerned. Now Mr. Snyder is, from all accounts, a very enterprising, though somewhat avaricious* young man. His character, good or otherwise, is of no consequence to us. He is our client and it is our duty to serve him to the best of our ability. As long as he has done nothing to break the law, whereby our association with him would tarnish our reputation.”

“If I may be so bold, sir, that is precisely what I fear.”

“Exactly what do you propose, Mr. Addington?”

“Perhaps,” ventured Joseph, “I should make another exploratory trip to Bishop's Green in a fortnight or so, to try to either verify or disprove some of the allegations which I have heard during my visit there.”

“Mr. Addington,” replied Crittingdon severely, “our clients hire us to serve them, not to investigate them. Nevertheless, I will give some consideration to your proposal. If Snyder is indeed involved in illicit dealings, we had best be ware of it. Nevertheless, be that it as it may, a client is a client and I regret to inform you, Mr. Addington, that you must once again bear the responsibility for this occurrence. Mr. Andrews!”

Once again the long, mouse-like nose proceeded from the adjoining room, followed by the rest of the accountant's bent and, Joseph imagined, somewhat furry body. “Please see to it that two pounds three shillings is deducted from Mr. Addington's wages and paid to Mr. Nathaniel Snyder in restitution for expenses incurred by our company's errors.

Thank you, Mr. Addington. That will be all. I will give due consideration to your proposal. Good day!"

Joseph returned to his desk once again, chagrined, but not a little relieved that his role in the affair with Snyder had not been discovered. *Well, he thought philosophically, last month it was two pounds, this month two pounds and three shillings. It seems that my wages are getting steadily less.*

Now, my dear reader, you may have been doing some calculations in your mind regarding Joseph's expenditures and losses during his adventures. However, our generous Joseph was, at this stage at least, by no means approaching destitution. His monthly wages were about ten pounds--quite a handsome sum for a young man in his position. In addition, prudent investment of the inheritance left to him by his parents enabled him to survive quite adequately.

He was not a man given to impulsive or foolish extravagance. His recent generosity had surprised even himself, but he felt strangely untroubled by the seeming losses.

It was all money well spent in relieving the distress of others, he mused. It is as Edward would have wanted.

CHAPTER TEN

That evening Joseph headed home with eager anticipation. His object was to read through Edward's poems with the intention of being prepared to present them to a publisher within the week. After quickly taking his supper and dismissing James for the evening, he went to his room and took the neatly written manuscript from his valise.

For long hours by his flickering lamp, Joseph pored over the poems. Line after line struck receptive chords deep in his heart, as he felt Edward's struggles, his passion, his humanity and his deep love for God. He read:

The Poet's Art

*If not for love, then let my poems be
As drops of rain which fall upon the sea
And disappear within its aqueous depth,
Where deathless secrets evermore are kept.
If done for pride, to boast my poet's skill,
Then let these words be as the withering dill
Which 'neath the blistering summer sun expires,
Soon cast into oblivion's hungry fires.*

*Yet if for love these humble words be penned,
Then let them be as seeds before the wind,
Blown forth to plant the truth in seeking hearts.
Yea, if I can but use my poet's arts
To set the fire a-burning in one soul,
To cause one wave of Thy pure love to roll,
And to a desert life refreshment give,
Then, dear God, please let these poems live.*

He turned a page and read further:

The Sordid Conquest

*Across the seas we sail our noble galleons
And spread our empire east and south and west;
Defiantly we set forth our battalions
And plunder find in glorious conquest.*

*Yet in our sordid streets there die forgotten
Unnumbered souls whose cries we do not heed.
We fail to feed the babes we have begotten,
Yet nurture gluttonous pride and hungry greed.*

*Return, ye soldiers, glorious from the battle,
And tell your tales of victory's sweet success;
We've land and gold, and grain to feed our cattle,
But left ten thousand children fatherless.*

*Oh, how much more exalted our intention,
Our lives how much more noble, undefiled
Were all our craft, our conquest, our invention
Aimed but to feed one hungry, yearning child.*

Joseph uttered a low sigh, as the words seemed to pierce deep into his soul. "I understand well what that publisher meant," he breathed, as he turned the next page. He read further:

Would Christ?

*Would Christ have built these temples that we build?
And thus their altars filled with gaudy sacrament?
Would He have deemed our million pounds well spent
On candlesticks of gold and arches solemn,
On stained-glass glory and exquisite column,
Would He approve that thus we spread His fame,
Who died without a penny to His name?*

*Would Christ have waged the wars we boldly fight?
Appointed us the right to execute
Swift judgment on the upstarts who dispute
Our claim to dominate the world? Would He
Despise those not as civilized as we
Who in the name of freedom spoil their lands?
Who let the nails of suffering pierce His hands?*

*Would Christ have lived the careless lives we live?
His benediction give to our excess,
Those trappings that we hope will so impress
The fawning world, and more, outdo our neighbours?
Would He pour forth His blessing on our labours
And smile upon our greed as more we get,
Who slept beneath the stars on Olivet?*

*Would Christ have preached the sermons that we preach?
And such vain half-truths teach as we allow?
As to the idols of man's knowledge bow
Our thoughtless heads, our faith shipwrecked
By hidden reefs of shallow intellect;
And let us drown in safe hypocrisy,
Who taught us that the truth should set us free?*

Joseph sighed deeply, then smiled as he turned a page and came across a sonnet inscribed to the Reverend Miller.

Dear Edward, he thought, for all your zeal and fervour, you could be as sweet as honey.

Sonnet to the Reverend Miller

*Oh, gentle shepherd of our humble fold,
An unseen eye beholds your earnest toil,
An unseen hand pours forth praise-scented oil
Upon your care-worn hands. A crown of gold
Awaits your brow, and yet to be unrolled
Are scrolls of Heaven, where in verses royal,
Inscribed in ink no moth nor rust can spoil,
The story of your faithfulness is told.
Without your thorn-pierced hands our souls would yet
Be snared by brambles on some rocky steep.
Think thus, should e'er the barbs of mankind's deep
Unthankfulness your weary soul beset,
Your rescued lambs still grateful vigil keep,
Our lives are saved and we shall not forget.*

When Joseph's heavy eyelids began to drop and the lamp began to smoke, he realized he had read probably more than fifty of the poems.

"I shall meet thee again tomorrow night, Edward," he said, and crawled off to his bed.

* * *

True to his word, Joseph repeated the same procedure the following evening. As he continued, he felt himself to be travelling on a spiritual journey by Edward's side, through steep valleys of despair, up mountains of challenge and struggle, and on to glorious peaks of exaltation and victory. He noticed Edward's style developing, becoming sometimes freer, sometimes more simple, sometimes more mysterious. He read:

My Truest Friend

*Sometimes I walk beside You
And I feel Your presence sweet,
Like a fragrance that pervades the atmosphere,
And bright flowers seem to spring forth
At the impress of Your feet,
And Your voice like rippling waters fills my ears.*

*Yet, sometimes I grope to find You
And I see no earthly sign,
As I wander in a desert vast and bare,
And my cries are met with silence
From the unforgiving sky,
And I find no evidence that You are there.*

*Sometimes through verdant pastures,
Beside laughing, rippling streams,
Sometimes through mighty canyons, deep and grand,
Sometimes through arid wastelands
Where the heat dissolves my dreams,
And I faint to grasp Your caring, guiding hand.*

*Yet these feet will go on walking
On the path that You have led,
And this heart will go on trusting till the end,
And will know You the more deeply,
When my feelings all are fled.
Though I see You not, You are my Truest Friend.*

Further on, Joseph came to a poem which again spoke deeply to his heart.

The Call

*Why do the sights of places I have never been
Burn so within my soul?
What is it, that this pain in eyes I have not seen
Compels me to console?
Why does the fever burning in a young child's breast
In far-off lands,
Steal my affections, rob me of my very rest,
And grasp my sweating hands?*

*Why do the cries of voices I have never heard
Haunt me each living day?
What is this debt, no deed of mine could have incurred
That I must surely pay?
Who are these wraiths* who come to me in chains of night
And beg their liberty?
Who is their captor, yea, and by whose power and might
Can I set them free?*

*I know the answer all too well, could I but yield
And let excuses go.
Whose is this plough in some unfurrowed virgin field
That cries for one to sow?
Such silent, pleading hearing, unseen anguish seeing,
Can I yet delay?
Lord, the call is burnt within my very being
And I must soon obey.*

Joseph breathed deeply, as conviction settled on his heart. "Powerful words," he mused. He turned the next page. "Crittendon would like this one," he chuckled wryly, as he read.

The End of Law

O Law!

With joy I saw thy mangled bands

Fall to the ground,

Broken by wounded hands.

No longer bound.

O Love, thou purest dove,

Fly to the skies!

Sail o'er the whispering sea

And gently realize

Thy destiny.

After a moment's meditation on the simple yet profound imagery, Joseph smiled to himself. "I should send Crittingdon an anonymous copy of this in the mail. But," he sighed, "I feel it will take more than a mere poem to change his mind."

On, on, into the night Joseph read, until at last, with a sigh of satisfaction, he lay down the last page of manuscript, snuffed out his lamp and went to bed.

* * *

Mr. Crittingdon, in his gracious liberality, granted all of his employees one day vacation of their own choosing in the period between Christmas and New Year, "in order," as he put it, "to fulfil any necessary family or other obligations." Joseph's only close relation was a sister in Nottingham, whom he would visit during the summer months. He purposed that he would use the opportunity to visit Edward's apartment and see about the publishing of the poems. So it was at ten o'clock on Friday morning, the 29th of December that Joseph found his way to the office of Mr. Albert E. Willard, publisher.

He was shown into Mr. Willard's office and found himself sitting in front of a rather rotund, benign-looking man who sat puffing on his pipe. His large grey handlebar moustache and sideburns were in pleasant harmony with his ruddy complexion.

"And what can I do for you, Mr. ...?"

"Addington, Joseph Addington. I am the attorney for a Mrs. Mary Farrow, husband of the late Edward Farrow."

"Edward Farrow ... Edward Farrow ... let me see now. That rings a bell somewhere deep within my cranium."

"Mr. Farrow was a poet, and I believe several years ago, his wife Mary approached you in the hope of having some of his poetry published."

"Ah yes, it comes back to me now! And what a charming young lady she was. Farrow, Edward Farrow. Did I hear you say 'the late Edward Farrow'?"

"Yes. Mr. Farrow passed away tragically earlier this month."

"Oh, dear me, dear me! How dreadfully sad. I remember he was quite a talented young chap."

"So I have heard," affirmed Joseph.

"Ah yes, now that you mention it, I never could quite get the young chap's poems off my mind. Let me see, what was it?"

"'Is there a fairer bird upon the wing, with eyes of more pure blue turquoise, than the lilting music of thy charming voice in the spring...' or something of the sort. Terribly, terribly romantic."

He let out a loud guffaw, which quickly transformed itself into a cough. Producing a large handkerchief, he sniffled and snuffed until he could regain his composure.

"Yes, yes. Now, as I was saying, I turned them down on the first attempt, but that's what we publishers do--sort of a standard policy. Never accept a new writer unless they have been turned down by at least five other publishers.

“Not good for the career you know. I remember Mr. Farrow, he had sort of an obsession with speaking the truth-- somewhat of an unhealthy practice in this day and age, methinks.” The guffaw, cough, handkerchief routine repeated itself.

“So, Mr. Addlesberry, was it?”

“Addington. I have here,” said Joseph, producing the manuscript, “an updated, collected and revised version of Mr. Farrow's poems, and I beg you to once again give them your consideration, sir. I believe they contain considerable spiritual and not a little literary merit.”

“Let me speak with you frankly, Mr. Addington,” Mr. Willard continued. “I am a lover of poetry and fine literature, but I am also a man of business. Taking on a new poet is a somewhat risky business. Many a volume of poetry has ended up as kindling for the fires in the poorhouses. Makes very good kindling, poetry does.

“Burn on, burn on, oh sacred flame of poetry! And all that! Ho ho!”

“What is that?” said Joseph, racking his brain. “It sounds familiar. Is it Keats?”

“Indeed not. It's one of mine. Vintage Willard. From my earlier period.” Thoughtfully tapping his pipe on the desk in front of him, after a moment he cleared his throat.

“Nevertheless, Mr. Addington, after some successful ventures, one is prepared from time to time to take a risk and in this case, I am more than half inclined to do so. There is always quite a market for poetry published posthumously. Has a strange sort of mystique to it. As the epigram says: 'As the poets pass away, the public prepares to pay!'" By a supreme effort he controlled his laugh, to Joseph's considerable relief.

“However, I must first discuss the matter with my partners. So if you would be so kind as to leave the manuscript with me, I can let you know shortly.”

“Thank you most kindly, Mr. Willard. And here is my card.”

“Very well, then, and do give my regards and condolences to Mrs. Farrow.”

“I will do that, sir.”

“Charming, charming lady, most charming. I do believe I asked her to come back and see me after a period, but she never came.”

“Mrs. Farrow informed me that she became rather disheartened.”

“Disheartened?” said Mr. Willard. “Now the problem with being disheartened is that you may never end up getting delivered. Dis-heartened ... de-livered! Ho ho!”

Joseph almost cringed as the inevitable guffaw of laughter burst forth, followed by the cough and handkerchief. When Mr. Willard had sufficiently recovered himself, Joseph took his leave.

Joseph's next destination was Edward's apartment, which he managed to locate after a long and diligent search. As he entered the tiny doorway leading off a dingy back alley and ascended the narrow staircase up to Edward's attic quarters, Joseph thought again how much Edward had sacrificed his own comfort for the good of his wife and expected child. Joseph took out the rusty key and opened the door.

He found himself in a small, austere room. The sloping ceiling had only one tiny window. The furniture consisted of a simple bed, a chair and a bare wooden table with an ink blotter on it. By the bed was a small side table, with a half-used candle and a well-worn Bible. Joseph picked up the Bible and browsed through it briefly, intrigued by the many markings, underlinings and symbols which Edward seemed to have used in his study of the Holy Word. There was little else in the room. In a closet Joseph found some well-worn clothes, and an old leather bag.

Joseph gathered up the few possessions and the Bible, placed them in the bag and looked around the room one more time for anything more of interest. His eyes were drawn to the ink blotter on the table. It was covered with blots and scribbles. There were lists, apparently of rhyming words crossed out one by one, and the occasional absent-mindedly drawn picture. At the top right hand corner of the blotter was a barely legible phrase, which Joseph managed to decipher after some effort.

"'The treasures of the snow.' An interesting phrase," he pondered, as he picked up the blotter and slid it into the top of the bag along with the other belongings. One last search of the room and Joseph found nothing more.

He went out, locked the room for the last time and slowly descended the staircase. In the apartment at the bottom of the staircase, Joseph found the mistress of the establishment, whom he informed of Edward's passing, as she had not yet known of it.

"Such a pity. He was a nice young man. And that lovely wife of his, Heaven bless her."

Joseph handed her the keys, bid farewell and was on his way back to his apartment.

Immediately upon his arrival, Joseph wrote a letter to Mary informing her of the hopeful outcome of his interview with Mr. Willard and the conclusion of the business at Edward's apartment. He signed it and sealed it, ready to be dispatched with the morning post.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

It was now the Monday morning of the 1st day of the new year, 1866, and Joseph sat in his office, pondering the unexpected events of the past two weeks. His formerly smooth and ordered life had suddenly undergone very considerable changes. It seemed as if more action and emotion had been packed into the last seventeen days than the previous twenty-six years.

As he pondered thus, he was summoned once again by Mr. Crittingdon's secretary to his office. Mr. Crittingdon began in his prompt manner.

"Mr. Addington, I have given careful thought to your proposal concerning Mr. Nathaniel Snyder, and I have concluded that if indeed Mr. Snyder is involved in illegal activities, this could reflect badly on our company's reputation and even cause us to be in some way criminally culpable. Therefore I give you my consent to conduct a short, exploratory investigation for the duration of no more than two days. You are to depart from our office on the morning of the 4th of January and return no later than closing time on the evening of the 5th of January, during which time you may use any legal method of investigation to procure information concerning Mr. Snyder's activities.

"I give this consent with some reservations, Mr. Addington, noting the eccentricity of your behaviour on your previous visit, and would hereby warn you that any actions that are found to be in conflict with the statutes and regulations of this law firm shall be met with further reprimand, and if deemed severe enough, dismissal. Thank you, that will be all."

Joseph's elation welled up within him. Perhaps this was the breakthrough that he had longed for. This was his chance to prove Nathaniel Snyder's ill intentions towards the people of Bishop's Green, and hopefully deliver them from the oppression that he so callously meted out upon them.

"Th-thank you, sir," he stammered, only to be met with an impervious silence.

As he turned to leave, Mr. Crittingdon's secretary once again entered the office.

"Pardon me, Mr. Crittingdon. Your daughter Sarah has arrived and wishes to speak to you on a family matter."

"Please ask her to wait," said Mr. Crittingdon. "I have important business matters to attend to. I will see her in half an hour." He looked up briefly at Joseph. "Mr. Addington, entertain Miss Crittingdon, will you?"

"Yes sir, with pleasure," said Joseph, nervously bowing and exiting the room.

* * *

Joseph entered the company's sitting room as nonchalantly as possible. Sarah Crittingdon had just taken her seat and was smoothing her elegant pink crepe dress and adjusting her lace bonnet.

How lovely she looks, thought Joseph as he cleared his throat.

"Good morning, Miss Crittingdon. Your father has some small, but pressing matters of business to attend to, and has prevailed upon me to entertain you while you wait."

"Oh," replied Sarah indifferently.

"A task which I have undertaken to accept with very little displeasure," Joseph said with what came out as a nervous chuckle.

Sarah looked at him narrowly.

Joseph called out to the secretary, "Have Rosey bring us some tea."

"Yes, Mr. Addington."

Joseph sat down. "And how does the new year find Miss Crittingdon?"

"Well enough, I suppose," she replied as coldly as could a January day.

There was silence for a few moments as Joseph studied the situation carefully. Perhaps it was as Rosey had said and her reactions were directly converse to her inner feelings.

"The weather is a trifle inclement," began Joseph.

"Yes," came the monosyllabic reply.

"Some of us thrive on coldness, but I for one, do long for warmer days."

At that point, Rosey entered the room with her characteristic fanfare.

"Warm yourself from the winter snows, and 'ave your cup of tea from Rose.--Oh, good morning, Miss Crittingdon, and a happy new year to you. And how is Miss Sarah? My, my, she looks like a breath of springtime in the midst of winter, doesn't she, Mr. Addington?"

"Yes," said Joseph, blushing a little and staring at his hands.

Rosey prattled on merrily as she went about pouring her tea and distributing her sweets. "And what brings you here today, Miss Crittingdon?"

"Family business," she replied, politely, but indifferently.

"Here you are, Mr. Addington--just as you like it." She slipped Joseph a surreptitious wink as she handed him his tea. "Well, I'd best be off on my rounds and let you two continue with your ... family business.

"Frozen noses, frozen tosies? Never fear, 'cause 'ere comes Rosey," she chortled as she left the room.

Sarah's delicately groomed eyebrows expressed faint but discernible contempt as she proceeded to sip her tea.

"Dear Rosey," began Joseph, "she does prattle on so, but she is a well-meaning soul, and incurably cheerful."

Sarah finished her sip. The warm tea seemed to momentarily melt something in her disposition and she managed to produce a light question.

"And how is your business, Mr. Addington?"

“Well,” began Joseph effusively, “this morning I must admit I am rather elated, because your father has just given his approval to an endeavour which I had proposed.”

“And what might that be?” inquired Sarah, her interest obviously aroused.

“Well,” said Joseph, his tone of voice betraying his enthusiasm, “recently, on company business, I visited a town to the north of London. There I discovered that a certain gentleman, a client of ours actually, is involved in some practices which appeared in my judgment to be causing considerable oppression and sorrow to the poor people of the township. Your father has given his consent for me to make an investigative journey to the area. I sincerely hope by means of this that some of these wrongs may be set right and many of these poor people may be granted the liberty to continue their lives free from such out of hand exploitation.”

“I should think, Mr. Addington, that you would be able to find a more fruitful use of your time and talents.” Sarah's tone was biting.

Joseph was taken aback. “How so, Miss Crittingdon?”

“Whilst I admire your altruism, you must be realistic, Mr. Addington. It is very obvious that the poor are usually poor because of their own lack of enterprise, whilst the rich are usually so because of their diligence and hard work.”

“If you had met Mr. Nathaniel Snyder, the client to whom I am referring, I think you may change your opinion, Miss Crittingdon.”

“Oh, but I have met Mr. Snyder, and I find him to be an unusually enterprising and ambitious young man--in some ways quite admirable. He has, with resources far inferior to many, achieved in a very few years quite an excellent level of prosperity.”

“Prosperity is not everything, Miss Crittingdon.”

“Perhaps not, but without it, everything is lost.”

“And if we lose our humanity, shall our prosperity then be justified?”

“I scarcely think that the poor wretches whom you intend to waste your precious talents helping can be classified as humanity. It is obvious that they do not possess the refinement, sensibilities and culture that we do. Let them remain where they are. They have lived that way for hundreds of years and are content to continue to do so. If no one tells them of their condition, they will have no idea that there is anything wrong with it. Let them be, Mr. Addington.”

Joseph's agitation was about to reach boiling point, when the door opened and the secretary announced that Mr. Crittingdon was ready to meet his daughter.

“Good day, Mr. Addington,” said Sarah stiffly.

“Good day, Miss Crittingdon.” Joseph stared into his half-empty teacup, crestfallen. Sarah Crittingdon's beauty had seemed to suddenly fade and wither like an autumn leaf. After a few minutes of agony, pondering this realization, Joseph put down his cup, squared his shoulders resolutely and returned to his desk where he resumed his work with determination.

* * *

On the morning of the 3rd, Joseph sat at his desk making plans for his upcoming journey. He would interview Mrs. Chadwick, return to the poorhouse, hopefully inspecting the factory where the children were employed. By observing and interviewing those he met, Joseph felt sure to obtain enough evidence to build a case against Mr. Snyder. Then of course, he would visit Mary Farrow to see how she did, and also Reverend and Mrs. Miller's orphanage.

Joseph recalled that he had a large wardrobe of clothes from his childhood and youth, which were still in reasonable condition. He purposed to take them to the orphanage. They were of a certainty better than some of the threadbare apparel with which the children were presently clothed.

While he thought on these things, the secretary brought in the morning post. There were two letters addressed to him. The larger and more business-like envelope was sealed with the seal of Albert E. Willard, Publisher. With excitement Joseph tore open the seal, drew out the letter and read the following:

Dear Mr. Addington,

In respect of your proposal to publish the poems of Mr. Edward Farrow, all the members of the board of our company are in agreement that Mr. Farrow's work is worthy of publication. We also agree with your proposal to divide the poems into two volumes to be published separately, the first in June of this year and the second, God and circumstances willing, in November. We propose the payment of one hundred pounds per volume and subsequent royalties of twenty-five percent to be paid in full to Mr. Farrow's widow, Mary Farrow. We are open to further discussion of the above details and invite you to visit our office again during the month of January to finalize the details.

Yours sincerely,

Albert E. Willard

Publisher

Joseph's heart leapt in exultation. Everything was going better than he had dreamed. He slapped the letter down on the table with a gesture of triumph and perused the other envelope. There was no recognizable seal, but he immediately remembered the feminine script as the same which had transcribed Edward's poems.

With trembling fingers he broke the seal and read:

Dear Mr. Addington,

I wish to express to you once again my deepest gratitude for your benevolent assistance during my time of greatest grief. Your example of consideration and gentlemanly conduct towards one whom you knew not, and to whom you were in no way indebted, will remain with me forever.

However, for reasons that I cannot explain and I fear must remain known only to myself, I must beg you, Mr. Addington, to refrain from any further attempts to assist me in the future.

Furthermore--and though it is painful for me--I must request that you do not henceforth attempt to visit or contact me personally in any way. All details regarding the estate and business of Mr. Farrow may be attended to through our mutual friend, Reverend Miller. I beg your forgiveness if this letter causes you unease, and I ask you to believe that it is truly circumstances beyond my control which compel me to make such a request.

Yours gratefully,

Mary Farrow

Joseph's exultation collapsed like a deflated balloon. In disbelief he stared at the neatly written page, reading it over again, twice, thrice, before slowly laying it down on the desk.

"Why? Why? What have I done wrong? I know it," he concluded sorrowfully. "My actions were far too forward. I should have realized that a woman who was mourning for her lost husband could easily misinterpret the actions of a young bachelor who appeared to take too great an interest in her affairs. How foolish I was," he thought aloud. "How impetuous and inappropriate were my actions. Perhaps Sarah Crittingdon was correct in her appraisal of me."

He stared glumly at the papers in front of him.

* * *

Joseph managed to struggle through the rest of the day. On his arrival home he skipped supper, dismissed the somewhat perturbed James and went to his room. Flinging himself headlong down on his bed, he wept into his pillow.

The sudden elation at Crittingdon's approval of his plans, followed by disillusionment at Sarah Crittingdon's disdainful rejection, then the brief rejoicing over Mr. Willard's acceptance of Edward's poems, followed by sorrow at Mary Farrow's mysterious spurning of his assistance all seemed to mount into a wave of confused emotions which engulfed him. He felt he could bear it no longer.

As he wept, the words of Edward's poem drifted softly into his consciousness, as if sung by an angel:

*Yet these feet will go on walking
On the path that You have led,
And this heart will go on trusting till the end,
And will know You the more deeply,
When my feelings are all fled.
Though I see You not, You are my Truest Friend.*

CHAPTER TWELVE

Joseph arose early the next morning, resolving to continue with his plans despite the setback of Mary Farrow's letter.

There are people that need my help, there are orphans that need my clothes, and there is Mr. Snyder who needs to be taught a lesson, he thought as he rummaged through his wardrobe and trunks, collecting an assortment of coats, trousers, shirts, caps and hats from his younger years.

He bundled them all into a large trunk and with the help of James, loaded it onto his carriage, and set off for his office. Upon arrival there, he called Tom the coachman, and together with James quickly loaded the trunk into the company coach, so as to avoid arousing Mr. Crittingdon's suspicion.

A pity, thought Joseph, *that charity must be conducted under such a cloak of secrecy.*

Having dispatched James and his own carriage, Joseph reported to Mr. Crittingdon, received further admonitions and was ready to depart.

"Let's be off then, Tom," he said cheerily. "The weather looks a little more friendly than on our last trip to Bishop's Green."

"Aye, that it does, sir," replied Tom, as he hoisted himself up onto the driver's seat and grabbed the reins.

* * *

Joseph's first stop in Bishop's Green was the house of Mrs. Chadwick, who received him warmly.

"And thank you, sir, for your kind help in our affairs," she said, as she brought him a hot bowl of broth. "Without you we would surely have been left to our own misery."

"You must thank none else but your dear Heavenly Father who watches over you, for it was through His intervention, not mine, that the catastrophe was averted."

“You are a very different young man from the one that visited me three weeks past,” observed Mrs. Chadwick. “Are you religious?”

“I have never thought of myself as such, yet I find myself more and more concerned with spiritual matters as the days go by.”

“Perhaps then you can give me some advice on me boys. Henry, me eldest, is running errands for the blacksmith. It's a good deal better than working for Snyder. Little Sam often goes with him. There's little else for him to do. But I am concerned about them, how they may learn more of living a godly life.”

“Well,” responded Joseph, “I know of a very fine and humble minister who lives not far from here, whom I would be glad to recommend your boys to, if his instruction could be of a benefit to them.”

“You would do me a great kindness,” replied Mrs. Chadwick.

“And now to the business about which I have come. I would like you to inform me of all the details of Mr. Snyder's dealings with you, for I am sent to investigate somewhat of his business matters.”

Thenceforth Mrs. Chadwick began to relate the story of her and her husband's dealings with Nathaniel Snyder. Throughout the narrative, Snyder's callousness, cruelty, greed and selfishness were evident, yet at no point could Joseph discern that he had broken any law, except in the matter of the eviction carried out one day too early, which had already been resolved.

“And is there news from Mr. Chadwick?” inquired Joseph.

“Yes, I received a letter from him,” she replied. “He could find no work in London, but he has a brother up north who is employed in the cotton mills and has offered to help him get a job there.”

“And would you move there too with your boys?”

"I have thought of it," she replied, "for I have only until the end of January in this house and I have had another visit from Mr. Snyder's men."

"Did they threaten you?" asked Joseph.

"Not in so many words, but there seemed to be..."

"Veiled threats?" asked Joseph.

"Yes, yes, something of the sort."

"If I may offer a personal opinion," said Joseph, "you would do well to remove yourself from the clutches of this man, for he seems to be of a vindictive nature and determined to crush any that would oppose his plans."

"Truly spoken, Mr. Addington, truly spoken! I cannot but feel that the move, although difficult in some ways, would be for the best for all of us, and my two boys as well."

"I think we would all be well rid of this Mr. Snyder," mused Joseph.

"I see very little hope of that," replied Mrs. Chadwick ruefully. "He owns most of this small town in some way or another."

"We shall see what we shall see," said Joseph. "Thank you, Mrs. Chadwick, for that excellent broth. And now, I must continue with my business. As I said, I will recommend your boys to my friend, the Reverend Miller."

"Thank you most kindly, Mr. Addington," she replied, as he arose and departed.

Next Joseph visited the poorhouse.

A muffled cackle escaped from the window as Joseph approached the door. "Oh, it's Martha Chadwick's 'andsome gentleman friend again!"

"Good afternoon, ladies," said Joseph, bowing as gallantly as he could after the door opened.

"And good afternoon to you too, sir," came a chorus of sarcastic replies.

Joseph entered the filthy, dimly lit room.

"And to what do we owe the pleasure of your visit, kind

sir?" said the boldest of the ladies, whom Joseph remembered well from his previous visit.

"I should like to visit your factory and see what you produce and how you produce it."

"Delighted, I'm sure!" she exclaimed, with a mischievous wink at her colleagues. "I myself will take you on a guided tour, sir. It's not often that we have the honour of such a distinguished gentleman visiting our establishment."

The woman, whose name Joseph soon discovered was Elsie, seemed to take an impish delight in imitating the hoity-toity accent of the ruling classes, which she did rather well, although the frequently dropped consonants and distorted vowels betrayed her humbler origins. She led Joseph out of the back door of the house and across a yard to a long, low, grey windowless building. Elsie stood before the door with her hand on the handle for a moment.

"Welcome to our most modern industrial factory, created by the enterprising and enlightened genius of our beloved benefactor, Mr. Nathaniel Snyder." With that, she curtsied in mock graciousness and opened the creaky wooden door. "Careful as you go in, now. It's not normally the gentry like yourself that use this way. We's take them in the front. But since you said you was wantin' to see--well, here you is."

Joseph stooped a little as he stepped through the low doorway. As he straightened himself he gasped inadvertently at the dismal atmosphere which greeted his senses. Immediately his mouth and nose were filled with a strange mixture of the acrid smell of coal smoke and the unpleasant tang of a chemical, which Joseph guessed to be sulphur. A deafening cacophony of clanging machinery, whirring wheels and whooshing steam engines filled his ears. It took a moment for his eyes to adjust themselves, as the long room was dimly lit by a few meagre lanterns hanging on the walls.

As his eyes came into focus, he began to make out rows and rows of children, their little grimy hands feeding long strains of cotton into the weaving looms run by the pounding steam engines.

Joseph coughed; the air was stale and unpleasant. Almost in a daze, he began to walk down the long rows of whirring looms. Tiny beady eyes peered up at him from blackened faces. He could hear childlike coughs and occasional snuffles. It seemed to be the filthiest place Joseph had ever seen. Low beams, bedecked with cobwebs, crossed the room at right angles, under which Joseph had to bend down to pass. As he did so, a large rat ran across the floor in front of him. Joseph started back in shock, while the little figures on either side of him continued their work in apparent disinterest.

At the end of one of the rows stood a scruffy, fierce-looking man. Joseph watched as one of the boys ahead of him slumped over and coughed, ceasing for a moment to feed the strains of cotton into the loom in front of him. The boy attempted pitifully to straighten himself and fumbled with the tangled skeins* in order to continue his work. Joseph turned to Elsie in disbelief.

“Aren't you impressed?” she said. “Come, let me show you the produce, in the front rooms.” She continued down a long room to a door at the end. It opened into another room as long as the first, but better lit and ventilated, and with a storefront side to the other end of it, which appeared to be closed at the moment.

“Here,” said Elsie, gesturing towards two long rows of neatly rolled cloth which lined the walls. “Some fine material for milord's and milady's clothes. Some silk for her gown perhaps. Some lace for her bonnet. Or perhaps some fine cotton for milord's shirt, so that he may be irresistibly handsome when he next takes milady to the ball.”

“From where are these children?” Joseph asked quietly, as a lump rose in his throat.

“Ah,” said Elsie, “these children are helped by our beloved Lord Snyder's generosity. When the rents increase, some of the poor tenants of the land he owns are unable to meet the payments. Mr. Snyder, in his kind charity, invites them to live in this delightful house and grants these children the right to earn a decent living in his factory here, earning the enormous sum of a sixpence per week. Of course, this being a charitable venture, Mr. Snyder is then able to deduct it from his taxes. Such a fine, business-minded saviour.”

Joseph boiled inwardly, but despite Elsie's obvious sarcasm, thought it wiser to suppress his feelings.

Joseph made his way back through the long rows of toiling children and at last stumbled back out into the crisp white snow. As he took a deep breath of the air, he realized even more fully how stale and unpleasant had been the atmosphere in that dreadful place. As he followed Elsie back to the house, Joseph reflected that he had never in his life seen any place that so closely resembled Hell.

For a while, he continued to question Elsie and briefly interviewed some of the other inhabitants of the poorhouse. Again and again he heard similar tales: families falling on hard times, unable to pay rent, falling deeper and deeper into debt, then receiving Snyder's so-called charity at the expense of their comfort and sometimes their very lives. Yet at no juncture could Joseph discern that Snyder had broken any law that he knew of. In fact, if reported simply on paper, his actions could be considered reasonable and in some cases indeed even charitable.

Dejected, Joseph left the poorhouse and returned to his carriage.

“Where to now, sir?” said Tom, eyeing his master anxiously. He could see Joseph's spirits were down.

“To the house of Mrs. Farrow,” he replied, “near the blacksmith.”

For the third time in less than a month Joseph found himself walking down the path towards the simple cottage door. But this time his knocks were met with no response from within. Finally in desperation he cried out,

“Mrs. Farrow? Mrs. Farrow, I have very good news for you from the publishers! They have accepted Edward's poems.”

Still there was no response.

Perhaps she has moved away, thought Joseph to himself sadly, as he turned and walked back towards the carriage. He was unaware of the pair of deep blue eyes that gazed at him wistfully through a tiny crack in the curtain.

The sun was now setting, as Joseph directed Tom to Reverend Miller's orphanage. As the carriage pulled up, Joseph could make out a dim figure in the twilight to the left of the house, who appeared to be chopping some wood. As he alighted from the coach, the man turned. Joseph immediately recognized him. “Reverend Miller!” he called out.

“Ah, Joseph,” replied Reverend Miller warmly. Laying down his axe and brushing some snow off of his coat, he came towards Joseph and warmly shook his hand. “Just chopping some wood for the evening fires,” he said. “I am done now.”

“Here, let me help you carry it in,” said Joseph.

Tom looked on once again with curious surprise as his unpredictable master held out his arms, received four large logs and proceeded to carry them into the house.

“Good evening, Mrs. Miller,” he called out as he entered the room.

“Good evening to you, Mr. Addington. And a happy new year, too,” came the cheery response.

“And what brings you up to Bishop's Green?” asked Reverend Miller, as he began stoking the fire.

"I came on business," said Joseph. "But I have a little something that I thought might be of assistance to your boys."

"Oh, what could it be this time?" gasped Mrs. Miller.

Within a few minutes Joseph and Tom came through the door carrying the large trunk. Once again, eager little eyes watched in anticipation.

"What is it, Mr. Addington?" piped up a tiny voice.

"We shall have to open it and see," replied Joseph playfully.

As he opened the lid of the trunk, a low cry of gratefulness left Mrs. Miller's lips, as she saw the piles of boys' clothes.

"Not exactly the latest fashions from London," said Joseph, "but I believe they will be of assistance."

Tiny hands began delving into the pile of clothes, but Mrs. Miller brushed them aside. "Hold your horses!" said Mrs. Miller. "There will be something for everyone."

And indeed there was. Mrs. Miller's capable and discerning hands immediately began distributing the items to each boy according to what she knew they most needed. There was enough for every boy to get at least two new articles, and some left over.

"For rainy days!" said Mrs. Miller with satisfaction as she closed the trunk.

"And perhaps next time," said Joseph, "some new dresses for the little girls. Unfortunately my wardrobe had none of that!"

"Mr. Addington, we are just about to sit down for supper. Would you and your coachman care to join us?" said Mrs. Miller graciously.

"Well, I daresay the company here is as fine as any in London," said Joseph. "And I'm sure Tom wouldn't mind the invitation."

The extra chairs were soon fetched and Joseph and Tom sat down with the Millers and their happy troupe of children.

Dinner was its usual jovial affair, though Reverend Miller couldn't help but notice that Joseph's mood was somewhat subdued in comparison to his previous visit. During the course of the conversation, Joseph inquired about Mrs. Chadwick's two sons.

"Well," said Reverend Miller, "we have a Sunday school service here every Sunday morning and the two boys would be most welcome to join us. Most welcome! Wouldn't they, children?" A chorus of approval ran around the table, ending with little Billy, who parroted the Reverend Miller's, "Yes, most welcome," sending a chorus of titters through the other children.

"The children are still talking about your Christmas visit, Mr. Addington," said Mrs. Miller. "I believe it was one of the most wonderful Christmases we have ever had."

"Likewise!" exclaimed Joseph.

After supper, Mrs. Miller busied herself with preparing the children for their bedtime, while Joseph asked quietly, "Reverend Miller, could I have a word with you in private?"

"Certainly, certainly," he replied. "Come into my study."

Together the two men walked into the reverend's simple study. Suddenly Joseph felt if he was in the presence of an intimate and long-trusted friend, even though this was only the second time they had met.

"What is it, Mr. Addington?" began Reverend Miller, his kindly eyes inviting Joseph's confidence.

"Please, Reverend, call me Joseph."

"Very well, then, Joseph. What is it about?"

"Reverend Miller, I find myself in a most perplexing and distressing situation." Without hesitation Joseph related to him the entire history of the past three weeks, including his experiences with Nathaniel Snyder, his success in finding a publisher for Edward's poems, and finally the letter he had received from Mary Farrow.

“Mrs. Farrow has not spoken to me of the matter,” said Reverend Miller after a pause. “But I do understand that she is going through a very difficult time, and not only because of her mourning for Edward. A woman who is expecting a child, particularly her first, experiences a broad spectrum of intense and often conflicting emotions, which are often as hard to be understood by the poor girl herself as the others around her. “

“Yes, yes,” Joseph replied thoughtfully. “But why, when I am trying so hard to do the right thing, do I find myself confronted by such obstructions and perplexities?”

“Well, my dear Joseph, do you think when you charge towards the Enemy of your soul in valiant fight, that he will passively yield, put down his sword and say, 'Well, well, I must be going now'?”

Joseph chuckled a little.

“Ah no, in my humble and limited experience, my dear Joseph, I have found that our times of greatest progress are also times of greatest struggle. These times also teach us that we cannot fight in our own strength, for our adversary is far too strong for us. We can only truly conquer him if we rely upon our Lord and Captain.”

“Perhaps that explains why I have been faced so often recently with such a peculiar sense of my own inadequacy. It is something I have never really experienced before.”

“That is because, Joseph, I perceive that you are beginning to work for a new employer, who has vastly different company regulations than your previous one.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, it seems to me like you have been following the call of the Man who called the fishers from their nets on the Sea of Galilee.”

“You mean *me*, working for God? But I am hardly a religious man. What use could God have for *me*?”

“God uses whatever we give Him to use, Mr. Addington. And you hardly need to be religious. The call of God can come to a man anywhere, if his heart is open to it. And then He will often use that same open heart to lead us in the direction He would have us go--as it seems to me He has been using yours, Mr. Addington.”

“Then why would He have me grope my way through a dark cavern?”

Reverend Miller smiled sympathetically. “Some of life's richest treasures are hidden in its darkest caverns.”

“Treasures.” Joseph paused momentarily. “Treasures. That reminds Reverend Miller--have you ever heard the phrase, 'The treasures of the snow?'"

“Yes, indeed! It's from the Bible, Book of Job--chapter thirty-nine, I believe ... or is it forty? Let me see now.” He opened the Bible that lay on the desk and flipped through it. “Ah, no--here it is, Job 38, verse 22: 'And hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow?'"

“I found this phrase written on an ink blotter in Edward's room when I went to collect his belongings--which, by the way, I have with me and I will give to you for Mrs. Farrow, as when I went to see her earlier, she appeared not to be at home. But do you know what Edward could have meant by this? Perhaps it was a poem that he was writing?”

“Yes, indeed it was,” replied Reverend Miller. He opened the top drawer of his desk and pulled out a letter. “I received this letter a few days after hearing the tragic news of Edward's passing. He had written it to me from London. It must have been sent just the day before he left. In it he enclosed a copy of what was to be, sadly, his last poem. I have not shown it to Mary yet, as I fear it may add to her grief--but when I read it, it seemed so strangely and almost eerily prophetic.” He glanced down at the piece of paper in his hand. “But perhaps you may find in it something to help you in your quest.”

“Reverend Miller, do you think I may copy it and add it to the collection? Without it, I feel it would not be complete.”

“By all means,” said Reverend Miller. “Here is pen and paper ... and while you copy it, please excuse me while I tend to the fire.”

Quickly Joseph copied down the words of the poem, folded it neatly and put it in his coat pocket.

Joseph rejoined Reverend Miller in the sitting room where he was tending the fire.

“Reverend Miller, thank you once again for your hospitality,” said Joseph, “and more so for your kindly words of good counsel.”

“Thank our dear Lord for them,” said Reverend Miller. “And you are always welcome to visit us.”

“Well, I see you must be about your business, and I must be getting back to my lodging for the night. But let me give you Edward's belongings to pass on to Mrs. Farrow.” Joseph signalled Tom to fetch the brown leather bag. “And do communicate with Mrs. Farrow the details which I related to you concerning the publishing. If I hear no other word by the 15th of January, I will proceed as planned.”

“Yes,” said Reverend Miller. “I will inform her.”

“Thank you again, kind sir,” said Joseph as he warmly gripped his arm.

“And may God be with you, Joseph,” said Reverend Miller, giving Joseph a warm and spontaneous embrace. The door next to the fireplace opened and little Billy padded out in his pyjamas, bed socks and a bed cap whose tassel reached almost to the floor.

“Good night, Mr. Paddington,” he said earnestly, accompanied by hisses and giggles from behind him, and he turned and shuffled back into the room, embarrassed.

The two men let out a hearty laugh.

“Ah, for the faith of little Billy,” said Reverend Miller

jovially, as he put his arm around Joseph's shoulders and escorted him to the door.

* * *

As Joseph's carriage travelled back towards Wayfarer's Inn, which had become his customary lodging place, Joseph felt considerably more encouraged.

What a rare and priceless privilege, he thought, to have a friend such as Reverend Miller with whom I can trust my deepest thoughts.

His mood being considerably improved, he ate a hearty supper, after which he retired to his room and proceeded with considerable relish and anticipation to study the poem he had copied. As he had so hastily written out the words, minding their accuracy more than their meaning, he had been looking forward to the opportunity of reading the poem more closely.

He sat down in a comfortable chair by the fire, drew a deep breath, and for a moment cast his thoughts Heavenward, feeling somehow that there was a truth to be culled from the words that he might miss if he was not careful.

"Dear God, please guide my thoughts," he prayed, and then read:

The Treasures of the Snow

*Oh man, that liftest up thy heart
And boasteth in thy way,
Dost thou know whose design thou art,
Who formed thee from the clay?
By whose word that first morning's dew
Did cause green herbs to grow?
And hast thou entered in unto
The treasures of the snow?*

*And canst thou tell whence falls the rain,
Who formed the frost and hail?
How grows the grass on yonder plain,
Where no man doth travail?
And where the Gypsy wind has been
And where it next shall blow?
And hast thou entered in and seen
The treasures of the snow?*

*And thou who reasons with surmise
And treats His Word with scorn,
Canst thou command the sun to rise
And cause the day to dawn?
And hast thou searched the sea's deep springs,
Their secrets do you know?
Canst thou explain such hidden things
As treasures of the snow?*

*Yet when thy errant ways are kissed
By white-clad flakes from Heaven,
And thou dost stumble in the mist
And to thy knees are driven;
Wilt thou not seek to understand
The lesson He would show,
And search out by His guiding hand
The treasures of the snow?*

*For when the night's bleak, fearsome storm
Doth to the morning yield,
And dancing sunbeams gently warm
The white-clad vale and field,
With radiance bright as angel's wings
All nature then doth glow,
And promise fresh awakenings
From treasures of the snow.*

*It is in mercy, not in wrath,
By plan, not skittish whim,
That He doth shroud your earthly path,
That you may search for Him.
To cover all thy scarlet sin,
His precious blood did flow.
Oh, seek His cleansing power within
The treasures of the snow.*

Joseph quietly laid the paper down. His thoughts seemed to turn into a prayer.

“Yes, I see it now,” he whispered, his hands folded tightly together. “I have struggled to do Your bidding. I have tried to help others in their desperation, yet I have not come to You and told You of my own desperate need. I have tried to help others, tried to cleanse others, yet I have not the strength to do so, for I have not let You cleanse *me*. I have never thought about what it meant when You died for me. Not just to cleanse the social ills of the world, but to set my soul free from sin. Oh, precious Saviour, blessed Jesus, come and dwell within my heart. Cleanse me and make me wholly Thine and grant me the honour of serving You with every day of the rest of my life.”

Joseph's tears burst forth, as it seemed his soul was flooded with an unearthly light. Suddenly he saw his past life, in all its ordered, indulgent self-satisfaction, as scarlet red sin. Not the sin of the drunkards, for those enticing with lustful temptations he had always studiously avoided, nor the sin of the avaricious Snyder and his cruel henchmen, which appalled him, but sin nevertheless--and perhaps for its subtlety, demanding more forgiveness. Almost in a trance, he watched as the pride, ambition, hardheartedness, and greed were washed by the precious blood of Jesus, and his rejuvenated spirit began to glisten with the radiance of freshly fallen snow.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

It was a new Joseph Addington that emerged from the inn the next morning. The heaviness of the past days' trials had vanished. His step was lighter, and his eyes clearer. He drew a deep breath of the bracing morning air as he stepped into the carriage.

"Tom," he called out, "there is one more errand we must run before returning to London. To Bishop's Green!"

As the carriage pulled up outside Mrs. Chadwick's house, Joseph saw the front door opening and two young boys come bounding out. "God's good time!" he smiled.

"Good morning, Henry and Sam," he called out.

The boys recognized him as the kind Mr. Addington who had helped them a few weeks earlier.

"And good mornin' to you, sir," they replied.

"And where might you be going?" inquired Joseph.

"Off to work, sir--runnin' errands."

"And how old are you, young Henry?" said Joseph to the older boy.

"Eight years, sir."

"And Sam?"

"I am five."

"And God bless the both of you."

"And does God care about a couple of little urchins like us?" asked Sam a little sadly.

"Who told you that you were urchins?" asked Joseph sternly.

"Mr. Biggins, the foreman at the workhouse. He was calling us names and such like. And why would Jesus care about a little boy like me?"

"Ah, but Jesus does care," said Joseph. "He cares more than you could ever know."

"I think He must be very angry with me," said Henry. "At the workhouse I called Tom a bad name and he hit me, so I

hit him back and he got a bruise. I think God is angry with us. That is probably why He lets us be poor.”

“Ah well,” Joseph said, “we have all made lots of mistakes.” As he spoke, a phrase came to him that he remembered from his own early days in church. He took Sam's and Henry's hands in his. They were stained red from the dye of the cotton factory. “Did you know that even when our sins are as red as the dye on your hands...” He knelt down and scooped up a handful of snow, spreading it over the boys' hands. “...that Jesus' forgiveness can make us white as snow?” Playfully he rubbed the snow into the boys' hands. They both giggled.

“You mean Jesus can help the likes of us?” asked Henry, giggling.

“Oh yes, He can. I'm sure He can.”

“I want Jesus to be my friend,” said Sam.

“And me, too!” said Henry.

“Then I'm sure you'll soon find out that He wants to be yours, too!” said Joseph.

“Thank you, Mr. Addington,” said Samuel. “I feel better already.”

“We better run,” said Henry, “or we will be late for work and miss our pay!”

“Well, how about this? How would you boys like to ride to work in a carriage today?”

The two boys' eyes widened. “A carriage?”

“Yes, climb up in there and wait while I just run and tell your mother something.”

Joseph ran to the door to greet Mrs. Chadwick, who had been observing the conversation smilingly.

“Good morning, Mr. Addington. What a pleasant surprise!” she said brightly.

“Ah, Mrs. Chadwick, I must run, for I have promised your two young sons a lift to Cobb's, but I wanted to tell you the good news that the Reverend Miller would love to have your

boys come to his Sunday school at the orphanage. You know where it is?"

Martha nodded.

"Ten o'clock Sunday morning, then. Reverend Miller and his wife will be expecting the boys."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Addington."

"And I believe your two boys are on the right road already."

"Mr. Addington," asked Henry meekly, as Joseph climbed up into the carriage, "do you think I may sit up beside the driver?"

"But of course, why not?--Tom!" he called out. "We have a little assistant for you."

Eagerly Henry scrambled up beside Tom.

"Can I hold one of the reins?" he asked eagerly.

"And what about you, Sam, would you like to sit up there?"

"No thank you, Mr. Addington. I think I'd like to ride with you inside the carriage."

And so they set off.

On the way, Joseph had a most interesting conversation with young Sam, whom he found, despite his somewhat tattered exterior, to be a very bright and promising young lad, even at five years of age.

"I believe that once you become good friends with Jesus, you could help Him do some really great things here," said Joseph at length.

"Really? Do you mean it?" said Samuel, as the carriage drew up outside Cobb's workshop.

"Yes, I do."

"I won't forget it," said Sam.

And so it was that for the first time in their life, Sam and Henry Chadwick rode to work in a carriage. Some other boys, on their way to work in the factory, watched in astonishment as Joseph climbed down, bowed and opened

the door for Sam, while Henry waved to them excitedly, holding the reins with his other hand.

“Goodbye, Mr. Addington ... and thank you,” said the boys as they dashed inside Cobb's shop.

“Goodbye, Sam! Goodbye, Henry!” called Joseph after them.

“Well, Tom--back to London it is.”

“And no more unexpected errands, Mr. Joseph?” said Tom with a half-grin.

“Well--none that I expect, at least,” said Joseph, laughing. So they set off.

* * *

By four thirty that afternoon, Joseph found himself once more in Mr. Crittingdon's office.

“Well, Mr. Addington,” said Mr. Crittingdon coolly, not looking up from the document on which he was writing.

“What vices and violations did your investigation uncover?”

“Vices plenty--violations, I am afraid none! Whilst I find Mr. Snyder's conduct to be ethically and morally reprehensible, I can find no legal grounds for prosecuting him.”

“It is just as I expected,” said Crittingdon. “I allowed you to go against my better judgment. Yet, in your stubbornness there was no way you would have been convinced but by seeing it for yourself.”

“Mr. Crittingdon, if your eyes could but behold some of the sights I have seen in the last two days--”

“I do not need to see with my eyes,” answered Crittingdon. “Documentary evidence is sufficient for me--and of that, you have provided me none.”

“I implore you, for the sake of the integrity of this company, that we forthwith discharge Mr. Snyder from our clientele.”

“Mr. Addington, your passionate outbursts give me no reason for doing so. If Nathaniel Snyder's actions are within

the law, it is--”

“It is because the law must change!” said Joseph emphatically. “It is almost as if Mr. Snyder is inventing a new form of oppression, bringing people into economic slavery and making merchandise of their souls. Children slaving their fingers to the bone for a pittance, with no concern for their welfare! Families thrust out of their homes into the freezing cold, without the slightest grain of mercy or human kindness, and all in the name of so-called charity.”

“That will be all, Mr. Addington,” replied Crittingdon coldly.

“Yes, sir, that will be all.” Joseph turned abruptly and walked from the office.

Joseph returned to his desk and sat there for at least an hour tapping his pen on his blotter and staring into space. Finally he took a fresh piece of writing paper and began with firm and definite strokes to write.

* * *

The next morning Joseph's responsibilities once more took him to the court. When he returned to the office in the early afternoon, he noticed an unfamiliar but extravagant-looking coach parked outside. As he ascended the steps, he wondered whose it might be.

In Crittingdon's office, Nathaniel Snyder was pacing back and forth in agitation.

“We must take action against this upstart lawyer whose interference threatens not only to hamper the progress of our enterprises, but also to disrupt the operations of the charitable institutions under my patronage. I am sure with your influence in the legal community, Mr. Crittingdon, you could put a stop to all this nonsense. The latest I hear is this Addlesworth or whatever his name is, has been snooping around my factory, asking all sorts of nosy and impertinent questions.”

“Oh, really?” replied Crittingdon, his eyebrows raised.

As Joseph entered the office, Mr. Crittingdon's secretary greeted him. “Mr. Crittingdon would like to see you in his office right away, sir!”

“I will be with him in a moment,” said Joseph, going first to his own desk. As he entered Crittingdon's office, he froze as Nathaniel Snyder turned and looked at him with a mixture of shock and anger.

“There he is!” Snyder exclaimed.

“Who?” said Crittingdon.

“Addlesworth or whatever he calls himself. That's the man! The attorney representing Samuel Chadwick--and snooping around my factories like some detective.”

“Is this true, Mr. Addington?” demanded Crittingdon sternly. “Have you been so presumptuous as to represent the interests of my client's tenants without my consent or foreknowledge--as an attorney, no less?”

“Yes, it is true,” said Joseph firmly. “And in all respects, they have made me their attorney by depending upon me to uphold their legal interests, which I will continue to do, for I will not stand by and see the rights of the innocent trampled upon by tyrants such as this.”

“Then by your own admission, I have no recourse but to immediately dismiss you from the employ of our office.”

“You cannot do so, sir!” said Joseph emphatically.

“I cannot?” thundered Crittingdon.

“No, sir, for I have already resigned.” So saying, Joseph took the neatly inscribed paper and slapped it down on the desk in front of Mr. Crittingdon.

“I will see it to that you will never practice law in this city again. Your career is ended, Addington!” Crittingdon's voice was uncharacteristically raised.

“If to practice law in this city means to support and condone the inhumane actions of men such as this,” said Joseph, gesturing towards the fuming Snyder, “I have no

desire to continue in this profession.” He turned curtly and marched out of the office.

Snyder was next. “If this is the kind of double-crossing your firm engages in, sir, I am taking my business elsewhere.” With that, he also stormed out, leaving Mr. Crittingdon with his mouth hanging open, for once unable to formulate an appropriate response.

Slowly his eyes fell to the paper on the desk in front of him.

Dear Mr. Crittingdon,

Sir, I once respected you--yea, well near worshipped you, as one of the most brilliant legal minds in our country. I wanted nothing more than to follow in your footsteps, to emulate your career and to attain to your brilliance in court.

But, today, having witnessed your adherence to the jot and tittle of the law, and your ignorance of mercy and compassion, which the Holy Scripture calls the heart of the law, I tell you plainly, sir, there is nothing I want less.

I do hereby turn in my resignation, to be effective forthwith.

Yours sincerely and with not a little sorrow,

Joseph Addington

* * *

“Though winter wind, it sadly blows, cheer up and have a cup with Rose,” came a familiar voice.

“Hmm, positively Shakespearean,” said Joseph, as Rosey entered the room with her tray.

“I like a bit of Shakespeare, I do,” said Rosey. “I have been to see his plays, you know.”

“Rosey, you are full of surprises!” said Joseph. “And how you manage to come up with a new couplet every day never ceases to amaze me. I shall miss them.”

"But Mr. Addington, what are you saying? Where are you going?" she asked in consternation, as she now observed Joseph packing up his belongings.

"Rosey, I regret to inform you that I am leaving."

"Leaving? On another trip?"

"No, Rosey--I am quitting the company!"

"Quitting the company? Oh dear! Was there a falling out between you and Mr. Crittingdon?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes!" said Joseph.

"Oh, Mr. Joseph, I shall miss you sadly."

"And Rosey, I do believe you are one of the things about this company that I shall miss the most."

"Oh, do you mean that, sir?" Rosey asked, her eyes a little moist.

"Yes, I do," said Joseph tenderly, "with all my heart. But Rosey, could you do me one last favour? Can you inform me of Mr. Clancy's address?--For I feel compelled to inform him also of my resignation."

"Well, Mr. Joseph, I do believe I can. I used to go there quite often in the early days, what with the catering and all of that. He lives in a big white house on Eastborne Road. If I remember correctly, it's number 14. You can't really miss it. Go to him, Mr. Addington--he is a good friend in time of need."

"And so are you, dear Rosey, and so are you!" Unable to restrain himself, Joseph placed his hands tenderly on Rosey's shoulder and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

"Oh, Mister Joseph, I shall remember you till the end of my days!" she said. With a sigh she picked up her tray and intoned as she left the room,

"Wherever in the world you goes, you're always welcome for tea with Rose."

Joseph smiled as a tear formed in his eye. He *would* miss cosy Rosey.

With a sigh he packed the last of his belongings, walked out of the office and closed the door behind him for the last time. But as he walked down the old building's cracking stone steps and hailed a carriage, his nostalgia gave way to a surge of elation.

He felt strangely free, as if the career that he had once so assiduously pursued had been his bondage, from which he was now set free. He experienced a sudden uncanny affinity with those humble fishermen of Galilee some eighteen-and-a-half centuries earlier, who heard the voice of a Stranger, yet a voice they knew so well, calling them to follow Him. Follow where, they knew not, but follow they knew they must.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

As the carriage wended its way through the busy London streets towards his apartment, Joseph laughed out loud, rejoicing with a peculiar sort of exuberance that he had absolutely no idea of what he was going to do next.

Upon arriving at his apartments, Joseph's first action was to dispatch letters to the Reverend Miller, the publishers and Mary Farrow advising them of his change of address.

To Mary Farrow he wrote the following:

Dear Mrs. Farrow,

It was with some sorrow that I received your letter informing me of your desire to sever all contact between us. I will respect your wishes, although I do not fully understand the reasons for them, nor do I hope to, for as you yourself said, they were known only to you.

However, I do wish to beg your forgiveness for any impropriety or forwardness on my part, which may have caused you distress or agitation. Please accept my apology for any such untoward action. If at any time in the future you should wish to contact me, please do so at my apartments in London, rather than the company on my card. I remain your humble servant,

Joseph Addington

Joseph sealed the letters and gave them to James to dispatch in the post. He then retired to his study. Joseph paced back and forth before the fireplace in his study for quite some time, carefully considering his next move.

He concluded at length that this was not the time for hasty action. There had been plenty of that, and Joseph felt very unsure about what to do next. He knew he must act; there were many things that pressed upon him and demanded his attention. But a certain instinct within him told him that it

would be wiser to spend time in quiet contemplation, grasping the significance of the tremendous change that had taken place within him and seeking Divine guidance for his next move.

Having resolved thus, he took his Bible from the bookshelf where it had sat for many years, barely opened since the day of his confirmation. Pulling an armchair near to the fire he sat down, opened the book and began to read.

Hours passed and on he read. At six, James brought his supper. Joseph thanked him, dismissed him and read on. Till late in the night he read. The next morning he awoke and read. Days passed and on he read. Every page, every verse, every word seemed to come alive to him, as light flooded into his soul. Verses, phrases he had long heard, but never fully understood, seemed to take on a new meaning.

There were other things that perplexed him, caused him to thirst for more understanding; still on he read. Questions arose; some were answered, and some were not. He began to long that one should teach him, someone such as Reverend Miller, who he knew not only purported to be a Christian, but lived as Christ taught. Still on he read.

For seven long days and nights Joseph did nothing but read, only pausing to take a stroll in the crisp afternoon air from time to time or for a bite to eat. He felt as if he were a seed planted in the earth, soaking up rain, sunlight and nutrients from the soil, preparing to spring forth--into what, he knew not, that was not his concern. He now merely needed to absorb.

On the eighth day, a letter arrived from Reverend Miller, and Joseph knew that it was once again time to act.

Dear Joseph,

I trust that you are well and abiding in God's blessings. I have met with Mary Farrow and she has given her consent to having the poems published, as has been proposed, and gives you leave to continue to manage the business as you originally proposed.

If you are soon intending to travel to these parts on business, I would like to speak with you on a matter of considerable gravity concerning Mr. Snyder and his most recent enterprises.

With love in Christ,

Reverend Miller

Joseph laid down the letter and as was becoming more of a habit with him, bowed his head in a moment of silent prayer.

"It seems," he said to himself, "that my next course of action is stipulated right here in this letter. First I must visit the publisher and then return to Bishop's Green."

Thus it was that that very afternoon, Joseph visited Mr. Willard's office.

"Mr. Addington, I trust that your year is treating you kindly," Willard began jovially.

"As kindly as any new year I have yet experienced," he responded. "Due in part to your decision, Mr. Willard, to accept Mr. Farrow's poetry for publication."

"So, Mr. Addington, I take it that you are pleased with my offer."

"Yes, I am pleased, but not half as pleased as I would be if you were offering two-hundred pounds per volume and forty percent of the royalties."

"Ah," Mr. Willard replied. "I half-expected such a counter proposal. Let's see. Perhaps I should meet you half way. One hundred-and-fifty pounds per volume and thirty percent of the royalties--and in that at least, Mr. Addington, you may

be three-quarters pleased.”

Joseph thought for a moment, “Three-quarters pleased is pleased enough for me,” he replied. “Done!”

The two men shook hands.

“I will have my secretary draw up the contract,” said Mr. Willard, “and if there is no further impediment, we shall sign today.”

“There is one more small matter,” said Joseph. “I was able to obtain one more poem which I believe is Mr. Farrow's last and I should like to recommend it for inclusion in the second volume. I believe indeed that it would be a worthy title.”

“May I see it?”

“Here it is,” said Joseph, handing him the poem.

“Let me see, 'Treasures of the Snow'--yes, yes, interesting.”

“It is from the Bible,” said Joseph.

“Ah yes,” replied Mr. Willard, “a Biblical passage to attract the devout, yet picturesque enough to interest the aesthetic--mysterious enough to entrance the mystic, yet not dogmatic enough to drive away the as-yet unconverted. A worthy title indeed!”

Without further ado, Mr. Willard instructed his secretary to prepare the papers for signing, which being completed, the two signed and Joseph took his leave.

* * *

Without much difficulty Joseph found his way to his next destination, which was Mr. Clancy's house. The elegant white brick mansion was just as Rosey had described it. Upon ringing the doorbell, Joseph was ushered into a comfortable sitting room. Within five minutes Mr. Clancy joined him.

“My dear Joseph!” he began warmly. “To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit?”

“Mr. Clancy,” began Joseph, “I took the liberty of obtaining your address from an employee at the company. I hope this is not an intrusion.”

“My dear goodness, no!” replied Mr. Clancy warmly. “I always welcome a visitor like yourself, who penetrates my rather quiet existence with a ray of brightness.”

Joseph smiled modestly. “I’m afraid perhaps my visit will not bring the gladdest of tidings.”

“Oh?” Mr. Clancy’s eyebrows were raised.

“It is my unfortunate duty to inform you that I will no longer be employed at the company.”

“Oh, I see. This is an unexpected turn of events.”

“Yes,” said Joseph. “I took it upon myself to resign, as there were certain things that I...” He paused, struggling for the words to express himself. “...could no longer countenance. Although I greatly respect Mr. Crittingdon’s abilities as a lawyer and a man of business, yet I found that in all good conscience, I was unable to reconcile the nature of some of his clientele with my personal convictions.”

“I see. And what of your career--of your future?”

Joseph hesitated again, as one who stands on the bank of a river preparing to plunge himself into its uncertain depths. Something within him urged him to go on, that Mr. Clancy would understand.

“Certain events have taken place in my life over the last months that have totally altered the way in which I see my own life, and have made living according to my convictions much more important than pursuing my career.”

“I understand,” said Clancy. “Please go on.”

Thereupon Joseph related the entire history of his meeting with Edward, his experiences with Mr. Snyder, his observance of pitiful conditions in Bishop’s Green, culminating in his final falling out with Mr. Crittingdon. Then, somewhat more gingerly, but with increasing effusiveness, he began to explain about his newfound faith and his desire to serve God and his fellowman.

“And I find within myself,” he concluded, “an ever-increasing desire to travel to Bishop's Green and in some ways help these poor recipients of Mr. Snyder's injustice.”

Mr. Clancy was silent for a moment and then sighed deeply. When he spoke it was with unaccustomed gravity.

“Ah! If I had but come to such realizations as this when I was young and strong as you are, I might well have found myself pursuing such a noble venture. It is a high calling indeed, Joseph, and I wish you the best of success. Were I younger and stronger I would happily offer my services to help you in your mission. As it is I spend many of my days in solitude and quiet contemplation of divine themes, and I shall with all my heart offer up prayers for your success.”

Joseph smiled at the gentle old man's humility.

“Thank you kindly, Mr. Clancy!” He hesitated once more before continuing. “There is one more matter about which I would like to ask your counsel.”

“Yes?”

“Concerning Mr. Crittingdon ... if there was only some way that we could help him to understand, help him to see the reality of Snyder's perfidy, but more--to apprehend the virtue of human kindness. He seems to be hardened and embittered by troublesome events that have taken place in his life and wants to leave no room for mercy, compassion and goodness. If only there were some way we could reach him, for I'm sure somewhere beneath the hard shell there lies some softness.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mr. Clancy. “I have long wished for such a realization to come to old Crittingdon, but these things are sometimes not learned from anyone but Lady Experience and her bitter lessons. Let me give it some thought and meditate on whether there is anything that we can do-- although in such cases, I believe as you yourself have experienced, the efforts of us mere men are nothing when matched with the power of the Almighty to alter lives.”

“Yes, that is true,” said Joseph. “But if He requires a helping hand, we should be ready to give it.”

“Point well taken,” said Mr. Clancy. “I will give the matter some thought and contact you further about it. Now, let me see ... do you have an address in Bishop's Green where you can be contacted?”

“Yes, I do.” Quickly Joseph wrote out the Millers' address on a card and gave it to Mr. Clancy. “This is the address of a dear friend, the Reverend Miller, of whom I spoke. If I secure a more permanent address, I shall let you know forthwith.”

“Thank you, my dear Joseph, and if you visit London, please come and see me. I'm greatly interested to see how you fare with your mission. If troubles come, as I expect they will, keep your chin up.”

That I will, sir. That I will!” said Joseph cheerily, and took his leave.

* * *

Joseph was much encouraged by Mr. Clancy's understanding and moral support for his mission. Such affirmation from a man he admired and trusted strengthened his resolve to follow that which he already believed to be the right course, which was to conclude his business as swiftly as possible and set off for Bishop's Green the following day.

He immediately proceeded to the chambers of his broker where he sold some of his stocks and investments, which resulted in the tidy sum of four hundred pounds. Other investments would not mature until later in the year and could not be liquidated yet. Joseph was determined to follow his Master and give all to the poor, but he also reasoned that God may have had some purpose in allowing there to be some further material assistance waiting for him at a later date, and thus at this stage felt no compunction about still being in possession of some worldly goods.

As Joseph approached his home, another matter occupied his thoughts--that of his servant James. Little has been spoken of James so far, apart from the fact he was always there when Joseph needed him, cheerfully and unassumingly dispatching his duties. It is this very self-effacing quality that has made James' role in the story so far seem somewhat insignificant.

Herein the reader, if he searches, will find a lesson. Many souls who toil faithfully and diligently, unrewarded by man for their painstaking labours, may be laying the foundation for suddenly blossoming into fruitfulness in their later years of life. Many whom we deem insignificant may be as seeds lying in barren ground, waiting for the refreshing rain of opportunity to fall so that they may bloom, or as dry fruit trees waiting for the pruning so that they may, in their latter seasons, bring forth much fruit for their husbandman.

Joseph had no idea how James would react to the news of his quitting the firm. James obviously knew that something unusual had taken place, as he had observed Joseph's week of quiet meditation and study, but to this point Joseph had never spoken with James deeply concerning his spiritual rebirth. Joseph knew, however, that the time had come that he must broach the subject. No longer having a regular source of income, he could henceforth not afford to keep James in his employ.

By the time he entered the front door of his apartments, Joseph had resolved that he should sit down with James and explain the whole matter to him fully and clearly, leaving the results, as it were, in the hands of God.

"James," he began, after he had finally constrained a reluctant James to sit opposite him in the drawing room--an act which contravened all conventions pertaining to the conduct of a gentleman's gentleman.

"James, I have some interesting news for you."

"Yes, Mr. Joseph." James' eyebrows were gently raised.

“In the last week you cannot have avoided noticing a considerable change in my behaviour.”

“That is true,” replied James, coughing apologetically.

“As you may know already, James, I am no longer in the service of my former employer.”

“Oh?” responded James politely, as if it were a surprise, although both knew that it was not.

“I have now decided to take up employment with a new employer.”

“Oh, really?” James' interest was more genuine this time.

“My new employer's conditions are quite different from the old one, and His service is I believe much more rewarding--although I must say, I believe it to be much less predictable. In fact, I will be employed without a fixed salary.”

“Oh!” James' obvious interest turned to discernible, though well-suppressed consternation.

“However, He has given me His Word, and I have every reason to trust it, that He will take very good care of all my affairs as I faithfully carry out the tasks He has entrusted to me.”

“Oh?” replied James, his concerned look turning to a quizzical one.

“I suppose you are now wondering about the identity of my new employer?”

Again James cleared his throat politely. “Indeed, sir, I was.”

“Well, believe it or not, the One Who has called me into His employ is none other than my dear Saviour, Jesus Christ!”

“Oh!” This time James' exclamation was one of genuine surprise.

Joseph wondered that the word “oh” could take on so many different meanings in the space of a few minutes.

“James, let me speak frankly,” continued Joseph. “You have been a faithful and good servant and almost a part of

my family, serving first my father--God bless his soul--and then me. It would give me great pain to release you from my service, however I must be honest and inform you that because of the decision I have made I will no longer be receiving a regular wage. I have committed myself to trust God to supply my needs. Although I realize this puts you in a difficult position, I truly believe that I cannot do otherwise.

“So, dear James, I offer you a choice. I will keep you in my employ for one more month after which I will release you to look for work elsewhere with the highest recommendations, and I will give you three months' pay. Or, if you choose to continue with me without pay, I should be happy to count on your company as a friend, and fellow labourer. Together we would serve our commission and do all that we can to help others, trusting in our new Master's benevolence and goodness to supply all we need.”

James drew a deep breath.

Joseph looked intently at him, carefully scrutinizing his reaction.

A smile began to play around the corners of James' mouth. After a long silence he spoke, and his words seemed to Joseph as music bursting forth from an instrument that had long lain silent, or as waters issuing forth from a deep spring that had long been covered with earth.

“Mr. Addington, for many long years I have loved and worshipped my dear Jesus, and in my secret prayers I have besought Him for a chance to serve Him in some capacity.” A tear began to trickle down the wrinkled cheek. “I had thought perhaps upon my retirement I should take up a lay position in a church, or some such thing. But your offer today, Mr. Addington, has brought my dreams to life sooner than I could have expected. I tell you truly, sir--there is nothing I would desire more than to serve my precious Lord together with you in whatever way His Divine Providence leads us!”

This time it was Joseph's turn to shed a tear, as he marvelled at James' humility and faith.

"There is one more person I need to consult," said James.

"Oh?" inquired Joseph.

"Yes, my wife Betty. We never make any decisions without conferring together first," he said, "and I feel certain Betty will want to hear of this one. As you know she is employed as a cook for a wealthy household nearby. We have at times in our conversations talked of such matters, and I do believe that my Betty may feel the same as I do. However, let me see what she shall say."

"So be it," said Joseph. "That being said, I must inform you of the timeliness of my plans. I have decided to remove myself to Bishop's Green tomorrow morning."

"It is well," said James. "I will discuss the matter this very evening. Whatever our decision, I shall still accompany you, whether it be for the month of my remaining employ, or as our Lord wills, indefinitely."

"Thank you, my dear James," said Joseph.

"And thank you, Mr. Addington, for giving me a chance to fulfil the secret desire of my heart!"

"Well, I'd best let you be getting on home," said Joseph, "as whatever the outcome you will have much to prepare."

"Aye, that I will," said James. "Your supper is already on the table, sir."

"Please, James, from this day on you no longer need to call me 'sir,' for regardless of your decision, you are no longer my servant, and I am no longer your master."

"This may take some getting used to, sir," James said with some hesitation.

Joseph laughed heartily. "Begone from my presence!" he said with mock sternness. "See that you report tomorrow no later than nine o'clock."

James' face fell before he realized the joke. Then his benign features broke into a smile, and as he stood up to

leave, Joseph impulsively stood also and threw his arms around James in a hearty embrace.

“God bless you, my dear friend!”

“God bless you too, sir ... er, my friend, er ... Mr. Joseph...”

* * *

Joseph spent the remainder of the evening packing as few items as he possibly could, as well as tossing large numbers of unneeded items into a chest, which he thought to deliver to the orphanage at his earliest convenience.

He was relieved and not a little amazed at his conversation with James, and very grateful that he would have a companion to assist him on what he guessed would be a formidable task. In fact, he was not even sure what the task would entail, and had at that moment no idea how to proceed. He trusted however that God's wisdom and Reverend Miller's wise counsel would help show the way.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

If Joseph had been pleasantly surprised at James' response to his decision, the next morning's events exceeded all his expectations. At precisely a quarter to nine, as Joseph was concluding the final preparations for his departure in his study downstairs, he heard excited chattering outside the front gate. Looking out the study window, he saw James carrying a large case accompanied by his wife Betty, who carried a large picnic basket covered by a wide chequered cloth.

Joseph arose and greeted them in the hallway. He had met Betty previously on several occasions and remembered her as a plump and pleasant middle-aged woman, who always seemed to have a cheerful word to say. Today, however, she literally bubbled over with enthusiasm, and before James or Joseph had a chance to open their mouths, she exclaimed effusively: "Mr. Addington! My James and I have had the night of our lives! Why, we stayed up 'til all hours talking about your most exciting proposal! When James asked if I would give my consent to his accompanying you on your mission, I said I'll do more than that--I'll come along too! Oh, Mr. Addington, you don't know how much I've prayed for this day. When I was a little girl I wanted to be a missionary, you know, but the likes of me with not much education--well, I thought I'd never have much chance. But here it comes along, and well, it's not exactly India or Africa, but it is Bishop's Green, and a good few miles from London, my James tells me."

"Ah, and what of your other employment, Betty?" asked Joseph, surprised.

"In all her enthusiasm," said James, "she omitted to mention that she must still fulfil her obligations to her employer, which means giving one month's notice."

“But I'm going to give my notice in this very day,” exclaimed Betty with all jubilation. “Now you two boys go ahead and get started, and one month from now James can come and fetch me. Just as well our Abel and Charity are grown up and married now. Won't they be surprised when they find out about the adventure their dear parents are about to embark upon? Now,” she said matter-of-factly, as she handed the picnic basket to Joseph, “I've cooked you boys some food for a day or two. There's steak and kidney pie and a bread pudding and a cheese and some freshly baked buns for your trip.”

“Why, thank you, Betty,” answered Joseph. “My mouth is already watering.”

“Now I'd best be getting along or I'll be late for work. God bless you my dear one, and Godspeed.”

She gave James a tender kiss on the cheek, “And you too, Mr. Addington. May God grant you every success with your endeavour.” Warmly she squeezed his hand before bustling off down the garden path.

Joseph shook his head in amazement. “I marvel at our dear Lord's foresight and planning. Undoubtedly your and Betty's many practical skills will be an invaluable asset to us in our endeavours, whatever they may turn out to be.”

“Aye, Betty's for certain.”

* * *

With that the two men set about completing the preparations before departure. Within the hour their carriage was winding its way northward through London's cobbled streets. It was nearly nightfall as the carriage pulled up outside the Wayfarer's Inn. The innkeeper greeted Joseph and James with customary warmth, but informed them that the inn was full.

“I'm so sorry,” he said apologetically. “If I'd have known you were coming I would have reserved you a room. There

are other inns in the town that you might try, such as the Barmaid's Arms opposite the green."

"Ah yes," said Joseph, "I've seen it. Well, thank you anyway."

As the heavy oak door closed behind them, Joseph said to James, "Well, perhaps it's for the better--we'll be right in the centre of the town and perhaps more easily able to conduct our business."

The Barmaid's Arms, as it turned out, did have a free room, which Joseph and James took with relish, being quite tired from their journey. Having placed their valuables in the room, they proceeded down to the inn's dining room, hoping to partake of some supper.

Joseph immediately sensed that the inn was of a lower class than the Wayfarer's Inn, a fact that he communicated immediately to James. Nevertheless the two of them unobtrusively took their place at a table and began to survey the scene around them.

Joseph noticed two slovenly, uncouth fellows at the table behind him. He could overhear snatches of their conversation and thought he heard the word "Snyder." He was straining to catch more when a buxom serving maid bounced saucily up to the table.

"And what can I interest you two gentlemen in?" she asked, fluttering her gaudily painted eyelids. James cleared his throat apprehensively.

"Uh ... two mugs of ginger beer for now," said Joseph.

"And would that be all?"

"Yes, that will be all," said Joseph definitely.

"This appears to be," whispered James, as she minced away, "an institution of questionable character."

"Listen, James," said Joseph, "we must try to hear what those two men behind us are saying."

As Joseph and James listened while pretending to be engrossed in some papers Joseph had pulled out of his

valise, they began to hear more of what was transpiring.

"It won't be long now, Ned, me boy," said one of them, "before I 'as me own 'ouse. Mr. Snyder promised me, 'e did."

"And me too," said the other one, "once I get rid of some tenants for 'im."

"I'll be living like a king, I will," snickered the first. "'Tis a fine 'ouse I'm lookin' at."

"And what of that?" replied the second. "He's promised me me own serving wench, you know, for cookin' and household duties and such. Ha!"

"And then there'll be no more nights for us in the Barmaid's Arms!"

The two collapsed into a sickening burst of laughter.

Just then the barmaid arrived with the two mugs of ginger ale.

"That'll be sixpence, good sirs," she said, "and for six shillin's you can 'ave a whole lot more!"

"That won't be necessary," said Joseph curtly, putting a sixpence on the table.

"Oh, we have offended the gentlemen, 'ave we?" she jeered as she snatched up the sixpence, turned and walked haughtily away.

"So this is how Snyder rewards his servants!" breathed Joseph. "James, I don't fancy the company, and I suspect the food will be little better. I suggest we take our ale to our room and turn our attentions instead to your dear Betty's steak and kidney pie!"

"I couldn't agree more!" said James, heaving a sigh of relief.

Without further ado, the two men went to their room. James stoked a fire in the grate, whilst Joseph lit some candles and pulled out his Bible.

"And I propose that while we consume food of the body, that we also feed our spirits, by reading from the Good Word. For I perceive we are going to need strength for the

battle in more ways than one. As we have already witnessed tonight, Snyder's agents seem to be all around us, and it will take more skill than we possess to outwit him."

"Aye, so it is," agreed James.

Hungrily the two men devoured the delicious steak and kidney pie, and equally as hungrily devoured the Word, which they took turns reading from the Good Book. Joseph read from Luke chapter seven, the story of the fallen woman who came to Jesus and washed His feet with her tears.

James concluded by reading First Corinthians chapter thirteen. "And the greatest of these is love." James paused, then continued with a twinkle in his eye, "Perhaps, if we can't defeat Mr. Snyder by law, we shall have to defeat him by love!"

"Hmm," mused Joseph thoughtfully, "and precisely what do you mean by that, James?"

"Well, I don't exactly know," said James hesitantly. "It just seemed like the right thing to say!"

"And may our good Lord in His mercy prove you right! And dear Lord forgive us if we passed too hasty a judgment on that poor serving wench--doubtless not too unlike the ones You came and loved while You were on Earth."

At that, the two men knelt and prayed a sincere prayer together and turned in for the night.

* * *

The following morning, James and Joseph awoke early and ate a hearty breakfast in the inn's sitting room. Joseph gave the surprised serving maid a generous tip, accompanied by words of appreciation for her service and a prayer for the good Lord to bless her life.

Upon completion of their repast, the two went straightaway to the orphanage, where the Millers welcomed them with customary warmth.

"This is James Hedgeworth, my dear friend and associate."

“Very pleased to make your acquaintance,” said the reverend, shaking James' hand warmly. “Any friend of Mr. Addington's is a friend of mine!”

Soon the three men were seated in Reverend Miller's study. Joseph recounted the last evening's experience at the Barmaid's Arms.

“Yes, this is the grave matter of which I wrote to you in my letter. It seems that, if unchecked, Mr. Snyder plans to utterly unhouse our village whilst himself maintaining an image of respectability and lawfulness. He has already seen to it that the only vicarage we had in Bishop's Green was removed a good deal hence--for a handsome price to someone, I am sure. He will not have God or anyone else interfering in his affairs if he can help it. And then he seems to delight in corrupting others with all manner of licentiousness, as if he imagines that their moral blindness gives him more power over them.”

“Yes,” said Joseph. “That certainly seems to be the case. So we must formulate a strategy. It is indeed for this purpose that I have come here, if it so be that the Lord will see fit to use me with whatever humble abilities I have to counter this perfidy.”

“But first,” said the reverend, “let us do as is our custom and seek our Lord's guidance. It is as certain as the fact that He is all competent, that in our own strength--or rather, weakness--we shall not prevail.”

The three men bowed their heads as Reverend Miller prayed an impassioned plea for the Lord's strength and guidance in their counsels. After a respectful silence, Reverend Miller spoke.

“The phrase came to me, 'Thou shalt prepare a place of deliverance for the captives.' But what could that mean?”

“I believe I might know,” said Joseph, “as while we prayed I recalled wise words spoken by my companion last night, that it is by acts of charity and not by legal strategies

that we shall somehow conquer this evil. As we prayed, the words formed in my mind 'Bishop's Green Refuge for Dispossessed Persons.' I believe the Lord wants us to establish a place where we can take in displaced persons, and thereby defeat Snyder's wicked plans!"

"And James?" prompted the reverend.

"Well, I cannot say that I heard so much as any words, but the impression was laid upon my heart that we must act quickly."

"Ah, that reminds me," said Reverend Miller, "speaking of premises, there is a large house on the edge of the town that Mr. Snyder has no power over. It belongs to a Christian gentleman friend of mine, a certain Mr. Biggs, one whose integrity I trust implicitly, and who has doggedly refused to sell to Mr. Snyder or any of his associates, though it currently stands empty. He's oft asked me whether I had any interest in buying his house, though of course such a purchase was always well beyond my means."

"But," Joseph interjected, "what if the Lord has seen fit to provide a certain sum for such an investment?"

"Then I propose," said Reverend Miller, "that we arrange to meet Mr. Biggs this very day, and see what we shall see."

* * *

It was not too late on that same day that Joseph, James and Reverend Miller stood outside a three-story house, with its owner Mr. Biggs. He was a distinguished yet affable man, who listened with respect as Joseph described his vision of helping the unfortunates of Bishop's Green.

"Then let's take a look around," he said, producing a large key from his pocket, and opening the front door. The house, not having been inhabited for quite some years, was very dusty and in need of a number of repairs, but overall Joseph could see it was in good condition and would be very suitable for their needs.

At a convenient moment he took James aside and asked for his expert counsel.

"There is some work to be done," said James, "but that is likely to be the case with any house we move into. But I'm sure it is within our capabilities."

"Well," said Joseph, turning to Mr. Biggs, "it seems admirably suited to our needs. Shall we get down to brass tacks?"

"Brass tacks indeed," said Mr. Biggs congenially. "My initial hope was to sell in the region of five to six hundred pounds."

Joseph fidgeted a little.

"But understanding the altruistic nature of your mission, I would be prepared to come down a little--shall we say four hundred?"

"I will be honest with you, Mr. Biggs," replied Joseph. "At present, four hundred pounds is all I possess. As you can see, the house would need considerable work before it can receive inhabitants, and we will initially need to pay the upkeep out of our own pockets. Do you think you could be persuaded to come down to three?"

Mr. Biggs paused, looking around at the sitting room in which they were standing as if once again weighing up its value. Finally he looked Joseph squarely in the eyes.

"I admire your dedication, young man, and I will go one up on you. Two hundred and fifty!"

"Done!" exclaimed Joseph joyfully as he grasped the man's hand.

"Then here, sirs, are the keys," said Mr. Biggs handing the rust-stained key ring to Joseph. "Welcome to your new home! And if you should need my assistance in the future, please don't hesitate to ask. It's high time someone did something to help these poor folk--and to check Mr. Snyder before he gets his evil clutches on all of us!"

After agreeing with Joseph that he would come the following day to sign the ownership papers and receive the payment, Mr. Biggs excused himself. Reverend Miller also excused himself, as he had to get back to his children, leaving James and Joseph standing alone in the sitting room of their newly acquired house, looking at each other incredulously.

“Your 'new employer' has certainly stayed true to His word!” said James.

“Aye, that He has! And I propose that without delay we go and fetch our belongings from that dreadful Barmaid's Arms and move ourselves into this delightful house that the Lord has provided!”

“I agree!” said James heartily.

Thus it was that James and Joseph spent their first evening in their new premises. The ground floor had a large sitting room and another drawing room, as well as a study, and a library; all of which, Joseph could see, would come in very handy. There were numerous bedrooms on the first and second floors, and James and Joseph chose adjacent rooms on the third floor. Joseph chose the simpler and smaller for himself, as James would need the larger one for Betty when she moved in. The house was equipped with central heating from a large boiler in the basement, but it was unusable, being badly rusted.

“One of our first tasks,” said Joseph, “will be to get this old boiler replaced!”

“That could be costly,” observed James. “Perhaps for the meantime we should use the fireplaces--though I believe these chimneys are due for a good cleaning themselves.”

That night the two pilgrims dined on the last remnants of Betty's cooking. Joseph went to bed tired, cold and a little hungry, but as he curled up under a musty quilt that covered a dusty mattress on a creaking bed, Joseph felt a quiet peace, which seemed to only beautify his humble surroundings.

The next morning the two plunged eagerly into the daunting task of cleaning the house. Joseph was as zealous as he had ever been in preparing for a court case, but soon found himself to be utterly inferior to James in such practical matters. He laughed heartily as James patiently instructed him on the use of the most seemingly mundane household items, and gently corrected his fumbling attempts to accomplish the simplest of tasks.

“This is quite a science!” Joseph exclaimed at length. “I never imagined all the various skills that went into the simple keeping of a house!”

“A science indeed!” replied James. “And some would call it an art as well--and a noble art at that!”

“That it is, and hereby our good Lord teaches me further humility, for I find myself to be your apprentice, and a poor pupil at that.”

“Not so, Mr. Addington. You are a worthy student, and the more so because of your humility!”

When Mr. Biggs arrived he was quietly impressed to see the obviously cultured London lawyer covered head to toe in cobwebs and soot. Joseph quickly washed his hands and face and met Mr. Biggs in the living room. After completing the business transactions, Mr. Biggs smiled sympathetically.

“Are you having a go at the chimneys?”

“I was just working on the fireplaces, actually,” replied Joseph ruefully. “Those chimneys looked far beyond anything of my expertise.”

“There are a couple of lads in the town who'll do it in a jiffy, have those chimneys clean as a whistle, and only ask a few pence for their labours. And I expect that you'll need that boiler fixed, too. How about I just go ahead and take care of that one for you? I know a good tradesman who owes me a favour, and could put in a new one right quick.

That'll be one less cost for you to worry about. If it's alright with you, I'll have the lads come 'round on the morrow."

"I can't thank you enough, sir," said Joseph gratefully, removing a cobweb which was dangling from his eyebrow.

"You just see that you do a good job of contending with Snyder, and I'll deem it well worthwhile."

* * *

Mr. Biggs' assistance proved invaluable, and the work of preparing the refuge proceeded steadily. Joseph and James also visited Mrs. Chadwick, inviting her boys over to make a few extra sixpence after work by helping with odd jobs around the house. Joseph thought it wiser to remain as incognito as possible, feeling sure that Snyder would certainly recognize him if they met. If he were given the slightest inclination of their plans, Joseph knew that Snyder would stop at nothing to overturn them.

When leaving the house Joseph donned a cockney-style coat and cap, and feigned an accompanying accent, making out that he was the servant of Mr. James, "a gen'leman from London 'oo fancied a bit o' country air."

The two began to make nightly visits to Reverend Miller's house, where they spent many hours learning and growing in the Word of God. Often they joined in with the excellent Bible studies and readings which Reverend Miller held with the older boys and girls in his care.

At times he would wake early in the morning, wondering what on earth he was doing, and whether he was following a foolish fancy that would end in utter defeat and humiliation. Other nights he lay awake, beset by worries and cares and endless possible scenarios of disaster awaiting their fledgling mission. In every case, the good Lord proved Himself faithful to answer Joseph's fears with a jewel from His Word, an answer to a prayer or a wise word of counsel from Reverend Miller.

He learned that in the good reverend he had a true friend in whom he could utterly confide, and who never belittled his trials, having passed through many of the exact same valleys in his long pilgrimage.

The days passed quickly and turned to weeks, and soon the refuge was well-nigh prepared. So much was Joseph embroiled in these affairs that he found little time to give thought to Mary Farrow, or how she fared in her own little cottage a short distance away on Potter's Lane. Joseph learned from Mrs. Chadwick that her husband had found employment with his brother in Leeds, and assisted her in departing thence with her two boys, arranging a coach to take them there by night so as not to arouse Snyder's further wrath at losing another of his victims.

"I'll never forget what you told me, Mr. Addington," said young Samuel as Joseph bid him farewell. "I'll find a way to serve God one day--you'll see."

"I do believe you will, my boy," replied Joseph, rubbing the boy's rosy cheeks with his gloved hands.¹

¹ See endnote on Samuel Chadwick.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The evening after Mrs. Chadwick's departure, Joseph and James were putting the finishing touches on the cleaning of the refuge when a loud knocking was heard at the door.

"Mr. Addington, Mr. Hedgeworth, Mr. Addington!" came an anxious, gasping voice.

James was the first to reach the door. It was Phillip, one of the boys from Miller's orphanage.

"What is it, what is it, young man?" exclaimed James. "Come in first, before you catch your death of cold!"

Philip swallowed, catching his breath. He had obviously been running and the icy early evening air had seared his throat.

"Reverend Miller wants you to come to the orphanage right now. He says it's urgent!"

Joseph arrived at that moment, dusting off his hands with a cleaning rag.

"The young gentleman informs us we have been summoned to an urgent meeting at the orphanage," began James.

"Urgent? What could it be?"

"It was something about Mr. Snyder," the boy said, still panting.

"Well, let's be off then," said Joseph.

Hastily the men donned their coats, and the three departed immediately.

At the orphanage, Joseph and James went immediately to Reverend Miller's study where Mrs. Miller, as well as the oldest three of the orphans, all in their teens, were sitting talking in hushed voices. Their earnest expressions betrayed the sober nature of their discussions. Reverend Miller sat reading his Bible contemplatively.

“Welcome, gentlemen,” he began warmly, but with a note of seriousness on his face. “Thank you for joining us at such short notice.”

“It is, as always, our pleasure,” replied Joseph. “But tell us, what news is there of Snyder’s intentions?” Joseph, in his eagerness, had not yet taken his seat.

“Ah, I see Philip has already informed you of the nature of the meeting. But first, my dear friends, I suggest we seek our dear Lord’s blessing on our time together. The adversary is walking about as a roaring lion, and without divine help I fear we will be no match for him.”

“Forgive my haste,” smiled Joseph apologetically as he and James sat down.

Phillip joined the other youngsters who were huddled on a sofa at the side of the room.

“I’ve asked our young friends to join us, as I believe we’ll need their help in upholding this venture with our prayers. John, would you like to lead us in prayer?”

“Yes, sir!” The young man bowed his head. “Dear Lord Jesus, we ask Thee to be with this company as we prepare to do battle against the one who would do our community harm, Mr. Snyder. Guide our counsels by Thy Holy Spirit, and strengthen us to do Thy will.”

Once again, Joseph marvelled at Reverend Miller’s patient training, demonstrated as it was in the fervent prayer of the orphan youth.

“Now John, would you like to inform us of what you saw and heard today?”

“Yes, sir! It was in the afternoon at the carpenters’ shop. I was working quietly away when two of Mr. Snyder’s men came in to talk on business. While they were waiting for my master, I overheard their conversation. I pretended not to be listening, of course, and I suppose they took no notice of the likes of me! They were talking about how tomorrow they

were going to throw five or six more families out of their houses and reap a new crop of labourers for Mr. Snyder's poorhouse and his new factory. They were talking about all the rewards they would get because of it. They were saying something about eviction notices having come due. What's an eviction notice?"

"I believe Mr. Addington can explain that better than I," said the reverend.

"Snyder has a way of twisting the law to suit himself. He knows he can't throw the people out without a warning, as the law doesn't allow that, so when he wants to get rid of tenants, he finds or creates whatever reason he can for their lease to be terminated. Then he has a notice delivered, giving the tenants eight days to move out, after which he is legally entitled to throw them out. Then Snyder, in the guise of offering them charity, virtually enslaves them and their children in his so-called factories. These eviction notices must have been served several days ago."

"And if it weren't for the Reverend and Mrs. Miller's kindness," continued John soberly, "it would be the likes of us out there in the snow tomorrow, and the likes of our dear little Billy dragged off to those infernal mills."

"It is but the kindness of our dear gracious Lord, John," demurred Reverend Miller.

"Well, gentlemen," said Joseph, "I am happy to inform you that our premises, the Bishop's Green Refuge for Dispossessed Persons, is now ready to receive clients. The only thing we yet lack is a sign."

"Do you not think that the fact that John overheard these words today is in itself a sign that it is time to begin?" interjected Reverend Miller passionately.

"Reverend Miller, I was referring to a sign that we might put up outside the house to identify its purpose."

They all laughed heartily.

“But now that you speak of it, perhaps I also needed a sign of the one you described--which the Lord has now provided!”

“Then, gentlemen,” Reverend Miller continued, “does anything hinder us that we should stop now and ask for our dear Lord's guidance and blessing on our plans and His instruction on how to proceed?”

“I can think of none,” said James.

“Mrs. Miller, would you kindly lead the prayer?”

“I would be glad to,” she said. “Our dear precious Jesus, we do ask You to speak to us, Thy humble children, and instruct us in Thy will that we may rescue these poor ones out of the clutches of the enemy, by Thy grace and power.”

Once again a worshipful silence ensued, at the end of which Reverend Miller burst out in an emotional, “Praise Your name, blessed Jesus,” with tears rolling down his cheeks. Everyone turned to look at him expectedly. Reverend Miller opened his eyes and with a catch in his voice said, “The Scripture came to me, 'Now is the day of salvation,' and that we should 'preach good tidings to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted and let the oppressed go free.'”

“Yes, yes,” said Joseph. “To me came the proverb, 'Withhold not good to them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to give it.'”

“And I saw a funny little picture of us all,” said James, “riding around in our carriage and picking up these poor people off the street and taking them to our house.”

“I thought that Jane and Sally and I could cook them all a hot meal,” said Mrs. Miller.

“And I thought,” said John, “that I should help to build a sign, for I am already quite a good carpenter, and Philip, here, who's done his share of painting, can help to paint it! We could stay up and work on it tonight. We don't mind, Reverend Miller, really we don't mind!”

“Well, in this case I give my consent,” said Reverend Miller, “on the condition that you check your spelling with me first.”

“Certainly, sir,” replied the two boys cheerfully.

“I propose,” continued Reverend Miller, his voice growing with excitement, “that we post some of our boys as sentries around the streets of the town. No one will take any notice of them. The moment they see Snyder's men entering a house, they immediately run and inform us. Then after Snyder's people are gone, we come with a carriage, pick them up out of the snow and take them to the refuge.”

“Yes,” said Joseph. “Splendid! We can't prevent Snyder from finding out eventually what we are doing, but the longer we keep him in the dark, the easier it will be for us. And once we have the poor people in our refuge, and they are staying there of their own volition, there is nothing he can do to stop us without breaking the law.”

Until late into the night, the “conspirators” discussed, excitedly made plans and laid out their strategy for what Joseph dubbed “The Battle of Bishop's Green.” Mrs. Miller collected some extra supplies, blankets and sheets, which they piled into Joseph's carriage for him to take back with him. The orphanage also had the possession of a large open cart and a horse, which would be more suitable for transporting people's belongings than Joseph's carriage.

They would report to their battle stations at the refuge by seven in the morning, ready for the first attack.

* * *

At eight o'clock, as Snyder's men approached the first target, they paid no heed to the grimy-looking urchin lolling against the building at the corner of the street. As the two uncouth oafs walked up to the front door of the house and rudely knocked, shouting imperiously to the hapless inhabitants that their eviction was due, the little figure

slipped nonchalantly around the corner and dashed off through the snow in the direction of the refuge. Even Nathaniel Snyder, as he sat astride his horse watching the scene with an evil fascination at fifty yards away, had not noticed the errand.

Within a half an hour, a poor mother with a baby and two little daughters and a hopeless, bedraggled father were standing out in the cold, huddled around their meagre possessions.

“If you are in need of charitable assistance,” shouted out one of the henchmen as he boarded up the door of the house, “the doors of Mr. Snyder's poorhouse are always open unto you. You know where to find it.”

As soon as they were out of sight, the same little pair of eyes who had watched their arrival turned to the carriage that was waiting around the corner. Joseph, with a cap pulled down over his eyes and wearing a tattered overcoat, held the reins on the driver seat. Immediately he drove the carriage around the corner. As it pulled up, James stepped out and in his most dignified manner approached the miserable family.

“Good morning, sir, madam,” he began respectfully. “We would like to inform you of a newly opened, 'Refuge for Dispossessed Persons,' sponsored by a kindly benefactor, who wishes to come to the assistance of persons such as yourself. It is a place of Christian charity, where you will be able to stay until such time as alternative accommodations can be arranged. Of course, there are no obligations and this is simply an invitation which you may accept or refuse at your own free will.”

The husband and wife looked at each other suspiciously.

“This isn't one of Mr. Snyder's houses again, is it?” asked the husband, with obvious disdain for that name.

“Good Heavens, no!” replied James emphatically. “We are Christians, as I said, and our offer is only for a roof over your heads and a hot meal in your bellies until such a time that you can find new and better accommodations for yourselves. Well, what do you say?”

Their hardened expressions soon melted, and gave way to misty eyes.

“You ... you mean that, sir? No factory duty?” asked the wife.

“No factory duty. No duty whatsoever but to continue your lives as you lived them here, only without the burden of your rent for the time being, until you can find a new place of abode.”

“It seems hard to believe there could still be such goodness in this place,” said the husband. “It seems we have little other choice but to go to Mr. Snyder, and God knows that is hardly a choice. Very well, sir. We accept.”

At that, James gave a signal to the boy on the corner and within seconds the orphanages' cart rolled in front of their doorway, with the jovial Reverend Miller driving, attired similarly to Joseph. Within ten minutes all the family's possessions were loaded on to Reverend Miller's cart, the mother, father and three little girls snuggled warmly in Joseph's carriage, and the procession set off to the newly established centre.

If the poor suffering family had any fears of ending up in a squalid poorhouse such as Snyder's, they were soon dispelled. The carriage pulled up outside a clean, pleasant-looking, three-story building, with a large sign painted in bright green bold letters.

“Bishop's ... Green Refuse ... for... Dispersed ... Prisoners,” read the husband laboriously, squinting at the sign.

“Er, *Refuge for Dispossessed Persons*,” James politely corrected.

Gently the family was ushered inside into a cheery sitting room, which although quite bare in the way of furniture, was nevertheless bright and cosy, with a warm fire crackling in the hearth.

“Good morning, dears,” exclaimed Mrs. Miller cheerily, as she came out with a tray of warm mugs. “And here’s some warm cocoa to warm up the cockles of your heart. Oh, you must be freezing from standing out there in the snow!”

The three little girls eagerly sipped their warm drinks, while the husband turned to Mr. James. “We don’t know how to thank you, sir.”

“Then thank us not,” said James. “But do thank the dear Lord, Who in graciousness smiles down upon us all.”

“Aye, that He does,” said the mother.

“Mrs. Miller will show you to your room shortly and you can settle in. Then later on we will take some time to get to know each other and talk about our establishment.”

As he spoke, there was a sharp knock on the door. James opened,

“Mr. James, I seen ‘em coming, I seen ‘em coming,” whispered a little voice excitedly. “I seen ‘em coming to an ‘ouse on Potters’ Lane, two doors down from Cobb’s blacksmith shop.”

Seemingly unperturbed, James turned to inhabitants of the room.

“Excuse me, sir, madam,” he said politely, “I have some business to attend to.” He walked staidly to the door.

As soon as he was on the other side of it, however, he leapt down the front steps of the house with the energy of a bolting horse, and ran up to the carriage where Joseph, watching his transformation in amusement, was already waiting in the driver’s seat.

“Potters’ Lane,” he shouted quickly.

Joseph’s heart suddenly skipped a beat.

“Two doors down from the blacksmith.”

For a moment Joseph's heart sank and then leapt, as he thought that it could be Mary who was in danger, but then realized it was not.

No, she is safe, he thought, as he snapped the reins and urged the horses into motion. He said it is two doors from Mr. Cobb's, not four. Oh foolish man that I am! Why did I react like that? Did my heart sink because of the thought that it was Mary in danger, or leap at the thought of seeing her again? Away with such feelings from my heart! Dear Edward, that I should so soon betray your trust in thinking such thoughts. With determination he set his sights on the road ahead.

Within minutes he halted the carriage carefully just around the corner from Cobb's Blacksmith. After about ten minutes, a lad leaning nonchalantly on a picket fence at the corner of the street tipped his cap towards him in an apparent salute. Joseph knew it was time and gently drove the carriage around the corner into the lane.

Once again, a pitiful sight greeted them. Once again, Mr. James alighted from the carriage and delivered his genteel introduction speech. Yet again, the charity was soon gratefully received and Joseph climbed down off the carriage to assist in loading the possessions.

All were unaware of a pair of eyes silently watching the proceedings from a cottage window two houses further.

* * *

Mary had watched the entire episode, angry at the perfidy of Snyder's men, yet feeling entirely powerless to do anything to stop it. Now she watched in surprise the strange turn of events that was taking place. She could see, by the gentle manner of the protagonists, that it was not Snyder's ilk. Something about the gait of the agile young man who clambered down off the carriage, gallantly picked up a trunk and loaded it onto the cart behind, reminded her of...

No, it couldn't be, she thought.

The portly figure of the cartman helping to load the belongings also looked familiar. She watched as the shivering family was loaded into the carriage.

"Could it be?" she wondered.

Then the agile young coachman seemed to pause for a moment and gaze wistfully at her cottage, before straightening himself and resuming his place on the driver's seat.

"But I believe it is!" said Mary, with a girlish giggle, clapping her hands.

All of a sudden she bit her lip, as a tear came to her eye. "But it cannot be--it must not be," she said dolefully, as she let the curtain drop and walked sadly away from the window.

* * *

The procedure of picking up the displaced families was repeated five more times throughout the day, until the refuge was abuzz with the sounds of children's voices, babies crying, mothers and fathers talking in hushed voices, fires crackling and plates and spoons clinking, as hungry mouths consumed bowls of warm broth.

At six o'clock that evening, Mr. Snyder rode up to the poorhouse on his black gelding. Hastily he dismounted and approached two figures standing outside, who had been anxiously scanning the road for signs of approaching victims.

"And what do we have?" he inquired curtly. "A goodly harvest today?"

"It's ... it's ... unaccountable," said one of the men. "This has never happened before. Not a soul has showed up."

"What do you mean? Where are they? Are they still out freezing to death in the snow? How have you fouled up this time, you blundering fools?"

"We hasn't fouled up. We's did everything just like we's done the other times. It always worked before, din' it?"

"Well, if not a soul has showed up by now, then something

has gone dreadfully wrong.”

“Well, there is one strange thing,” said one of the henchmen. “You know the house about half a mile down the road, the one that has been painted up real nice. Well, I went by there today and there is a sign up.”

“A sign indeed? And what did it say?”

“Well, I knows how to read real good, you know, I learned 'ow when I was a little boy. So I read the sign and it says, 'Bishop Green's Refuge for Depressed Parsons.'”

“You blitherin' idiot,” said the other one. “Wot does a bunch of bloomin' miserable vicars got to do with all this?”

“I shall see that for myself,” said Snyder menacingly. “But remember: Those houses stay boarded up until I get my workers!” Without hesitation he mounted his horse and rode off in the direction of the refuge.

* * *

As he drew up opposite the house, Snyder eyed it suspiciously. The sounds of children's cries and laughter echoed from within. There were lights on in almost every window, and smoke billowed from the chimney. His lip curled contemptuously as he eyed the bright green painted sign.

“'Dispossessed Persons' indeed. Something has gone dreadfully wrong.” He snarled as he reined in his horse and rode off in the direction of his mansion.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

“Good morning, everybody. My name is Mr. James Hedgeworth and I am host here, and the manager of this institution. This is my assistant, Mr. ... Applesberry, who prefers to be known as Joe Apples, or simply Joe.”

“Good mornin' all,” perked up Joseph, in the best cockney accent he could manage.

“Welcome to the Bishop's Green Refuge,” James continued, “which we trust you have found at least relatively comfortable. You must forgive us for any inconvenience, as we are still in the process of getting established--and you are our first guests.”

A murmur of appreciation ran through the small crowd that was gathered in the sitting room of the refuge.

Joseph smiled to himself, amazed at how admirably James was handling the situation.

How years of faithful servitude could have prepared this man for such gracious leadership is beyond me, he thought. But he certainly plays his part well. What an invaluable friend he has turned out to be!

Joseph was continuing to pose as James' assistant, even before the guests--for if Snyder should learn Joseph's true identity, he felt sure it would further exacerbate his anger, and perhaps bring more suffering upon the poor people.

“Now let me begin by saying that we are a charitable institution, but our staff at present is rather small. In fact, it presently consists only of my assistant and myself. So while there shall be no mandatory factory duty for any of you, we would like to request your assistance in also performing some of the staff duties.”

“Fair enough,” said a voice from among the guests.

“Now in a moment I shall interview you and inquire as to your profession, skills and abilities, after which Mr. Applesberry will inquire concerning your circumstances and

how you came to find yourself in such a plight. As this is a Christian institution, prayer will be held every morning, and Bible reading and prayer each evening, which you are all invited to attend.”

“Well, God bless your souls, kind sirs,” said another guest.

“God bless you both,” came a chorus of assent.

“Now Mr. Applesberry will take the children into the drawing room, which shall serve as the schoolroom for now. I believe he has prepared some entertaining stories to tell them. Meanwhile I shall interview you, on completion of which I shall read to the children and Mr. Applesberry will inquire as to your circumstances.”

“Come on, boys and girls,” said Joseph. “Step right up into the drawing room.”

Little feet eagerly scampered into the adjoining room where Joseph began a cockney version of the story of Moses and the exodus from Egypt.

James immediately began to compile a register of all the names of the guests, listing their professions, skills and preferences. There were all together seven women and four men. Two of the husbands were off in other places looking for work, and one of the women was a widow. Amongst the men was a weaver, a carpenter, a blacksmith's journeyman* and a tinker. The tinker and the blacksmith's journeyman retained their positions of employment, and had been forced from their homes on some obscure technicalities of their leases. But the carpenter and the weaver hadn't been able to find work. James carefully compiled the information, which he would use to arrange responsibilities within the refuge.

Childish shouts and screams of laughter had been periodically emanating from the drawing room, and as James opened the adjoining door to call Joseph in for his portion of the interviews, the story was just reaching its climax.

“And all of a sudden, the two 'uge walls o' water came crashin' down on the 'Gyptians, and their chariots went 'iggledy piggledy, 'ither, thither and yon, tossin', tumblin' and turnin' topsy-turvy over one another, like a bunch of blooming leaves and twigs blown by the wind. And that was the end of Pharaoh an' his fiendish friends, an' Moses and 'is mighty mob marched off into the desert towards the Promised Land.”

The children cheered and clapped as Joseph bowed and struggled back into his coat, which he had been using as an impromptu staff.

“Joe,” James interjected, “the guests are ready for their interview.”

“Thank you, Mr. 'Edgeworth,” he said.

James smiled to himself.

He could not recall Joseph ever addressing him in that manner before.

“So, ladies and gentlemen, tell me all about it,” Joseph began. “Ow did you all get yourselves in such a pickle?”

Once again tales of Snyder's mischief abounded, but Joseph took particular interest in one lady's description.

“Then I comes home one day and finds this here piece of paper stuck on my door.” She pulled out a crumpled piece of paper, which Joseph immediately recognized as a writ similar to the one he had delivered.

“And me and me Albert, not having the foggiest idea 'ow to read it, was thinking it was one of them proclamations from the Parliament or some such thing. Then all of a sudden a week later, we get dragged out in the snow by these brutes waving this same paper in front of us and sayin' we'd been evicted, and that there was nothin' we could do about it anymore.”

“I see,” said Joseph. He knew that in this case the proper procedure for delivering writs had been ignored. Suddenly an idea hit him.

“If any of you 'ave any documents or papers relating to dealings with Mr. Snyder, bring them to me. I's got a friend in London 'oo is a lawyer. I will have him look over them and we will see what we can do.”

Crumpled and tattered pieces of paper were produced. Eventually Joseph had a small collection of leases, writs and other documents that he could study.

All good ammunition, he thought, for future defence ... or attacks.

“Thank you all kindly,” said Joseph. “That will be all. And now Mr. Edgeworth will inform you as to the plans for the rest of the day.”

Joseph opened the door to the drawing room, where the children were now sitting in a far more subdued mood as they listened to James' reading from the Psalms. There were some giggles of anticipation as Joseph once more entered the room. James subsequently emerged and in his dignified manner, respectfully assigned the duties of the day to the people.

The tinker and the blacksmith went off to be about their business, whilst the carpenter and the weaver offered their services to help with any repairs or improvements to the refuge. To this James gladly acquiesced, for there were tasks to be done which he and Joseph possessed neither time or skill to accomplish. Some of the women went to work in the kitchen, and others watched over the children.

* * *

In the afternoon, Joseph visited Reverend Miller to inform him of the progress. As he entered the orphanage, there was a loud cheer from the children.

“We beat him, we did, sir,” said one of the older boys. “Did you see the looks on those people's faces when we told them they had a place to go?”

“God bless you, my brave assistants,” said Joseph to them.

"You all did a wonderful job. We all worked together-- and with God's help, victory was ours. But this is only the first battle," said Joseph, looking knowingly at Reverend Miller.

"Yes, we must confer for further victory plans," Miller concurred.

"It appears to me," said Joseph, after the two had settled themselves down in the reverend's study, "that this battle must be waged and won with the Word of God and prayer."

"Indeed," agreed the reverend. "And for our part, we will make constant prayers for you and the success of your mission."

"Please do, for I know that Snyder will not take this intrusion to his affairs peaceably, though at present I see not what he could do against us."

"Yes, we must be vigilant always. But believe, sir, that God is with you and He will protect you and your work."

"That I do. I must trust that He will lead and guide--for assuredly, I know not how to proceed. Our resources are limited, and it is of a certainty that I shall not be able to sustain these people forever from my own pocket."

"Yes, indeed. And that is why..." The reverend paused momentarily, as if an inspiration was visiting him. "...you must teach them to open accounts with the greatest Banker of the Universe. He holds the purse strings of infinity. And if you teach them to look unto their Heavenly Father for their needs, I am persuaded that He will not let them down.

"Yes, yes. I agree with you entirely. This morning James and I awoke for prayer and we determined that we would begin each day with prayer and end it with Bible reading and prayer for the evening. And seeing that these folks have likely never seen the inside of a church, I am determined that the very first subject we shall address shall be the salvation of their souls and their entering into a relationship with their Heavenly Father. Would you come and speak with them for me?"

“My young man, perhaps it is more fitting that you speak with them,” said Reverend Miller with a gleam in his eye.

“Me? But I am not qualified to such a task, sir!”

“Who is to say who is qualified or not? It is really not all that difficult or complicated. You have discovered Christ, have you not?”

“Well, ... yes.”

“Then simply show Him to them as you have found Him, from the Bible.”

“Uh ... very well. Could you, then, perhaps recommend me a good passage or two?”

“The most admirable I have found personally,” replied Reverend Miller, “are the first twelve verses of the first chapter of the Gospel of John, and the first eighteen verses of the third.”

“Thank you for your kind counsel, sir. I pray it shall be as simple as it sounds.”

* * *

That evening after the little children were asleep, the men and women and older children gathered together for the Bible reading. Many of them considered themselves to be Christian, but had rarely attended church and knew very little of the Holy Word.

James led the reading, and Joseph, still maintaining his cockney accent and manner, acted as interpreter, translating the scriptures and imagery into simple terms that the humble folk could understand. At the same time, the act of his cockney manner helped to dispel any nervousness or apprehension he may have felt, and instead transformed itself into a vehicle whereby Joseph suddenly found the words he spoke coming to him almost supernaturally.

“But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God,” read James.

“And that means,” came Joseph's translation, “that anyone can receive Jesus, just like you receive a guest into your

house, open the door and ask 'im to come in and offer 'im a cuppa tea."

"You mean I could ask Jesus over for a cuppa tea?" interjected one of the ladies. "And would 'e come?"

"In a manner of speakin', yes. 'E loves to dwell in the 'umble places with the simple souls. Now, it doesn't matter if you're a dustman, or a chimney sweep, or the prime minister. It's all the same to Jesus. He doesn't look at your outward appearance, He looks into your heart. Now, how many of you folks would like to have Jesus living in your heart, as your friend?"

All nodded their assent. Humbly they bowed their heads and Joseph led them in a simple prayer.

After it was finished one of the ladies asked, "And can Jesus help my Fred to find a good job?"

"That He can," said Joseph. "He helped me to find a new job with a much better Boss than me old one. He's your Father now and 'e wants to take care of you. He takes care 'o you with the same love as what's burnin' in your heart to take care of your little ones. Now sure as shootin' dear Mr. 'Edgeworth here, and little Joe Apples aren't going to be able to take care of you forever. But if you learn to talk to your 'eavenly Father and ask Him, He's the one that will be lookin' out for you."

Thus it was that seventeen more humble souls entered into the Heavenly Kingdom that night.

Throughout that next week the days progressed in a similar fashion. Joseph and James rose for prayer at six o'clock in the morning, committing their cares unto the Lord and seeking His guidance They organized the children into a makeshift school, and Joseph and James took turns teaching them "the four Rs," as Joseph called them: "Reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic and religion." All of which the children had had precious little of in their short lives.

Joseph had been paying out of his own remaining money, but his resources were beginning to run dangerously low, so he and James organized a meeting of the inhabitants, explained the situation to them, and asked if they could all come to an agreement. So it was decided that those who worked would contribute half their wages to the upkeep of the refuge and keep half for themselves and their families' needs.

After a few days, Fred the carpenter also found work, for which he gave great thanks to God, as did his wife and children.

* * *

It was on the sixth morning that Joseph happened to look out the window as he was giving the children a class and saw a figure he recognized walking up the front path. It was none other than the constable who he had first met at the Wayfarer's Inn on the occasion of Edward's passing.

"Excuse me, children. I think we have visitors," said Joseph quickly and went to fetch James who was in the study.

"James, the constable is at the door."

James started, immediately looking worried.

"Don't look concerned," urged Joseph. "Just stay calm and follow my prompts."

Joseph felt reasonably sure the constable would not recognize him in his britches and suspenders, chequered cap and his cockney accent.

As the loud knock echoed around the house Joseph and James whispered a short prayer together.

James opened the door, with Joseph standing slightly behind him.

"Ah, good morning, constable. What can I do for you?"

"Good morning, I'm Constable 'iggins from the Bishop's Green Constabulary, I am. I've come to investigate a complaint, I 'ave."

“And what manner of complaint might that be?” began James a little uncertainly.

“Come in,” said Joseph. “Why don't you come in and make yourself at home, Constable?” He ushered the constable into the sitting room as he whispered to James. “The constable might like some tea.”

“Ah, tea ... yes, tea. A very good idea,” said James.

“Well, I don't usually partake when I'm on duty, but since it is an uncommonly chilly morning I may be persuaded to indulge, I may.”

James signalled for one of the ladies to bring some tea, while the constable continued.

“We have 'eard information, we 'ave, that this establishment is operating an 'otel without possessing a license.”

James began to stammer.

“This is a charitable institution,” Joseph quietly prompted.

“Ah yes,” James affirmed. “This is a charitable institution and ... er...”

“And as such does not require a license,” continued Joseph.

“...does not require a license,” James concluded emphatically.

“The complaint I have heard is that this house purports to be a charity, but is in fact operating as an 'otel, it is.”

“Well, it's not true,” said James pathetically.

“Perhaps the constable would like to interview our occupants,” said Joseph to James.

“Er, yes,” said James. “Perhaps you would like to interview our occupants ... er, Joe, fetch the occupants.”

Quickly Joseph found six of the ladies and the weaver, brought them in to the sitting room and lined them up in front of the constable.

The constable stood up, stiffened himself and began, "A complaint has been registered with my constabulary that this house, while purporting to be a charity, is in fact an illegal 'otel."

"Well, that's the biggest load of cock and bull I ever heard," said Molly, one of the boldest of the ladies. "These two are good Christian gentlemen, who took us in out of the charity of their hearts, when we had been cruelly evicted out of our houses. They invited us 'ere where we came of our own free will and have asked nothing of us except those of us that have incomes to make of our own free will contributions towards the charity."

"And is this true?" questioned the constable.

All of them affirmed.

"Mmm. Well, I have heard a second report that this institution is in fact holding the occupants here against their will, and employing them without any wages for the benefit of the owners."

"Old your 'orses, Constable," said another of the ladies, "and 'ow could we be here against our free will if this was an 'otel? It's like Molly said, we was all invited 'ere and we came of our own free will and we're staying of our own free will until such time as we can find 'ouses of our own to live in."

The constable raised his eyes, and lifted himself up on his toes once again.

"Hmmm, I see, and the third complaint has come to my ears, it 'as: that in this very establishment, the children are forced into slavery and used to make a profit."

"There ain't nothing could be further from the truth," chimed in a third. "Why, my little Jonny and my little Alice ain't never been happier since they been here, finally getting a little bit of heducation." She turned to her colleague. "And I didn't even know what that meant until I comes here."

“Why don't you come and see?” began Joseph.

“Yes,” said James. “Why don't you come in and see the children for yourself?”

“That I will,” said the constable. “That I will.”

The constable was invited into the drawing room where the children sat quietly practicing writing their letters.

“Say good morning to the constable,” Joseph primed them.

“Good morning, Constable,” answered a chorus of little voices.

“I have a question for you, I have. Have any of you been forced to work here without getting paid?”

One little boy raised his hand. “Yesterday my mother made me polish my shoes. She didn't pay me nothing for it,” he said.

“And I 'ave to make my own bed every morning,” chipped in a second.

“I'm not talking about that kind of work, am I?” said the constable. “I'm talking about like working in a mill or weaving, or such like, I am.”

“No one has done anything like that to me here,” said one of the older boys. “Not like that Mr. Snyder did to my friend Tom.”

“I see, I do. Then tell me more about your friend, little man.”

“Well, my friend Tom got kicked out of his house, his mama couldn't pay the rent, and Mr. Snyder said he'd help him. He took him to that factory of his, where he works his fingers to the bone and only gets paid sixpence a week.”

“Hmmm,” replied the constable thoughtfully. “I shall look into that, I shall.”

“Excuse me, sir Constable,” piped up one of the little boys with his hand raised.

“What do you have to say for yourself, my young man?”

“Our teacher, Mr. Apples, said it's not always necessary to complete a sentence with the same words with which one begins it.”

“He does, does he?” the constable replied, his eyes raised once again.

“An obscure grammatical rule,” coughed Joseph apologetically.

“Well, thank you, children, for your assistance.” He turned to James and Joseph. “Well, sirs, it seems I can find no fault with your establishment.”

“Excuse me, Constable,” said Joseph, seizing the moment and the constable by the arm as he escorted him back into the sitting room. “Your tea will be getting cold and ... you might be interested to hear what this lady 'ere has to say concerning the method by which she was evicted from her dwelling place.”

Joseph nodded to the lady in question, who, as soon as the constable had seated himself and apprehended his teacup, began: “Well, one day I comes home and found this piece of paper stuck to my door and me and my husband, not knowing how to read, thinks it's some kind of a notice from the parliament or whatever. Then not knowing anything else, eight days later these awful men comes around and throws us out on our ears, and if it wasn't for Mr. Hedgeworth here we'd be out in the freezing snow or at the poorhouse.”

“As you may realize, Constable,” Joseph interjected, “the correct procedure for delivering a writ is that it be read aloud to the recipient and understood to be fully comprehended before it can be served.”

“And just where did a yokel like you obtain such a knowledge of the law?” inquired the constable, a trifle suspiciously.

“Oh, I do a bit of readin' in my spare time, I do,” replied Joseph as nonchalantly as he could.

“Well, well, well,” said the constable, “we shall look into that then, we shall. Thank you for providing the clues for my next case.”

“And thank you for your visit. You're always welcome to drop by for a cup of tea,” said James politely.

* * *

“Victory!” exclaimed Joseph as the constable marched officiously down the front path. “Snyder must have sent his men to lodge complaints about us, but it's turned right back around on his own head. Thank You, dear Jesus! 'Vengeance is Mine, I shall repay,' saith the Lord.”

That evening after the evening reading, James and Joseph conferred together.

“A full month has gone by since we first arrived,” began James, “and I must be getting back to London to fetch my Betty.”

“Well,” said Joseph, “we could certainly use her capable hands to help us, and I think it would be well if you bring all my furniture. I for one have a sore back from sitting around on cushions--and I'm sure many of our guests feel the same.”

“Yes,” said James.

“And furthermore, I think you should close up the apartments and put them up for sale, for I feel I shall have no more need of them--and we could certainly use the money to keep us going here.”

“Yes, indeed,” said James. “If there is no impediment, I shall depart tomorrow.”

With that, the two men committed their thoughts to the Lord in prayer, and--seeing no impediments--it was decided that James should leave in the morning.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

After James' departure Joseph found himself doubly busy, teaching the children, running downstairs to stoke the boiler, checking in the kitchen to make sure all was well, teaching the Bible to his little flock, riding over to see Reverend Miller to inform him of progress and ask for his prayer and counsel.

After four or five days he began to feel faint and flushed. He had been sleeping less and less and working more and more and had neglected his morning time in prayer, reasoning that it was only for a fortnight whilst James was gone, and that the good Lord understood as it was all His work anyway.

One day during class, Joseph stammered, "I'm sorry children, I'm afraid I shall have to go and lie down."

Wearily he managed to drag himself up the three flights of stairs, open the door to his room and collapse on the bed.

One of the boys ran to get Molly, who came hurrying up the stairs to see him.

"Good Lord, Mr. Joe, what's got into you?"

"I'm afraid I am ill," added Joseph, "and must rest today. Please see to it that the children do their lessons."

"Mr. Joe you don' 'alf look sick! I shall have one of the boys run and fetch Doctor Lean."

"Oh, really, that won't be necessary," said Joseph. But Molly insisted.

* * *

Joseph groaned inwardly as the long-faced physician entered the room. Dr. Lean immediately recognized him from the Wayfarer's Inn.

"Ah, young man," he intoned mournfully, "did I not warn you to be careful? Did I not warn you that that disease, like a hungry beast, stalketh his victims waiting for their weakest moments? Yet obviously you have not heeded my counsel. Beware young man, beware!"

Joseph heartily wished he had the energy to respond, but all he could do was groan.

“Now, let me see.” The doctor placed a thin, bony hand on Joseph's forehead, felt his pulse, lifted his eyebrows one by one and stared piercingly into his eyes. Then he took a long wooden spatula from his black bag and pushed it into Joseph's mouth, holding his tongue down as he stared into his throat with the expression of one gazing with consternation into a seething volcano.

“It is worse that I feared,” he began. “You are overcome with a terrible fever, young man. There is, however, a good chance that you may survive if you follow my instructions to the letter.”

So saying he produced three vials from his bag, scrutinizing the Latin inscriptions on them carefully.

“This first potion,” he began, “is to induce perspiration. The second potion is to reduce the perspiration that was caused by the first potion, and the first two potions will most likely cause a rash to break out on your skin, upon the which you should take the third potion to relieve the rash. Let me see ... that will be three shillings.”

Weakly Joseph reached into the drawer by his bedside table, drew out his wallet and deposited three shillings into the bony hand.

“Mark my words, young man,” intoned the solemn voice once again, “many a strong young man like you has seen the end of his days through such carelessness. If you are still alive in a week I will visit you again.”

Joseph could only groan as the doctor cast a woeful glance towards Molly and left the room.

“Bring me some water, please,” asked Joseph weakly, after which his eyes closed and he slept.

* * *

Molly was highly unfamiliar with attending to the sick, but she did what she could. First she tried to help Joseph to swallow the first of the potions, which he succeeded in doing, only to feel sicker than ever. He managed to convince Molly not to make him drink the second two, as he could not bear to think what effect they would have on him.

For days the fever raged through his body like a fire through a tinder dry forest. Joseph was delirious most of the time, but became faintly aware of Reverend Miller's kindly face before him and his hands on his head praying for his recovery.

At the height of the illness, Joseph felt himself slipping away. It seemed as if he was falling into a deep, abysmal pit, engulfed in mist and darkness. Suddenly, all around him he saw the haunting, tortured faces of the children in Snyder's workhouse. Grimy hands seemed to reach out and grasp him, tiny beleaguered eyes gazed at him pitifully, tiny frames collapsed into throes of pain as coughing racked their bodies. Tears formed little furrows in coal-smearred cheeks. Still the hands grasped at him as those grasping at the last straw of hope.

With what seemed to be the last ounce of strength left in his disease-ravaged body, Joseph cried out, "Oh, Jesus, save me!--Not for my own sake, but for the children, save me!"

Suddenly he saw--or rather, felt--a light descend from above, like a bright cloud, which pushed the darkness down from around him and enveloped him in a soft golden glow. He felt as if he were a babe again, enveloped in the gentle arms of his mother. Feeling warm, safe and reassured, he drifted into a peaceful sleep.

As he slept, he dreamed that he was standing outside the Millers' orphanage. He saw a white-clad figure approaching. Once again he recognized it as Edward, but instead of greeting him, Edward walked past him and continued walking around the corner of the building.

Curious, Joseph followed him, as he walked past the back of the house and through a little gate in a picket fence, into a field behind the orphanage where a sloping bank ran down to a brook.

Joseph continued to follow until Edward came to a tree, which grew out in two trunks in the shape of a V. On one of the trunks Joseph saw some inscriptions, but could not make them out.

Edward bent down. At the base of the trunk was a small hole, perhaps made by a squirrel. Edward put in his hand and drew out a small golden locket. Without saying a word he turned to Joseph, smiled and handed it to him.

At that Joseph woke up abruptly. Once again, the eerie but peacefully light feeling surrounded him. He lay there he knew not how long, enjoying the blissful, entranced, dreamlike state. He seemed be drifting in and out of the dream, still seeing Edward's smiling face.

After a long while he fell asleep again.

* * *

It was after five long days of having eaten nothing and drunk only a little water, that Joseph woke up and managed to raise himself up on one elbow. Gingerly he lifted one leg at a time over the side of his bed and sat up. Immediately he felt very dizzy and lay back down. He was extremely hungry.

Sunlight streamed through gaps in the closed shutters of his room, and he knew that it must be near noon. Weakly he again tried to sit up, and this time succeeded. As he sat there in a half-stupor, the door opened a crack and then widened. It was Molly.

"Oh, Mr. Joe, are you feeling better?" she asked as she came in carrying a tray, "This morning I found this on the doorstep," she said. "There was a note on it saying 'from a well-wisher.'"

“What is it?” said Joseph curiously.

“It's a nice pot of chicken broth,” said Molly. “I warmed it up. Would you like to try some?”

“I would indeed,” said Joseph hungrily. Soon he was eagerly devouring the hot, tasty broth.

“Whoever brought this was an angel of mercy,” he said.

“Is there anything more I can get you?” asked Molly.

“Not for now; I feel that I must rest. But tell me, how is everyone? How are the children?” Joseph noticed the note of anxiety in his own voice.

“Well, we're getting along quite alright,” said Molly.

“Reverend Miller's come over a few times to confer with us when matters came up, and to teach us more about the Bible, and the men are out doing their work and the children are all healthy, and when we don't know what to do we just ask the good Lord and somebody gets an idea and then everything seems to run along just fine. We have missed you, though, and it's not been the same not having you around.”

Joseph lay back down on his bed with a relieved laugh. “Dear Lord, forgive me,” he said, “for trying to bear the anxious burden of running this place myself! I resolved that I would allow it to be Your work and not mine, but then took matters too much into my hands, instead of leaving them contentedly in Yours.” With that he closed his eyes and peacefully slept some more.

From that day on, Joseph's condition improved rapidly.

Soon he was up and about again, still somewhat shaky and aware of his need for extra rest. He still retained the strange sensation that he had experienced, some type of apparition during his illness, but was unable to recall any of the details.

The next day he had a visit from Reverend Miller, to whom he related the lessons he had learned of relying on the Lord's strength to sustain him.

Reverend Miller nodded sympathetically, as one recalling his own passage through similar storms.

"Some good news," continued Reverend Miller, "is that Snyder's activities appear to be somewhat curtailed. There hasn't been any news of writs or evictions for some time. At the very least we have caused him to change his strategy."

"Yes," said Joseph. "But he's not going to give up without a fight."

Later on that afternoon Joseph had another visit from the physician, who was surprised to see him on his feet. Joseph fancied that the good doctor seemed a little disappointed that his predictions of doom had not come through.

"In addition to your undoubted expertise," said Joseph courteously, "I have a greater Physician."

"And who might that be?" came the peremptory reply.

"The Sun of Righteousness, Who arises with healing in His wings."

"Humph," said the doctor, "superstition."

"Not so," said Joseph, "for I have found His remedies to be highly effective, and I suggest that when you find your own remedies to fail you may consider availing yourself of some of His."

"If medicine cannot save a man's body, religion certainly cannot," said the doctor, and departed in a huff.

* * *

That night Joseph awoke with a start. He had been dreaming again, only this time it seemed he was in a cauldron of fire. There were screams about him and flames licking up the walls of his rooms and consuming the roof. In shock, Joseph lay motionless as a cold sweat broke over him. What did it mean? Was it a warning?

Perhaps I had better go down and check the boiler room, he thought. Slipping into his shoes and casting the quilt from his bed around him, he lit a candle and made his way carefully down the wooden staircase.

He had still not regained full strength, and prayed as he walked that he might not slip.

Carefully he checked the boiler room, but all was well and safe. As he reached the top of the staircase that went to the ground floor, he cast a glance into the sitting room. For a moment he thought he saw a faint orange glow. Quickly he walked over and checked the hearth but the fire had been put out and there was not so much as a single coal burning in the fireplace.

Suddenly Joseph started. In the reflection of some brass ornaments on the mantelpiece he could still see the orange glow. He turned quickly as he realized it was coming from outside the window. Before he could move there was a deafening crash as three burning firebrands were cast into the middle of the room. Immediately the carpet caught alight.

Without thinking, Joseph threw the quilt over one of the brands and extinguished it. The other two were still burning and he threw the quilt again and with much effort managed to extinguish the flame. Seeing that the flames were extinguished, he ran and opened the front door. He could see no one, but heard horses' hooves disappearing into the distance.

A few moments later Molly and one of the boys came down, holding candles.

"What is it, Mr. Joe? What's all the ruckus?"

"I fear it is some evil treachery that has been planned against us," he said, showing them the remains of the burning firebrands and his severely burned quilt. "If it were not for the great mercy and forewarning of God in a dream I had just now, we may have all perished." Instinctively Molly stepped forward to begin cleaning up the mess of broken glass and burned carpet.

"Leave it now," said Joseph. "The constable shall see it at first light. Now back to bed with you, and get some sleep."

Joseph fetched some more blankets from his room, and went to sleep on the sitting room sofa, fearing further attacks, although none transpired.

* * *

At first light he sent one of the boys to the constabulary.

Soon the constable arrived. His initial disgruntlement at being pulled out of bed at such an early hour was soon overtaken by excitement at the prospect of solving an actual crime--an event that had been rather rare in his career thus far.

After questioning Joseph long and thoroughly, the details of which we will once more spare the reader, he requested to keep the three blackened lengths of wood that had apparently been soaked in pitch, and the charred remains of the quilt.

"Evidence," he said with a knowing look.

Joseph gladly consented to his request, all the while praying silently that the dear constable would receive supernatural assistance in his inquiry, without which Joseph surmised he would make very little headway.

It was decided that the older boys and the men would take turns sleeping in the sitting room, to hopefully curtail any further attacks of the same nature.

* * *

The following evening, a very welcome sight greeted Joseph as he stepped out of the refuge door to draw a breath of crisp dusk air. A carriage and two wagons were arriving, bearing none other than James and Betty, with Joseph's furniture.

"Ah James, it is so good to see you," exclaimed Joseph. "Much has happened since you left."

James immediately noticed the broken sitting room window.

"I see that it has," he began.

“And Betty, how are you?” asked Joseph warmly.

“Oh, Mr. Addington,” she began, “my James has been telling me about all your outlandish escapades, and all the good Lord has done to make your way prosperous.”

“Betty, you are certainly a welcome addition to our humble team. Your abilities will certainly fill a gaping hole in our meagre attempts.”

“Thank you, Mr. Addington, for saying so, but talking about gaping holes, what's this gaping hole in the window here? Is that some of your rascally boys playing around, is it?”

“Rascals indeed, but none of mine,” said Joseph wryly.

He called some of the boys to start unloading the furniture and baggage, then took James and Betty inside to tell them of some of the events that had transpired.

“This is undoubtedly the work of Snyder,” said Joseph, “but by the mercies of God his two attempts to thwart us, the first legal, the second illegal, have failed and indeed could turn back upon his own head. We can only expect further attacks, although not knowing what form they may take.”

“We must pray and be prepared,” said James.

“That we must.”

That night James and Joseph conferred together about many things. Eventually the conversation turned to financial matters.

“I fear we are right down to our last few coppers,” said Joseph.

“And I expended all the money you gave me on the hiring of the carts and carriages and my expenses while in London,” replied James gravely.

“We don't even have enough to fix up the broken window downstairs, or replace the burned carpet.”

“Your apartments are up for sale,” said James, “but there have been no takers as yet.”

“And my other investments don't mature until June,” said Joseph thoughtfully. “To whom else can we turn to for help? Ah, dear Jesus, give us the faith we need.”

With that, the two men knelt down to pray.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

The next morning none other than Mr. Snyder himself arrived at the front door of the refuge. James opened the door and stood with his mouth open for a few seconds, not knowing how to react.

"Well, don't just stand there, man! Aren't you going to invite me in?" asked Snyder.

"Yes, of course," said James, immediately assuming his butler-like submissiveness as he ushered Snyder into the sitting room. "This way, sir ... er, allow me to call my assistant, Joe."

Joseph entered the room, saw Mr. Snyder and quickly cleared his throat.

"Ah, good mornin' Guvner. And what can we do for you?"

"Well, to begin with, Addington," snapped Snyder, "you can take off that ridiculous cap, stop putting on that abominable cockney accent and speak to me in proper English like you have before."

"Ah," said Joseph, crestfallen, removing his cap and tossing it onto an empty chair. "I see you are not taken with my disguise."

"I should think not," replied Snyder. "And who do you think you are, to come here and try to pull the wool over my eyes, setting yourself up as some sort of self-styled emancipator of the poor? Exactly who do you think you are trying to fool, Mr. Addington?"

"Would you like some tea, sir?" interjected James politely.

"No!" snapped Snyder. "I can't stand the stuff."

"Oh," said James, his attempt at civility rebuffed.

"Look, Addington, I'll get right down to business. I've come to make you an offer. I know you're a dreamer and an idealist, but don't worry about that, you'll get over that in a few years. It's also come to my attention that you're a damned good lawyer--much as I hate to admit it--one of the

most promising upstarts in London, by all accounts.

“So I have a proposal. Why don't you come and work for me? I'm in need of someone with your kind of talent to help me in my enterprises--who knows the law and could help advise me how best to go about my business. There are others like me who see a very bright future for this country--prosperity that we have only dreamed of. I have friends and colleagues, a growing force that you could also be a part of. I could even fix you up in a reputable company of lawyers, to further your legal career, which otherwise--or so Crittingdon has assured me--has absolutely no future in the practice of English common law¹.

“I'll give you one hundred pounds a year--no, make it one hundred and fifty. And I'll even underwrite the expenses of this place. I'm always looking around for a good charity to support. I mean--look at yourself, Addington! You're one of the finest young lawyers in London, and could have a promising career ahead of you. Even Crittingdon's daughter has an eye for you, by all accounts. Yet here you are, living in poverty with a miserable collection of tinkers and tailors, and you can't even get your own broken window fixed, let alone these burns on the carpet!”

“I ... er...,” began Joseph lamely.

“Oh and--by the way, the constable informed me that he apprehended the young hooligans that did this,” said Snyder. “The village is well rid of them.”

“But really, Mr. Snyder, I don't think I--”

¹ **Common Law:** A system of law in which cases are decided by previous decisions of the court, the doctrinal principles of those decisions, and local customs and usages, instead of by codified written laws. The common law system is largely practiced in Great Britain and the United States, while much of continental Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia make use of the *civil law* system, which has its roots in the ancient Roman and Germanic methods of more rigidly defining laws and decrees. In some countries, a successful blend of the two is practiced.

“Oh, give it up, Addington! Give it up. You'll never survive without financial backing, and goodness knows, I have loads of that to give you. Come on, man. Think about it. Oh, all right--two hundred pounds a year.”

Joseph stood up stiffly. “Thank you, Mr. Snyder. I will give your offer my consideration.”

“Good. I shall come by next week and we can talk about it some more, shall we? And by the way, allow me to make a small contribution to help you fix up your window and your carpet.”

So saying, he pulled ten pounds out of his wallet and slapped it into James' hand. “Good day.”

For a few moments after his departure, James and Joseph sat in stunned silence.

Finally James said, “Let us go and see Reverend Miller.”

* * *

“Is it possible that Snyder has begun to see the error of his ways and is intending to repent?” asked Joseph hopefully.

“Did his manner seem to you to be repentant in the slightest?” said Reverend Miller.

“Not to me, sir,” said James.

“Or is this some odd and unexpected answer to our prayers whereby God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform?” continued Joseph.

“God's answers to prayer do not usually result in deals with the Devil,” said Reverend Miller.

“But is there a possibility that Snyder isn't the Devil, but possibly a sheep gone astray, and that perhaps some influence of mine may help him turn from his errant ways?”

“Yes, that may be,” replied the reverend hesitantly.

“And was not Joseph of old employed in the courts of Pharaoh before he rose to control more than half his kingdom?”

“True,” Reverend Miller concurred uncertainly.

“When I think of the welfare of those poor children in the refuge, never having to worry about where their next meal will come from ... I could buy so many books for the library, hire teachers--”

“Joseph!” Reverend Miller cleared his throat. “May I speak plainly?”

“Yes,” said Joseph,

“It is becoming increasingly obvious to me that this latest attack of Mr. Snyder's is far more deadly than the false reports spread about, or even the attempted arson of the other night.”

“Attack?” said Joseph. “You mean his offer?”

“When the serpent approached Eve in the Garden, he appealed to three of the inherent weaknesses of our poor human natures, what the apostle John called the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. I'm afraid that Mr. Snyder, in his likely devilish wisdom, has done precisely that.”

For a moment Joseph's blood rushed to his face and he was tempted to slam his hand on the table, push back his chair and walk out of the room. “Jesus help me,” he whispered almost silently as he swallowed, recalling Reverend Miller's humility, long years of service and obvious love for his Saviour.

Breathing deeply, Joseph stammered, “Go on.”

“Did he not call you the finest young lawyer in London, with a promising career?”

“Yes,” said Joseph lamely.

“Well, here is the pride of life. He offered you a hundred pounds, a hundred and fifty, then two hundred--tempting you with something you can easily see rather than the riches that are in Christ. Is not this the lust of the eyes? Did he not even mention your former employer's daughter, who you yourself have told me is a shallow, superficial girl--beautiful

perhaps, but with no concern for the needs of the poor? Is not this the lust of the flesh? But, dear friend, I will not try to convince you further. Let us do as we have done in past times, and open our hearts to our Lord and ask Him to guide us. I'm sure He will not fail."

"That He will not," said Mrs. Miller.

"Why don't you yourself pray, Joseph? For the Scripture says, 'let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.'" Reverend Miller's tone was gentle but firm.

With that, the four closed their eyes and bowed their heads. Joseph prayed, "Dear Jesus, we are as sheep in the midst of wolves, as gentle doves amid serpents; without Your guidance we are surely lost. We ask You in all humility to guide us, and show us the true nature of Snyder's offer and what we should do about it."

As he closed his eyes and concentrated, suddenly Joseph sensed himself to be in a lush, verdant tropical garden. Delicious fruit hung on the trees around him and pleasant balmy breezes filled the atmosphere. All was pure and unadulterated, all was provided for him to enjoy and partake of to the full, all but the one fruit that he longed to taste.

Suddenly he saw the beautiful woman, her lips curled deliciously, holding the fruit out to him, as he heard the Tempter's voice whispering beside him, "Take and eat."

Suddenly he slammed his hand down on the side of the table and shouted, "No!"

All eyes in the room turned to look at him in surprise.

"No, no ... I will not serve you, Satan!" he whispered through clenched teeth. "I shall love the Lord my God with all my mind, with all my soul, with all my heart, and Him only shall I serve."

"Yes!" said Reverend Miller with excitement. "The very verse the Lord gave me!"

"I saw a picture of Daniel refusing to eat of the king's delicacies," said Mrs. Miller.

"And I," said James hesitantly, "couldn't help thinking there must be something terribly wrong with a man who doesn't like tea."

"Another thought that occurred to me--for him to come and make you an offer like that means that he is quite worried. He feels he's in danger of being beaten," said Reverend Miller.

"Gentlemen, forgive me for my weakness. And thank you for your wise words of counsel and reproof," said Joseph. "Rather than surrender, I do believe it's time we launched a new offensive--spiritually speaking."

"Go on," said Reverend Miller.

"Well, during my sickness, I was unable to get those poor boys off my mind and I thought that even if for now we can't save their poor little bodies, at least there might be a way we could save their souls. I have an idea. The coming Sunday is Easter...."

* * *

It was the next morning, and Joseph and James were nearing Snyder's poorhouse. James was feeling rather uncomfortable in Joseph's fanciest frock coat.

"James, you just have to play the role," whispered Joseph urgently, as they approached the front door.

"Now remember--Elsie's the one you want to talk to. She's the one I sensed just a drop of sympathy in for the poor boys."

"Good day, madam," began James with an air of authority as Elsie opened the door.

"Well, look who's 'ere," she said calling back over her shoulder, "if it isn't another gentleman--from London undoubtedly." She smoothed her dress in an attempt at demureness. "I'm Elsie, an' who might you be?"

“Allow me to introduce myself,” said James. “I am Mr. Edward James of James, James and James and Sons Tailors and Haberdashers in London. This is my driver and my assistant, Jonny Aimsworth.”

Joseph tipped his cap. “An’ a good day to you, madam,” he said in his cockney accent, which he had been diligently trying to improve since the Snyder debacle.

James continued the charade. “I have been informed of the very excellent produce of your company and I am interested in obtaining some of your weavings for my warehouses in London, so I would like to take the opportunity to visit your factory.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. James, but Mr. Snyder ’as given very strict orders that no outsiders whatsoever are to be allowed into the factory.”

“Oh dear,” muttered James.

“Mr. Snyder may be interested to know,” interjected Joseph perkily, “that Mr. James ’ere ’as one of the fancies’ shops in all London. Blimey, a contract like this might be worth up to one thousand pounds a year--and wouldn’t Mr. Snyder be ’appy if he found out that lil’ ol’ Elsie were the one whose initiative were responsible for obtainin’ it?”

“I’m sorry, but I can’t disobey Mr. Snyder’s orders,” Elsie said firmly. “You could come to our showroom. The cloths are all on display.”

“No no, I’m afraid that wouldn’t do at all. I ... I was given strictest instructions to ensure these materials were in fact crafted here. Perhaps,” said James, exchanging glances with Joseph, “if we arrange a small advance payment for you personally.” He handed Elsie a crisp pound note.

“Well, that bein’ the case,” said Elsie, her eyes widening, “perhaps as an exception, a small guided tour could be arranged. Come this way.”

She led the two men through the house, calling out to the other women, “Gentlemen business friends of Mr. Snyder.”

Joseph braced himself and clenched his teeth as Elsie once again opened the factory door. Quickly Elsie led them through the Hades-like place, not noticing Joseph and James hurriedly counting the children as they walked through.

"Customers of Mr. Snyder," Elsie shouted to the overseer with the big cane, as they passed him and went through to the other room.

James gasped as the door closed behind him, obviously reeling from the experience. A stern look from Joseph helped him to regain his composure.

"Hmmm, interesting," he said, with as much detachment as he could muster. "Now, may I be permitted to peruse your merchandise?"

"Go right ahead, sir," said Elsie.

"Exquisite," he said examining the varieties of cloth.

Joseph, getting Elsie's attention said, "Poor little tykes--it's a miserable existence they 'ave, isn't it?"

"I must say it is," said Elsie, "but there's nothing the likes of you and I can do about it."

"What's this Mr. Snyder like?" whispered Joseph,

"Well," said Elsie, looking around, "some say he's an enterprising business man, but if you ask me he's a selfish tyrant."

"Then why do you keep working for him?" asked Joseph.

"Well, I does me best to make it easy for the poor little blighters--that's the only reason I continue 'ere. If it weren't for me it'd only be the likes of 'im watchin' over the miserable wretches." She pointed a finger in the direction of the cane-handling guard.

"Do they have a day off?" Joseph inquired.

"By law they have to stop working on Sundays. Mr. Snyder at least pretends to abide by the law, but he locks them all up in their rooms on Sunday so they don't escape."

"Wouldn't it be a treat for them if they could just go out for a day? Just one day--for a picnic, perhaps? Just to get

out of this hell hole, and get some fresh air in their little lungs.”

“It'd be a dream come true,” said Elsie pensively, “but Snyder would never 'ear of it.”

“I've got an idea. James here is a philanthropic gentleman, and tomorrow bein' Easter Sunday and all, I'm sure we could arrange it.”

“I'd 'ave all 'ell to pay if I's got caught.”

“But wouldn't the little ones love you? We'll arrange everything. I'll bring a cart here with a big sheet pretending to deliver wood, and we'll pack the little ones in the back of the cart, drive out, take them out for a treat, and then bring 'em back and no one would ever know the difference.”

At that moment James reached for a piece of material that dangled from a high shelf. Joseph saw that it was attached to a larger roll that was poised to roll off the shelf and onto James. He ran forward just in time to catch it and save James from being inundated with an avalanche of cloth, however, in the process he knocked his cap off.

As he bent to pick it up, Elsie exclaimed, “‘Ey, I know you! You're no Jonny Aimsforth! You're the one that came in and rescued Mrs. Chadwick and 'er boys. Addington, isn't it? Mr. Snyder told us to keep a watch out for you, 'e did!” Elsie began to raise her voice.

“Shh, shh! Yes, I confess. I am Joseph Addington, but listen, Elsie! Please listen.”

Elsie grew still.

“Forgive us for trying to deceive you, but there was no other way to get in and try to reach the boys and girls.”

“Reach them? What do you mean?”

“Well, Mr. James and I run the mission called the Bishop's Green Refuge--you've probably heard of it.”

“I 'ave. Snyder rants and raves against it without ceasing.”

“All we want to do is just take the boys there for Easter and give them a chance to know that someone cares for them and that God loves them. We don't want to get you in trouble, Elsie, so we promise we'll get them back--every last one of them. Please, please help us! Just give us this one chance to do something for those poor children.”

“You promise me? You're not trying to pull the wool over my eyes now?” she said suspiciously.

“Why? What possible advantage could we gain from that? We are only interested in the welfare of the boys and girls.”

“All right then. Ten o' clock tomorrow, and don't be a minute late.”

“Thank you so much, Elsie.”

So saying Joseph replaced his cap, James reassumed his lordly bearing, and the two men left the factory.

* * *

At precisely ten o' clock the next morning Joseph and John, the carpenter's apprentice, whom he had borrowed from Reverend Miller for the occasion, rolled up in the orphanage's cart outside the poorhouse.

“A load of wood for Mr. Snyder's factory,” John called out.

The back-court guard, recognizing John from previous encounters, opened the gate for them and lazily waved them through.

Joseph parked the cart as near as he could to the back entrance as Elsie emerged, lifted up a corner of the sheet and quickly waved to the excited children who were waiting just inside the back door. One by one, dirty, scrawny, but animated little bodies piled into the cart.

“Shh! Absolutely quiet and still,” she said.

The mass of little creatures froze as she replaced the corner of the sheet.

Jumping up on the cart she said, "I wouldn't miss this for the world."

As they sailed through the gate she said, "The gentlemen said they would fetch me to the market."

The guard smiled lazily at Elsie's characteristic impersonated pomposity.

Fifteen minutes later the cart pulled into the back of the refuge, Joseph jumped down and pulled off the top sheet and exclaimed, "Welcome, children! Today you are our honoured guests!"

Excited, the little ones jumped down and were led into the drawing room. Betty served them warm cocoa and hot cross buns, which the hungry children began to eagerly devour.

Elsie watched with fascination how kindly all the members of the refuge treated the children, and was equally amazed to be herself accorded gracious respect.

Soon Joseph was ready to begin his rendition of the Easter story, which he delivered to the children with customary enthusiasm. Little eyes furrowed and then lightened as he described the story of Jesus betrayed to the chief priests by his friends, nailed to the cross and finally triumphantly rising again.

"Do you know that He did it all for you?" Little eyes widened in amazement, and soon little hearts opened up to receive the love of their truest Friend and caring Father.

Afterwards Joseph led the boys and girls outside, where two of the older boys from Reverend Miller's orphanage, whom Joseph had called for the day, led them in some games.

One little lad, whom Joseph learned was named Arnold, was more weak and sickly than the rest. Joseph recognized him as the poor lad who had been coughing pitifully and was mistreated guard in the factory.

Joseph took extra time to comfort him and carried him around piggyback style most of the time.

Elsie, moved to tears, commented to Betty, "This is not only the 'appiest day of their lives, but the 'appiest day of mine."

Soon the allotted time was up and the children piled back into the cart.

"Can we do this again sometime, mister?" said little Arny to Joseph.

"I'm sure we can," said Joseph. "I'm sure we can."

As the old cart once again entered the gate of poorhouse, Elsie in her most hoity-toity voice called out to the apathetic guard again, "And the nice gentlemen agreed to drive me 'ome."

The little ones were herded back inside the house, and with a silent and grateful tear Elsie waved farewell to John and Joseph.

"I wish we could do more for them," said John as the old cart lumbered back down the road.

"So do I," said Joseph, "but now they are Jesus' children, and He is bound by His Word to do all He can for them."

CHAPTER TWENTY

It was two days later that Mr. Snyder once again called at the refuge. Joseph had in the meantime been strengthening his resolve through some days of prayer and reading of the Scriptures, and although their money was down to a pound and six shillings, his confidence in his Heavenly Employer was fully restored. It may be noted that Mr. Snyder's donation of ten pounds had been gainfully employed to fix the window and repair the carpet, with some left over for the running of the refuge.

After being shown once more into the sitting room and again perfunctorily dismissing James' offer of refreshment, Snyder wasted no time in getting down to business.

"So, Addington," he began, almost pleasantly, "I trust you've given my offer due consideration?"

"Yes, I have--and I'm afraid I must decline," Joseph replied calmly.

Immediately Snyder's face fell, and his dark eyes began to glower.

"And decline you shall--in more ways than one," he retorted sharply, "and your miserable refuge with you."

"Mr. Snyder, you do well to remember the words of the Good Book: 'If this work be of God, no man can stand against it, lest haply you be found to fight against God.'"

"That Bible you profess to believe in is balderdash," snapped Snyder sardonically. "If you wish to enlighten yourself, I suggest you attend some of the secularist meetings I have been to in London, where some of England's finest minds agree that the Bible is nothing more than fib and fable."

"I consider no mind fine that denies the existence of its Creator," said Joseph firmly.

“You will soon see where those old wives' tales land you. From this day forth I count you my sworn adversary.”

“Then may God be the judge between us!”

“So be it!” fumed Snyder and stormed out of the house. He quickly mounted his steed and galloped off towards his mansion.

As he passed through the crossroads he slowed slightly, and gave a silent nod in the direction of a solitary figure standing there.

* * *

At the refuge, James turned to Joseph with a slightly worried frown, but Joseph was effusive.

“With only one pound and six shillings left to our name, I have just turned down two hundred pounds a year,” he exclaimed, “and I've never felt better. I'll stake the claims of the Word of God against that man's lies any day. I do believe I trust every sentence, every word, and every letter.”

“The letter!” gasped James, “How could I have forgotten? The letter!”

“What?” said Joseph.

“There was a letter for you at your home in London. I put it in my coat pocket and totally forgot about it.”

Quickly James huffed and puffed his way up and down three flights of stairs and retrieved the envelope. With a curious expectancy Joseph opened the envelope.

Dear Mr. Addington,

Thank you again for your visit, which was a most pleasant occurrence in my otherwise quiet and uneventful life. I have given considerable thought to the question you posed to me and believe I have come up with a plan of action that may be quite effective. Next time you are in London, come and see me and we'll discuss it together. All the best for the success of your mission. Please find enclosed a humble contribution towards it,

Yours affectionately,

William J. Clancy

Hardly believing his eyes, Joseph fumbled about in the envelope. "And here is a check for ... three-hundred pounds!"

For a moment the two grown men lost all sense of dignity as they danced wildly around the room, Joseph waving the check high in the air, before fervently embracing James.

"My dear James, ha ha ha!" shouted Joseph. "Give us the faith of little Billy! And God bless Mr. Clancy! I must ride out and tell Reverend Miller. He will be overjoyed at the answer to prayer! Here, James--keep this in a safe place. I will be back within the hour."

So saying he handed the check to James and turned for the front door.

"The faith of little Billy? What on earth should that mean?" James pondered.

* * *

Within minutes Joseph was on his horse, spurring it down the street in the direction of the road which led to the orphanage. Now in order to reach the Miller's, Joseph needed to travel along a half a mile or so of fairly deserted road, with only a few farmhouses on either side. As he neared a bend in the road a loud scream from behind some bushes suddenly pierced the air.

Joseph immediately reined in his horse. A woman ran out onto the road, her clothes dishevelled and an anguished expression on her face. Joseph immediately recognized her as the serving maid from the Barmaid's Arms.

"Mr. Addington, help!" she cried. "The terrible brute..." Her voice faltered, her eyes rolled upwards and she collapsed in a dead faint by the side of the road.

Quickly Joseph dismounted, and ran to assist her. As he knelt down and attempted to revive her, a sound alerted him.

Joseph turned to see just behind him now stood an armed and threatening man. Immediately Joseph remembered the sneering face as one of Snyder's men from the inn.

"Addington, you are too kind for your own good--just like Mr. Snyder said," the man snickered.

"What have you done to this poor wench?" began Joseph angrily.

The maid opened her eyes, sat up and looked at Joseph imploringly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Addington. Ned threatened to harm me if I didn't pretend and do just as he said."

"Shush yourself," Ned hissed. "Come with me, Addington. You too." He gestured menacingly to the wench. Roughly he grabbed and pushed Joseph along, pointing towards a deserted barn off the side of the road.

Joseph's heart sank as they walked towards the barn.

"Lord forgive me," he breathed. "In the excitement of the moment I ran out the door without so much as a prayer for Thy protection, and fell straight into the enemy's snare. Have mercy on me, Lord, and turn it to Thy good."

Once inside the musty, cobweb-ridden barn, Joseph turned to face his captor.

"Mr. Snyder 'as decided that you are too much of an annoyance and a disruption to his plans," Ned sneered. "So 'e instructed me to rid this place of you."

“Ned...,” said Joseph. His calm clear voice surprised even himself. “...the law enforces that if one takes the life of another, it will cost their own. Whereas for minor felonies, of which you are no doubt guilty, you will most likely be sent to Australia. Whilst it is by all accounts a desolate land, nevertheless there is talk of abundant gold in the rivers there.” Joseph was thinking quickly and praying desperately. “Upon your release you might very well make yourself a fortune.”

“I can do as I wish here,” Ned growled.

“Ah, but they might very well catch you. This is a small town, after all,” said Joseph.

“The likes of that Constable 'iggins couldn't catch a cat stealin' chickens!”

“Well, even if you do manage to escape the officers of the law, think of this: One day you will face God Himself, Who will require an account of all your deeds.”

“It's too late for the likes of me,” snarled Ned. “As far as God is concerned, I'm already goin' to 'ell. And you're most likely going to 'eaven.

“It's true that I believe I shall go to Heaven,” said Joseph. “And if I must go there sooner than expected, then so be it. But I want you to know that it is definitely not too late for you. Jesus told a dying thief on the cross that if he would believe, he would go that very day to Paradise.”

The maid was watching the exchange in wide-eyed wonder.

“Well, I ain't a dying thief, and you ain't Jesus,” came the gruff reply.

“Then at the very least grant me one wish,” said Joseph. His authority continued to surprise himself.

“What's that?”

“Allow me to pray for your soul.”

“Ain't no one ever prayed for the likes o' me before,”

said the man, surprised at the request. "All right, then. Get on with it."

Joseph kneeled down.

"My dearest Lord Jesus, I would like to ask request that dear Ned here could come to know You as his Friend and Saviour, and that he would be able to leave this awful life he now lives, and begin anew. And I ask the same for our barmaid friend. By Your grace and in Your wonderful name, I pray."

Joseph kept his eyes closed, though not knowing what to expect from one moment to the next.

After a minute of deafening silence, he gingerly opened his eyes.

Ned was still and silent as a tear rolled down his cheek.

"Only one person ever called me 'dear Ned' before," he snivelled. "My dear mother, rest 'er soul. She died when I was only five. That's when I 'ad to learn to steal for a livin'." In an instant the story of the lonely, hardened life unrolled before Joseph's eyes, a story he knew only too well. Suddenly he saw the orphan boys at the refuge in Ned's hardened face. This time a tear formed in Joseph's eye.

"Jesus can change all that, Ned."

Suddenly fear gripped him as he recalled the threats made to him by Snyder, if he didn't follow through on orders. Ned blurted out, "Snyder will find out I've let you go. And you know what 'e does to those 'oo decide to leave 'is employ?"

"I can well imagine." A sudden inspiration struck Joseph. "How much does he pay you per month? "

"Three shillings."

"Look--here's my wallet. In it is one pound, six shillings. That's six months' wages. Take it and leave today, right now. Go to Yorkshire or Leeds--there's good work to be had there. Honest work. Start a new life there. Let Jesus give you a new start."

“What if Snyder finds me?”

“I don't think he will. I have it on good authority that his time is almost up.”

“Ned,” the barmaid pleaded, “take the chance! Take it and leave. You know this is what you always wanted.”

For an unbearably long moment, Ned hesitated, eyes still trained on Joseph. His eyes then shifted uneasily to the maid, then back to Joseph again. He appeared to be grappling with a momentous decision. Finally he took the wallet from Joseph's outstretched hand. He turned to the barmaid.

“Will you come with me, Mildred?” he said gruffly, but with a note of tenderness in his voice.

“Wot's got into you, Ned? You ain't never called me Mildred before! Is it that Jesus doin' all this? One minute you don't care about me and the next you want to take me off to Yorkshire with you.”

This time it was Joseph's turn to witness the exchange open-mouthed.

“Mr. Addington...” Mildred turned and looked straight into his eyes. “...you're the bravest man I ever saw.” With that she planted a tender kiss on his cheek. “Come on now, Ned,” she said. “We'd best be off. There's a long way to go before nightfall.”

Suddenly a thought seemed to strike Ned,

“If you know what's good for you, stay here a good two hours and don't take the main road home. That will give us time to get away ... and--thank you, Mr. Addington.”

Without another word the two slipped quietly out of the barn. Joseph, his confidence and dying graces suddenly removed, promptly fainted.

Ned mounted the horse he had hidden behind the barn. He rode out onto the road and raised his arm in an affirmative salute to a dark-clad figure on horseback about fifty yards down the road.

The dark figure turned and rode away.

As soon as he was out of sight, Ned signalled to Mildred, who emerged from the bushes. He pulled her up beside him and promptly spurred his mount off in the opposite direction.

* * *

It was nearly nightfall by the time Joseph arrived back at the Refuge. He was tired and dishevelled after painstakingly leading his horse on a circuitous route through fields and woods, and eventually clambering over the refuge's back fence, exhausted, but very happy to be alive.

He entered quietly through the back door, greeted the astonished James and promptly beckoned him to follow him up to his study.

Eagerly James listened as Joseph related the events of the day. The two rejoiced at Joseph's miraculous deliverance.

"But now we must pray more than ever," said Joseph, "for I perceive that our enemy truly stalks us as a roaring lion."

* * *

The next day Joseph and James were at prayer in his study when Betty burst into the room.

"Mr. Joseph, come quickly!" she gasped.

"What now?" said Joseph, surprised by her obvious consternation.

"It's Elsie from the poorhouse. She's come with a boy and he looks awful sick."

"Careful," warned James. "It could be another of Snyder's ruses. I'll go meet her. Snyder thinks you're gone, remember?"

With that, James strode manfully down the stairs and towards the door. Joseph carefully looked on from the upper hallway as Elsie came into the main hall, and up to James.

Tears were streaming down her face. In her arms was little Arny, looking deathly pale.

This is no ruse, thought Joseph to himself as he raced down the steps to greet Elsie for himself.

“Oh Army, my blessed little man,” he cried as he took little Army in his arms. Carefully he carried him to the sitting room sofa. As he neared the sofa, a violent coughing spasm wracked the frail body. Joseph put the little boy down, and his heart sank.

“Oh,” moaned Elsie, “he’s awfully sick, Mr. Addington. He fainted while he was working and that brute would have just left ‘im there to die. I couldn’t just let ‘im die, Mr. Addington-- I didn’t know where else to go.”

“You mean you carried him all the way here yourself?”

“I snuck ‘im out the back, so’s no one would see me. I couldn’t let little Army die, so’s I brought him ‘ere. Is there anything we can do?”

“I’ll call for the doctor,” said James to Joseph.

“Yes,” replied Joseph quickly. “And the constable,” he added as a thought seemed to strike him.

James quickly dispatched two of the older boys.

Joseph knelt beside the sofa and began praying fervently, laying his hands on the emaciated little body. “Oh, my little Army, don’t give up on us!”

Betty knelt and joined in supplication, as did Elsie, though she barely knew how.

“Oh little Army, don’t leave us,” she pleaded.

The little boy gasped, his eyes gazing blankly from their sockets.

“Precious Jesus, by all that is holy, heal this little one!” intoned Betty.

“Betty, he’s cold. Quick, fetch warm blankets, and water to drink,” urged Joseph. “Come on, little man, get all better and I’ll take you for another piggy-back ride.” Joseph took a thin little hand in his. “Come on, my boy.”

The thin hand seemed to have been tenaciously hanging on to a tiny thread of life, but Joseph sensed that his grasp was fast slipping.

“Hang on, little boy! Hang on.”

Betty arrived with blankets, which she tucked warmly about Arny.

For what seemed like hours, but couldn't have been more than forty minutes, Joseph stayed by the little boy, praying fervently and cajoling him, squeezing his tiny hand, trying to force a little water past the parched lips, and brushing back the ruffled golden locks from his face.

Finally Dr. Lean arrived.

“Ah doctor, thank you for coming,” said Joseph gratefully.

“One of the children of this house?” asked the physician, as he knelt down beside the boy.

“No, one of the children from Mr. Snyder's poorhouse--or from his factory, to be more exact.”

“Let me see.”

Gravely the physician examined the little boy, holding his pulse, and looking down his throat as he held the tongue back with the end of his spatula.

“This child,” he pronounced after a few moments, “is beyond all human aid. If that God of yours has any remedies, Mr. Addington,”--he shook his head gravely--“then now is the time to employ them.”

Upon this came the red-faced constable, huffing and puffing as he entered the room.

“What 'ave we 'ere? What 'ave we 'ere then?”

“Constable, this child is deathly sick. I wanted your presence here as a witness. This child has been brought...”

“From where?” interjected the constable brusquely as he drew out his notebook.

“Elsie, would you like to inform the constable?” said Joseph.

“From Mr. Snyder's factory,” she replied. “He was coughing-like, an' couldn't work. The guard hit him and he fainted and they would 'ave left him to die, but I brought him 'ere to Mr. Addington, as I know he 'as a kindly 'eart.”

"I see, I see, I see," said the constable. "Wait a minute-- Mr. Addington, did you say? Aren't you the lawyer who was with that other dead man at Wayfarer's Inn before Christmas?"

"That I am," said Joseph.

"Well, there was a cockney fellow here the other day, looked a darn sight like you, but no--'e was a different fellow. Nothing escapes my eagle eye, does it?"

"Nothing, constable," affirmed Joseph. "That's why I wanted you here as a witness to Mr. Snyder's cruelty and neglect of the children under his charge."

"Hmm," said the constable, then whispered knowingly to Joseph, "We're on his trail, we are. I slipped him a right red 'erring I did--told him I already caught the rascals that tried to burn down this 'ouse. But I know who's behind it. Just never found a way to prove it yet, 'ave I?"

"Betty," said Joseph, "tell all the children to pray. There's a sick and dying child right here, and we need them to pray."

Once again Joseph knelt down by Arny's side. "Come on, little man, don't give up on us."

The doctor shook his head sadly. "It is too late," he intoned moanfully.

Through the open door to the drawing room Joseph began to hear childish voices offer simple, sincerely entreating prayers.

Once more Joseph prayed, this time with a definiteness and conviction that surprised even himself.

"Dear Jesus, I know that Thou art the Great Physician. Thou hast all power in Heaven and in Earth. As a testimony to all present here today, and for Thy mercies' sake, I pray that You heal this little one, and bring him back to life just as You brought me back to life. Amen."

Slowly little Arny let out a gasp, as though it were his last.

Suddenly he coughed and spluttered a little, and his eyes opened wide. In surprise he looked around at the unfamiliar faces. Finally his eyes rested on Joseph, who was gazing at him with a mixture of joy and incredulity.

“Mr. Joseph, can we go for our piggy-back ride now?” he asked.

Dr. Lean gasped faintly.

The constable scratched his head in bewilderment.

Arny sat up, stretched, and said, “May I have some water please, Mr. Joseph?”

“Yes, you may,” said Joseph, handing him a cup, from which he drank thirstily.

“You know the nice Man said I couldn't stay now.”

“Stay where, Arny?”

“Up in the big garden with all the children. Oh, it was so much fun, but the nice Man said I had to come back down. He had some work for me to do.”

“What nice man, Arny?” asked Joseph softly.

“The nice Man in the white clothes with the long beard and the kind eyes--you know, the one you told us about on the day we came to play.”

Joseph looked up at the doctor who was watching the boy with a kind of wide-eyed fascination.

“You know ... Jesus.”

The doctor was stunned, but Joseph was not surprised.

“Yes, indeed, we do have some work to do,” Joseph repeated. He picked Arny up in his arms and looked at the doctor benignly.

“Well?”

“I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't have seen it with my own eyes,” said Dr. Lean, shaking his head.

“Betty, take Arny,” Joseph said. “Give him something warm to drink and put him to bed for the day. We shall take good care of him, until he's all strong and healthy again. Now, gentlemen, I have a few questions I'd like to ask you.”

“Doctor, what is your diagnosis of the little boy's condition?”

“Well,” said the doctor, “if it were not for a miracle he would not be alive at this moment. There was no fever, and his coughing up blood was not from the consumption. It is not impossible that he was ... poisoned.”

“Listen carefully, Constable. And how might that be, Elsie?”

“It's that factory,” she said. “Their poor little bodies breathing in them foul vapours day in and day out, and not so much as a window to let a bit of fresh air in. And even when Arny 'ere was almost deathly sick, that big oaf was treatin' 'im cruelly an' all.”

“And what of Arny's parents?” inquired Joseph. “Surely they must have consented to his working there.”

“Arny ... is an orphan,” said Elsie. “'E never had no parents--at least that were known. We just found 'im outside our door one day, we did.”

“Gentlemen, I hope you will agree with me that it's high time this madness was put to an end,” said Joseph emphatically.

“I propose that we take the child right now and confront Mr. Snyder with the evidence,” said the constable.

“Wait,” said Joseph. “Snyder is too smart for that. Although we have the doctor's testimony to back us up, we have no one but Elsie to testify that the boy actually came from the factory. Snyder and his lot could easily deny up and down that they ever set eyes on the lad, and make dear Elsie out to be a liar. Wait, gentlemen, I have another idea. Listen....”

* * *

The next morning Nathaniel Snyder was sitting in his study when one of his men knocked timidly on the door.

“What is it?” snapped Snyder.

"It's ... about Addington," came the hesitant reply. "It seems he's still around."

"What?! That conniving creature. How do you know?"

"Elsie just seen 'im yesterday."

"Nonsense! Fetch Ned."

"That's just it. Ned's gone. He 'asn't been 'eard of for two days, and Mildred the barmaid wench, she's gone too. It seems they've run away together."

"I have been betrayed!" Snyder slammed the table angrily. Suddenly his anger turned to suspicion. "But wait ... what was Elsie doing seeing Mr. Addington?"

"One of the boys in the factory was dyin', I forget 'is name."

"Who cares about their names?" Snyder snapped.

"Right, well, any'ow, Elsie took the boy to Addington's refuge, to try to get 'im 'ealed like."

"And?"

"I don't know what 'appened, but 'e didn't die. They prayed for 'im, and now they're keepin' 'im."

"Where?"

"At the refuge, with Mr. Addington."

A malevolent gleam formed suddenly in Snyder's eyes.

"The foolish woman," he said contemptuously. "Little does she know that in her contrived compassion she has finally given us a chance to get Addington exactly where we want him. This has fallen out better than I could have hoped. Fetch me the child's contract, and call Constable Higgins. I'll meet you outside the refuge in twenty minutes."

* * *

It was with an air of triumphant gloating that Nathaniel Snyder, accompanied by the factory overseer and Constable Higgins, walked up the steps of the refuge and rapped sharply on the door with his cane.

As soon as James answered the door, the constable began in his most pompous manner, "Mr. Snyder 'ere informs

me that you have stolen one of the children that is in his employ and are illegally keeping him here.”

“Stolen--oh my!” said James. “Mr. Addington! There are some gentlemen here to inquire about--”

“Out of the way, you idiot!” snapped Snyder impatiently, as he pushed past the faltering James.

At that moment Joseph emerged from the sitting room carrying little Arny.

“That's him! That's the child!” said the overseer.

“Come on in,” said Joseph. “We have nothing to hide.”

“Fool,” muttered Snyder contemptuously.

“Let me examine the child,” said the constable. “Do you testify that this 'ere is the child that went missing from your factory yesterday?”

“Yes!” snapped Snyder.

“And you?”

“That's 'im all right,” said the overseer.

“And do you have the legal note of his employ?”

“Here is his contract with his thumb print.”

Carefully the constable examined the thumb and the print.

“Yes, they are matching,” he said.

Little Arny began to cry. “Mr. Joseph, don't let 'em take me back, Mr. Joseph!”

“I ask you once more,” said the constable. “Are you sure that this is the child?”

“Yes, yes!” snapped Snyder, while the overseer nodded affirmatively.

“If that is the case,” said the constable producing two pairs of handcuffs from underneath his tunic, “I hereby arrest both of you for causing grievous bodily harm through your neglect and cruelty, which almost resulted in this child's death.”

So saying he smartly snapped the handcuffs around the astonished Snyder's wrists. Immediately the overseer raised

his fists as if to deal the constable a fearsome blow.

“Jump to it, lads!” cried out the constable.

In a second he was surrounded by four more blue-uniformed constables who seemed to appear from nowhere, and quickly restrained the violently cursing oaf, and the struggling Snyder.

Quickly the constable handcuffed the other man. Then he turned triumphantly to Snyder.

“I've been on your trail a while, I 'ave,” he gloated.

Little Army ran back and jumped into Joseph's arms.

“Does that mean I don't 'ave to go back? Does that mean I can stay with you?” he pleaded.

“Yes, that's what it means,” said Joseph, “and a whole lot more.”

“You fools!” snapped Snyder. “You'll pay for this!”

“Mr. Snyder,” replied Joseph innocently, “I insist. This time it's your turn to pay!”

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

The trial against Mr. Snyder at the Hertfordshire County Court began two days later and lasted a full week. Joseph's careful investigation of all Snyder's affairs had turned up many more an infraction of the law than he had initially observed, and it was with little or no compunction that he, as self-appointed prosecutor in the case against Mr. Snyder, presented the matter forthrightly and passionately to the judge.

His most recent personal encounter with Snyder's associate in the barn would have elegantly capped off his testimony, but after prayer and consideration Joseph decided to let that matter rest, as to bring it up in court would have meant to disclose Ned and Mildred's identities. In Joseph's estimation, their attempt to find a new life was of more value than adding some more years to Snyder's prison sentence.

After the evidence was all heard and numerous witnesses called, the judge let his heavy gavel fall.

"Mr. Nathaniel Snyder, the jury finds you guilty of all the charges laid against you. You are hereby sentenced to five years in prison--and may I add, if it were not for the mercy of God in allowing that young child to live, it would have been much graver. Also, if you can find it in yourself to offer a prayer, then I would advise you to thank God for the ministrations of such as Mr. Addington here, without which you would be in the clink for twice the time. And I can't say I don't think you deserve it, but the law is the law!"

With one more even heavier bang of the gavel, he dismissed the court.

* * *

That night at the refuge a celebration took place, the likes of which hadn't been enjoyed in Bishop's Green for many a year.

"And the Devil was cast into prison!" quoted the Reverend Miller jocularly.

"And the Beast," chimed in Elsie.

"And afterwards," added Joseph a little soberly, "they must be loosed a little season."

"Well, we can but pray that Snyder learns his lesson a little more quickly than that old serpent the Devil."

"Perhaps we should visit Mr. Snyder and take him a Bible," said Mrs. Miller.

"I have a good mind to," said Joseph, "but I fear it may bring me too great a pleasure to see him in prison. What is that proverb?"

"Rejoice not when thine enemy stumbleth," quoted Reverend Miller.

"That's the one," said Joseph, "although I must admit I have never enjoyed a trial quite as much as the one I attended this week. But I fear," he added with a note of foreboding in his voice, "that if England should depart from its Christian values into the secularism embraced by Mr. Snyder, then we will have little defence against those of his kind, and our end shall be more dismal than the beginning."

"It is a sober thought," replied Reverend Miller, "but tonight let us rejoice and be merry, for our dear children were dead and are alive again!"

In spite of the rejoicing and merriment there was one face Joseph wished he could have seen amongst the happy crowd at the refuge.

Away with such thoughts! he chided himself again. *And forgive me, Edward, for thinking thus on your poor widow!*

* * *

The following day Joseph and James joined the Millers for further consultation and prayer. Amongst the court's rulings, one which greatly pleased Joseph was that those houses and properties from which the tenants had been wrongfully evicted, or evicted without proper cause, be returned and their ownership signed over to the tenants as equity for the wrongs they had endured through Mr. Snyder's malfeasance. This meant that the tenants of the refuge could now return to their places of abode.

Only, thought Joseph gladly, now with a heritage not only of land, but of faith and the knowledge of God's Word.

Of the forty-two children working at the mill, twenty-one belonged to parents who would now return to their dwelling places, whilst twenty-one others were orphans who had been corralled by Snyder at various times and forced into his employ. After prayerful deliberation, it was decided that Joseph, James and Betty should take fifteen of these to live with them at the refuge, while the remaining six, whose health was more delicate than the rest, would join Reverend and Mrs. Miller's orphanage, to be under Mrs. Miller's expert supervision, as she was better qualified to give such care.

Little Arny was amongst those assigned to the Millers, but he extracted a promise from Joseph that he would come over and give him a piggyback ride.

Joseph purposed also to continue the day school at the refuge that the children who had first occupied it had begun, if it so pleased the parents. Two of Reverend Miller's older boys and two of the girls volunteered to move to the refuge to assist in the care of the younger ones, thus giving the Millers more room to receive the incoming children.

And so it was that, on Sunday, the 15th of April, 1866, Joseph went to Reverend Miller's orphanage to fulfil his promise to little Arny. As he rode, Joseph breathed deeply of the invigorating spring air as he admired the daisies,

dandelions, crocuses and bluebells that were beginning to spring forth all around him.

As he dismounted at the gate of the orphanage he paused to admire a rose bud that was beginning to poke its tiny pink petals through the picket fence. As he bent for a moment to enjoy its innocence, the words wafted through his mind,

Is there a fairer rose that blooms this spring

Than thou whose fragrance makes my heart rejoice?

“Oh, stop it!” he exclaimed, chiding himself as he straightened his shoulders and marched towards the orphanage's front door.

A few moments later he emerged with Arny on his back. With a playful whinny he began to gallop round to the side of the house, out to the back, through the little gate in the picket fence, and down across the meadow towards the brook.

“Horsey fall down! Horsey fall down!” shouted Arny playfully, as Joseph galloped down the bank. With an extra loud neigh and a scream of delight from Arny, the two collapsed on the soft grass near the base of a tree. Its V-shaped trunk suddenly caught Joseph's attention and in an instant the dream flooded back into his consciousness.

Gripped by a fascination, he began to examine the left trunk. Clearing away the bark a little he found a heart inscribed on the trunk with the letters E. F. and M.C. inside. Edward Farrow and Mary ... who?

In an instant he was at the base of the trunk where just as in the dream there was a small hollow where a squirrel had stored nuts for the winter. Scrambling through the leaves, nuts and sticks Joseph's hand suddenly came against something hard and metallic. Instantly he pulled it out. It was a gold locket.

“Just as in the dream!” he exclaimed in amazement.

He opened the locket. There on one side was a finely penciled likeness of Edward, and on the other, one of Mary.

How extraordinary! thought Joseph.

Almost in a daze he turned the locket over in his hands. Suddenly he noticed an inscription on the back. Quickly he wiped away some remains of damp leaves as he struggled to make out the engraved letters.

“Mary ... Crittingdon!” he breathed in stunned astonishment.

“What is it, Mr. Joseph?” asked Arny.

“Mary Crittingdon! Dear God, can it be possible?”

“Mary who?” said Arny.

“Come, Arny--horsey is going back to the barn,” said Joseph quickly lifting him up onto his back again.

Joseph burst through the door of the orphanage, put down the bemused Arny and barged into the Reverend Miller's study.

“Why, Joseph!” exclaimed Reverend Miller.

“Look what I discovered!” said Joseph. “Down by the bank in a tree trunk!”

“My goodness!” said the Reverend Miller.

“In a dream during my sickness I saw the whole thing!--I saw the tree. Edward showed me where it was, he gave it to me! I dreamt the whole thing!”

Reverend Miller's mouth opened in astonishment.

“Lord bless my soul! Mary Farrow is Crittingdon's daughter!” continued Joseph breathlessly. “That explains it all! After she eloped with Edward, Crittingdon in his shame and disgrace spread the story that she'd come to an unfortunate accident! Oh, that explains why she refused to see me.”

“Yes,” said the Reverend Miller casting his eyes downward.

“And you knew?” Joseph exploded.

“Mary implored me not to let you know. She made me swear with my hand on the Bible that I would not tell you of this.”

“But why ... why?”

The reverend took a deep breath before continuing.

“I believe first she feared it was too much of a coincidence. When she first realized that you were working for Crittingdon, she thought it might be some kind of a plot hatched by her father to somehow ensnare her. Later when she saw your obvious sincerity, which she could not doubt, she feared to tell you for your own sake knowing that if Crittingdon ever found out that you were handling her affairs he would most certainly dismiss you. Then, when she learned of your resignation from her father's company, she feared that you would be angry with her, as she had not been honest with you. Perhaps there were other fears.”

“Ah ... but of course. It all changed after I had given her my card!” mused Joseph. With all his restraint, but still a little too eagerly for his own liking, he continued, “And ... er, do you think that her wish still stands?”

“My son,” replied the Reverend Miller with a strange smile, “there is only one way to find out.”

He chuckled as Joseph hastily withdrew from the room, delivered Arny a quick kiss on the head, waved goodbye to the other children and dashed out of the house. Little eyes watched in amusement as he mounted his horse and charged off down the road.

Upon arriving at the refuge, Joseph went straight to his room, took out a fresh sheet of paper and wrote:

Dear Mrs. Farrow,

I, the undersigned, Joseph Addington, do hereby request payment in full of the rates due to me for services rendered on your behalf in the estate of the late Edward Farrow, namely one setting of tea and scones, to be paid in full at the convenience of the debtor.

Yours faithfully,

Joseph Addington

Without further ado, he blotted the page, placed it in an envelope, sealed it, addressed it, ran downstairs and mounted his horse. Within minutes he was dismounting outside Mary's cottage.

"Why am I almost sick with nervousness about this?" he chided himself, as he walked gingerly up the path and slipped the envelope into the letterbox on the door.

For the rest of the afternoon, Joseph paced back and forth in his study, distracted and struggling with his thoughts. At six o' clock there was a knock on the door.

"A letter for you, Mr. Addington," said Molly.

Joseph's heart leaped.

As calmly as he could, he took the envelope, thanked Molly and gently closed the door. With scrambling fingers he tore open the envelope and read.

Dear Mr. Addington,

Payment in full of said debt to be accomplished tomorrow, 16th April, 10 a.m. at the residence of Mary Farrow, 12 Potters' Lane, if the arrangement suits the convenience of the creditor.

Yours respectfully,

Mary Farrow

Joseph held the dryly worded document to his lips and kissed it as tenderly as if it had been the most rapturous love letter ever composed.

* * *

Joseph slept little that night but tossed and turned on his bed as thoughts seemed to tramp through his mind like a thousand horses charging across the land, first this way and then that, up hill and down, but never at rest.

Why did he feel this way towards Mary, a widow of only four months, and great with child at that? Was it not a dishonour to Edward's memory to even entertain such thoughts? But the two dreams had been so clear. Edward at first tearfully entreating him to care for Mary, and then smiling as he handed him the heart-shaped locket. Could it merely have been his own fancies translating themselves into self-indulgent dreams?

And what if Mary did not return the same affection? With Edward only four months gone, was it not too much to expect her to be favourable towards him in any more than a purely platonic way? And what of taking on the responsibility of a mother with child? Was he ready for that? After hours of tumbling, confused thoughts, only one thing managed to assert itself within his heart: He was deeply in love with Mary.

Now it might have pleased the Almighty in His infinite wisdom to send an angel that night to say, "Joseph, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife," for it is well known that He has the capability to perform such feats. Indeed the messenger angel would not have needed to be re-instructed about what to say, having already learned his lines so very well.

However, perhaps in the interests of upholding the principles of good writing, that is to avoid unnecessary repetition, and to steer clear of that which has been done

before, in His Divine benevolence, our Lord saw fit not to do so. Or was it that, in this case, He preferred His children to be free to make their own choice in the matter, the issue not being quite so vital to the human race as the birth of the Saviour?

Whatever the invisible workings of Divine Providence in the matter, it was with an extremely severe case of butterflies in his stomach and wobbles in his knees that Joseph made his way down the path towards Mary's cottage the next day.

"Good morning, Mrs. Farrow," he began with superbly mustered calmness, as the door opened.

"Good morning, Mr. Addington. Please come in," came the equally calm reply.

Joseph was genteelly ushered to the armchair in which he had sat four months before, the tea and scones already on the table before him.

Mary was definitely "great with child," but yet retained a grace and femininity at which Joseph marvelled.

"It was kind of you to come," she began. "Please forgive my long delay in repaying my debt to you, sir."

"And forgive me for my importunity in demanding it."

"I must admit I was surprised," said Mary. She hesitated, then added, "But willing to comply. Mr. Addington, I cannot deny that I have watched your conduct in the village with a great deal of admiration and interest."

"All the admiration should be directed towards the life-saving grace of our dear Jesus. And since He was introduced to me by Edward, and our mutual friend the Reverend Miller, to whom you introduced me, perhaps the thanks belongs more fully to yourself--and of course to your dear Edward."

"Our dear Edward," Mary smiled radiantly. "You speak of him with such tenderness. I perceive that a kinship has developed between you, though I know not how since you knew him so briefly before he died."

“Mrs. Farrow, you embolden me to speak of a subject which I have long thought to withhold from you.”

“Go on,” said Mary slowly.

“I have twice dreamed of Edward. Once he came to me, carrying a child, and begged me to take care of you. That experience encouraged me in my early efforts to assist you. The second time I dreamed of him was more recently, during a severe sickness.”

“Ah yes, I heard of your illness.”

“So it was you that sent the chicken broth?”

Mary looked down, smiling bashfully.

“I half-guessed it, although I didn't dare to dream as much. Well, it was just what the doctor ordered, and I thank you! Anyway, at the height of the fever, I dreamed again of Edward. He led me to a spot behind the orphanage to a particular tree in which he showed me the location of ... this.”

At that, Joseph drew the locket out of his pocket, and extended it to her.

Gently she reached out and took it, opening it and handling it lovingly. Finally she turned it over and looked at the back where she saw the inscription. Quickly her eyes met Joseph's.

“You have discovered my secret,” she said.

“I believe I have,” replied Joseph softly.

“And yet you came?” said Mary. “I feared so greatly that when you knew you would spurn me, or be grieved with my dishonesty to the end of my days.”

“I do not believe that I could ever find it in my heart to spurn you,” said Joseph. He breathed deeply. “Mary, although this contravenes every convention I've ever been taught and though it slaps tradition and polite society in the face ... I do believe I have Edward's permission to say this.” He paused. “I ... I love you more deeply than anyone I have ever known.”

“Oh, Joseph!” she breathed, looking deeply into his eyes, “I love you, too!” She stretched out her hands, which he clasped and fell to his knees beside her chair.

In an instant, the two were locked in a passionate embrace.

“Oh, how I have longed for this moment,” said Mary, “yet never thought it should be! I thought I could never confess my love for you. I wondered what you would think of me, since I knew you had great respect for my Edward. Yet I feel his blessing too, almost as if he were,” she laughed, “arranging the whole thing!”

“Yes, yes!” said Joseph. “That is precisely how I feel. I feel he is right here rejoicing--dare I say, even sharing in our love.”

Mary looked tenderly into Joseph's eyes. “I cannot believe that a love so true could be purely of human contrivance.”

“Nor I,” said Joseph, “and I desire nothing more than that we should spend our lives together, serving our Lord together in love. Will you consent to be my wife?”

Mary gazed into his eyes for a long teasing moment. “I,” she said, then cast her eyes downward at her unborn child, “...we accept!”

With that Joseph let out such a burst of laughter and tears as he never would have thought himself capable of, and held his beloved bride-to-be for many long and tender minutes.

“We must let the Millers know right away!” said Joseph finally.

“I think you've forgotten all about the tea and scones!” said Mary with mock indignation.

“That I have,” said Joseph, happily stuffing one into his mouth and some more into his coat pockets and taking a swig of tea.

“Mmm, and to top it off, you make the most excellent scones! Come and let us go, for I cannot wait to see the reverend's face!”

* * *

Reverend Miller was ecstatic. “Oh, it's so perfect! I couldn't have imagined a better match for either of you!”

“Reverend Miller,” smiled Mary with a childish dimple, “could I prevail upon your generosity to marry us?”

“With the greatest of pleasure,” he replied. “And when might that be?”

“Well, on the way over Joseph and I were talking and he, in the interest of propriety, wanted to wait. But I said I would so love for my child to be born knowing him already as the father, and so, he readily agreed and we set a date for the 1st of May.”

“And a more appropriate day I could not think of!” replied Reverend Miller.

* * *

The happy couple immediately dispatched invitations. Joseph to his sister in Nottingham, to some uncles and cousins in London, and Mary to her father, mother and sister.

“It is worth a try,” she sighed, “though perhaps we will be both more the anathema than ever.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Thus it was that Joseph Addington became, as he had once intended, Charles Crittingdon's son-in-law, although in a manner that he would not have anticipated in all his wildest dreams. The marriage was a joyous affair, held in a quiet little chapel not far from the orphanage.

"Everything is not exactly as it seems," said Joseph hastily to his uncles and sister, whose eyes bulged when they first saw Mary, thereafter taking great pains to explain the story down to its minutest details.

The rest of the population of Bishop's Green was well aware of the story, and Mary's condition. Of course, there was the usual clique of meddlesome spinsters who judged it improper to marry so soon after the first husband's passing, and made it their business to let everyone know their feelings on the matter.

Elsie, upon hearing such opinions, immediately took them to task, saying, "Mr. Addington is a fine and noble gentleman, and what he is doing proves it the more so. I believe it is just how our dear Lord would have us all to act--in love and concern for the poor widows."

Such criticisms reached the ears of the young couple, but failed to dampen their happiness.

"I don't give a hoot what they all say," said Joseph to Mary privately. "You are my wife, I love you, and we love our Jesus--and that's all that matters."

As Mary expected, her father, mother and sister did not attend, however there was a beautiful bouquet sent from London with a card attached:

Dear Joseph and Mary,

I am blissfully happy for you both, and wish you a loving and a prosperous marriage. Charles expressly forbade Sarah and me from coming, a fact which I greatly lament, as I would have loved to see this day. I could not have prayed for a better match for either of you, and you have my full blessing.

Yours, with love, prayers and a few tears,

Grace Crittingdon

“Oh, I do wish Mother could have come.” Mary shed a few tears as she read the card. “Oh dear Jesus, please help Father to change his mind.”

Mary's sadness however was soon swallowed up in the joy of the day. The orphans looked with wide-eyed wonder as Joseph kissed Mary and led his blushing bride down the aisle.

It was not expedient at that time for the newlyweds to take a honeymoon, partly because of Mary's condition and partly because of Joseph's continuing responsibilities at the refuge.

“But I have an idea or two up my sleeve,” remarked Joseph, “somewhere a trifle exotic perhaps! But that's for later!”

Mary's curiosity was fully aroused, but try as she might, she could not get Joseph to divulge anything.

* * *

On the 17th of May, Mary gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, whom they named Jessica Mae.

“Oh, she looks so much like Edward!” said Mary, holding her precious infant tenderly.

“She will always be a beautiful bond between us three,” said Joseph, “yet I will love her as my own daughter.”

“Joseph Addington, you are a wonderful man!” said Mary, planting a kiss on his cheek.

Jessica Mae was christened at a simple ceremony a few weeks later, over which the Reverend Miller presided. For the occasion Joseph chose one of Edward's poems, written after he had learned that Mary was expecting.

As he read with a tremor in his voice there was hardly a dry eye in the small congregation.

Sonnet to My Unborn Child

*I know you, though I cannot tell you how,
As if in some strange world where spirits meet
I often dandle you upon my feet,
Or plant a kiss upon your dimpled brow,
Or swing with you beneath some blossoming bough,
And hear your gurgling laughter, passing sweet,
As if our love already were complete,
And past and future melted into now.
This is a knowledge passing understanding,
A trust that binds our separate hearts as one:
Two travellers on eternal seashores standing,
Two pilgrims on immortal quest begun,
Two seabirds o'er horizons e'er expanding,
Soaring breathless towards the rising sun.*

* * *

In the middle of July, Joseph and Mary purposed to travel to London. Things at the refuge were running smoothly and Jessica Mae was healthy and strong and deemed fit for travelling. Joseph needed to take care of some business, as well as wished to see Mr. Clancy, whilst Mary fervently hoped for some reconciliation with her family.

The first night they arrived, they lodged at a small, comfortable inn. The next morning Joseph was browsing through a copy of *The London Times*, he started suddenly.

“Mary, listen to this! ‘*The Poet’s Art*, by Edward Farrow, reviewed by Samuel Weston.’ He says, and I quote, ‘Fresh inspiration blossoms on every page. ... Mr. Farrow expels every idol from the reader’s heart with all the exuberance of Christ cleansing the temple of the moneychangers. ... The hot tea of spiritual fervour sweetened by the sugar of poetic lyricism. Were it not for his untimely death, Mr. Farrow could well have developed into one of England’s finest young poets.’”

“That’s wonderful!” cried Mary. “See Jessie, Daddy is a famous poet!”

Jessica gurgled cheerily in response.

“Oh, I can’t wait to go and see Willard, and get our hands on some copies,” said Joseph.

And since he couldn’t wait, he did it that very morning, returning triumphantly from the publisher’s office with ten complimentary copies and Mary’s first check.

“Let us pray they sell well,” said Mary, “that the message may go forth. And further, that the Lord will supply towards His work.”

“That is indeed a worthy prayer,” said Joseph.

* * *

Later that day Joseph attended to his other business transactions, then the following morning he and Mary visited Mr. Clancy.

“My dear Joseph,” exclaimed Clancy as they were shown into the elegant study.

“Mr. Clancy, my dear friend!” said Joseph grasping his hand warmly. “Allow me to introduce my wife, Mary! But you must have already met?”

“Ah yes,” replied Clancy, “a very, very long time ago. My, what a beauty you have blossomed into, dear Mary!” Warmly the two embraced.

“I still remember Mr. Clancy holding me on his knees when I was only six, and telling me stories,” said Mary, turning to

Joseph with shining eyes, “always such a kind, warmhearted gentleman.”

“My, my! Joseph, you certainly do work quickly,” he said with a boyish twinkle in his eyes as he cast them towards little Jessica Mae, who Mary was cradling in her arms.

“Mr. Clancy, may I explain?” Joseph stammered.

“Ah, you don't have to explain,” replied Clancy, enjoying jesting for a moment. “I already know the full story. Well, I wish you two the greatest happiness. Come, let us sit and talk.”

“And may we present you with a complimentary copy of Mr. Farrow's poems?” said Joseph, after they had taken their seats.

“Ah, thank you indeed. Yes, I had read of it in the *Times* and thought of getting myself a copy. Thank you for bringing it.”

Joseph could contain his curiosity no longer.

“So what of this idea that you had, concerning Mr. Crittingdon?”

“Well,” said Clancy, “you have to know the fish to bait the hook, as they say, and let the punishment fit the crime. Or to put it another way--it takes a thief to catch a thief, or a lawyer to catch a lawyer.”

“Go on,” said Joseph, intrigued.

Mr. Clancy thereupon proceeded to expound on his plan to Joseph and Mary, who listened carefully.

Finally Joseph replied, “Yes, I do think there's a chance it will work.”

Mary silently nodded her assent.

“But,” said Clancy, “we first need to secure some assistance of all the members of Mr. Crittingdon's family, as well as the staff at his office. Now I think I can manage the staff, but the family...”

“You have my assistance already,” said Mary. “Anything that will help to reach Father.”

“And Mrs. Crittingdon?” inquired Mr. Clancy.

“I believe she will cooperate,” said Mary, “but Mr. Clancy, I so long to be able to meet with her, even if clandestinely!”

“Well,” said Clancy warmly, “it would be easy for me to set up a clandestine meeting right here. Your father need never know of it. As a matter of fact, why don't you two just stay here? I have more guest rooms than I know what to do with.”

“Oh, Mr. Clancy--”

“No, no, I insist. Be my guests! There's no need for you to be wasting your hard-earned missionary money on an inn.”

“Thank you so much for your kindness,” said Joseph. “And I must say that the so-called small contribution that you sent us arrived at the most incredibly opportune moment. I can't wait to relate the circumstances to you.”

“Ah, we shall have plenty of time for that,” said Clancy. “I've a great interest in the work that you're doing, and I can't wait to hear the story of how you snared Snyder. Now let me see what I can do to have your mother here to meet you tomorrow.”

“Oh,” Mary said, “that would be wonderful!”

* * *

“Where is my dear girl?” cried Grace Crittingdon as she hastened into the room at eleven o'clock the following morning. “Oh, my dear Mary! My dear girl!” Immediately she fell about Mary's neck, kissing her. “Oh, I've prayed for you so much, dear one! Oh and look! Here's dear Jessica Mae! What an angel! She's an absolute angel from Heaven!”

Joseph stood modestly by, enjoying what he estimated to be to at least five minutes of oohs, aahs, goo-goos, gurgles and other similar utterances until finally Mrs. Crittingdon turned to him.

“Oh, and Mr. Addington! I've totally ignored you, clucking over my dear girls! God bless you, sir, and congratulations

on your fine choice of a wife! I did always secretly have my eye on you as a son-in-law, although in a thousand years I never would have expected this! Now you two, you must tell me how you are getting on, and about your mission.”

The three spent much time in happy reunion, and recounting of the past months' events.

Grace seemed delighted with everything that had transpired, whilst Joseph thought that he could not have hoped for a better mother-in-law. Eventually the conversation turned to Mr. Crittingdon.

“And how is Father?” asked Mary with a note of anxiety in her voice.

“Oh,” said Grace, “Charles grows more sullen and distant every day. It's as if he is cutting himself off into a world of his own designing--his law, his work, his books. He barely speaks to any of us anymore.”

“Mother,” said Mary, “Mr. Clancy has had an idea.”

“Yes?” said Mrs. Crittingdon quietly. “Tell me.”

Carefully Joseph recounted the plan that Clancy had expounded to them the previous day.

“Well, it is, as it were, a last resort,” Mrs. Crittingdon said thoughtfully, “but anything would be better than to let him sink into the abyss that he now finds himself in. Yes, I'll throw in my lot with you all.”

“But, there's one thing more,” continued Joseph.

“Sarah?” Mrs. Crittingdon inquired.

* * *

“No, Mother, I will not meet with Mary, whom I no longer call my sister!” said Sarah Crittingdon vehemently, throwing her hairbrush down on the dresser and gazing into the mirror as she applied rouge to her face. “Nor will I countenance that imbecilic dreamer, Mr. Addington! He betrayed father, and betrayed you ... betrayed us all!”

It was the following morning, and Grace had entered her daughter's room as she was dressing. She sighed in deep consternation at Sarah's angry retort before attempting to continue.

"Sarah, Mr. Addington is a good, kind Christian gentleman, who has taken pity on Mary in her hour of greatest need."

"They were her own problems, and she needed not that any should take pity on her. She should have been left to suffer for her own indiscretions! And now she has caused Mr. Addington to throw away his life on some foolish escapade, wasting his talents on irredeemable orphans."

"Sarah, I won't have you calling your sister's child an act of indiscretion. She was Mr. Farrow's wife. And now she and Mr. Addington do a work that is Christian, admirable and sacrificial."

Sarah hardly heard her mother, and continued her own tirade as her voice reached a high-pitched squeal. "And the worst of it ... the worst of it ... is that Mary has somehow weaseled him into marrying her when I, when I..." Suddenly a torrent of tears seemed to burst forth from her delicately groomed eyes. "...when I wanted him! Oh, Mother, I wanted him so much!" Instantly her hard façade dissolved and she fell into her mother's arms.

"Oh Mother, Mother! What am I to do?"

Grace Crittendon held her sobbing daughter for the first time in many years. For long minutes Sarah cried as Grace gently held her head on her shoulder and stroked her hair.

"Oh, Mother, forgive me," she sobbed. "I have been so hard, so cold."

"Oh, my dear girl," said Grace, "my dear, precious girl. How I love you!"

"I love you, too, Mama."

The two held each other for a few more moments, and when Sarah pulled herself away, her carefully applied make-up was a smudgy mess, and her immaculately brushed hair was in a terrible tangle, but Grace saw in her a softness that she had not noticed for a very long time.

“Oh, am I a pretty sight!” she said with a mixture of a sniffle and a laugh, catching sight of herself in the mirror.

“You are more beautiful than I have ever seen you,” said a voice from the other side of the room.

“M-M-Mary is that you?” said Sarah tremulously, turning towards the voice.

“Yes, my dear sister, it is I!”

In an instant the two were embracing.

“Mary, forgive me! I have been so hard against you, so bitter. All these years I thought it was you that was causing the problems in our family, but now I see that it was me, and ... Father! But you came here? Father said he would never let you set foot in this house again.”

“It was worth the risk to see you, my dear sister,” said Mary lovingly.

“Oh Mary, you were always so loving towards me, and I've been so unworthy of your love.”

Again the two sisters embraced.

“But tell me, where is my niece?”

“Well,” said Mary, “she is in the next room with your brother-in-law, Joseph!”

Timidly Joseph entered the room carrying Jessica in front of him.

“Oh! She's lovely!” said Sarah. “She's adorable! Oh, let me hold her!”

Gladly Joseph yielded Jessie up to Sarah's embrace. It was easily another five minutes of coos, oohs and ahs before Sarah turned coldly with one hand extended and said, “Good morning, Mr. Addington.”

“Good morning, Sarah,” he replied benignly, which comment concluded the entire conversation between them on that day.

Thenceforth the cooing continued unimpeded while Joseph observed from afar, wondering at the magical power of a niece.

After a while Mrs. Crittingdon thought it wise that the two *persona non grata** depart, in case Mr. Crittingdon should make an untimely return, to which they readily concurred.

“And we shall see you again very soon,” said Mary.

“I hope so,” Sarah replied, while mother looked on with a knowing smile.

* * *

The following morning a note arrived at Mr. Clancy's addressed to Joseph and Mary. It read simply,

I have secured Sarah's cooperation and we are ready.

Please give us 24 hours notice.

Love,

Mother

“Mr. Clancy,” said Joseph, approaching him soberly, “we are ready.”

“I believe the time is right,” said Mr. Clancy. “It will be two days from now, on the evening of July 23rd.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

At nine o'clock p.m., on the 23rd of July, Charles Crittingdon sat in his study absorbed in a weighty legal tome. There was a polite knock at the door and his butler entered with a message on a silver tray.

"An urgent message for you, sir."

"What on earth could it be at this time of night?" he muttered. Breaking the seal with an impatient frown, he read:

Dear Crittingdon,

I must speak to you on a matter of the utmost urgency and importance. I will meet you at the chambers of the firm at 10:00 p.m.

Yours respectfully,

Clancy

"Hmpph. In all my years I've never known Clancy to do this. I suppose he considers it important enough," he sighed.

Quickly he dressed and then called for the butler. "Have the coachman prepare the carriage," he ordered.

"It is already prepared," came the polite reply.

"Oh," said Crittingdon. "How odd."

* * *

At precisely ten o'clock, Mr. Crittingdon strode into his office.

"What in God's name is going on?" he sputtered. The office had been transformed into a makeshift courtroom, complete with prisoner's dock, witness stand and judge's bench. His employees sat quietly in rows of chairs facing the judge's bench, as did Mrs. Crittingdon, Sarah, and certain members of his household staff.

“What is this madness?” he thundered.

Just then the door behind the judge's bench opened and Mr. Clancy emerged wearing a white judge's wig and carrying a large black book.

“Clancy! I command you to stop this nonsense!” said Crittingdon.

Without responding, Mr. Clancy sat down, smote the table with the gavel and began. “This court is now in session.”

“Mr. Clancy, will you desist from this puerile* charade?”

“Order in the court!” ordered Clancy, in a manner that was most unusual to this otherwise soft-spoken man. “Will the accused take his place in the dock to have charges read.”

Gently Mr. Crittingdon's secretary took his arm to escort him into the dock.

“Accused! Accused of what? What crime have I committed?”

“The charges shall be read,” said Mr. Clancy.

“I will never submit to this madness!”

“If you do not,” replied Mr. Clancy gently, but firmly, “I have it on good authority that there shall be no supper on your table tonight, nor shall there be any breakfast served to you tomorrow, nor shall there be any employees at your office!”

“And there shall be no tea on your table at ten thirty,” chimed in Rosey.

“Order in the court!” said Clancy.

With a disgruntled scowl, Crittingdon allowed himself to be led to the prisoner's chair in the dock. Mr. Clancy opened the large black book at his right hand, cleared his throat and began.

“As it is written, we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, where as the apostle saith, human tongues shall cease, knowledge shall vanish away, we shall put away childish things and finally realize that the greatest of all things is love. We here tonight seek not to cast final

judgment, for that is reserved for the One before Whom all hearts are open, and Whose wisdom and judgment exceed ours. We seek merely to present an illustration, an intimation of what might, according to our finite comprehension, transpire on that great day.

“The accused who stands before us tonight is Mr. Charles Crittingdon, who will be judged according to the statutes of Christ's law, the greatest of all laws, which, begging the court's indulgence, I propose to succinctly summarize, in the words of the apostle James, as the Royal Law, or the laws of love. The prosecution shall be carried out by the most capable solicitor, Joseph Addington.”

Joseph entered the courtroom with a flourish, bowed to Mr. Clancy and then to Mr. Crittingdon, who visibly seethed with agitation.

“The defence shall be argued by a man who, in my opinion, has one of the finest legal minds in all of England, Charles Crittingdon himself, who I may add better knoweth his own heart than any present here tonight. The prosecution may arraign its witnesses, and begin the examination-in-chief.”

“Thank you, Your Honour. Prosecution calls Mr. Crittingdon's secretary, George Wilbur.”

“Mr. Wilbur,” began Joseph, after Wilbur had laid his hand on the Bible and sworn a solemn oath, “how long have you been in the employ of Mr. Crittingdon?”

“Why, a good twenty years, sir,” he replied.

“How would you describe your employer?”

“He is a fine upstanding man, a man of principle, and bent on upholding justice.”

“Have you ever observed him breaking any law?”

“No, sir, most certainly not. He has been most steadfast on his rigid application of all regulations, more so than I have ever heard of.”

“And could you describe to the court Mr. Crittingdon's general disposition and manner of speech.”

“Well,” said Wilbur a little uncomfortably, “undoubtedly because of his highly advanced intellect, Mr. Crittingdon has a manner of talking which makes ones such as myself feel themselves to be highly inferior, and has indeed uttered many sentences which have long remained within my mind and rankled with me, causing me feelings of distress, guilt and inadequacy.”

“Thank you, Mr. Wilbur. No further questions.”

“Does the defence wish to cross-examine the witness?” said Clancy.

Crittingdon started as if he was about to speak and then shook his head silently.

“The prosecution calls Tom the coachman.”

All eyes were fixed on Tom as he carefully ascended the witness stand and took the oath, repeating it solemnly after Joseph.

“And how long have you worked for Mr. Crittingdon, Tom?”

“Fifteen years,” said Tom.

“And what is your assessment of Mr. Crittingdon?”

“A reliable man, always pays his wages on time, never cheated us.”

“Is there anything in Mr. Crittingdon's conduct that you would consider deficient or lacking?”

“Well,” said Tom, “I couldn't understand when we wanted to do something charitable like 'elping the orphans, the poor little waifs, we 'ad to 'ide and do it behind 'is back, like 'e didn't approve of it or something.”

“Thank you, Tom. That will be all.”

“Does the defence wish to cross-examine the witness?”

Once again Mr. Crittingdon shook his head.

“The witness may step down. The prosecution calls Rosey, the tea lady.”

After completing the same procedure, Joseph questioned Rosey.

“And tell me what you know of Mr. Crittingdon.”

“Well, me being a founding member of this company, I have observed Mr. Crittingdon in a variety of situations and I must agree with all the other witnesses. He is a man of principle and integrity. However, if I may offer my 'umble opinion, if he would just learn to be a little bit kinder to people it would be like adding a couple of lumps of sugar to a cup of tea, you know? He's already good and strong, he just needs a bit more sweetness.”

“Thank you, Rosey.”

“Mr. Crittingdon, do you care to cross-examine the witness?”

Once again came the negative response, whereupon Joseph proceeded to call the accountant, who scurried onto the stand in his typical mouse-like fashion.

In response to Joseph's similarly worded question came the reply, “Well, Mr. Crittingdon could never be accused of embezzling a penny from the accounts for his own pocket. In that sense he is definitely the most straightforward and excellent man of business I have ever encountered. Yet I couldn't help wondering sometimes whether we could have spared more than fifty pounds a year to help the needy, and there was a tendency to be a trifle drastic in cutting the employees' wages when their intentions were obviously to assist another human in need, as I believe you yourself have experienced, Mr. Addington.”

“Thank you. That will be all.”

Once again there were no questions from Mr. Crittingdon.

“The prosecution calls Sarah Crittingdon.”

Gracefully Sarah ascended the stand, took the oath and prepared to answer Joseph's questions.

“Tell me in your own words about your father,” said Joseph.

"I have always greatly admired my father," said Sarah gently. "I always thought him to be a dedicated and admirable man. Yet how often I have longed,"--a tear formed in her eye--"for a fatherly embrace, a word of encouragement or cheer, a look of sympathy and tenderheartedness and found them not." Impulsively she held a handkerchief to her face, and Joseph quietly remarked, "No further questions, Your Honour."

Crittingdon pre-empted Clancy's questions with a solemn shake of his head.

"The witness may step down."

Grace helped Sarah from the stand and back to her seat.

"The prosecution calls Grace Crittingdon."

Solemnly Mrs. Crittingdon took the oath as Joseph began.

"Madam, I have not called you in any way here tonight to denounce your husband."

"And I shall not do so, sir," replied Grace, looking tenderly at Mr. Crittingdon, who gazed resolutely at the floor.

"But could you tell the court your sentiments about your husband?"

"I have never regretted marrying Charles. He has been a faithful provider, a diligent father, and a husband whose fidelity I have never doubted. I cannot forget the twinkle in his eye when he first held little Mary. The only thing I long for is that by some miracle the same twinkle could someday return."

Mr. Crittingdon visibly cringed at the mention of Mary, but whatever emotions he felt found no further utterance.

"And what of the marriage vow that he uttered to you twenty-five years ago?" continued Joseph.

"He has been faithful to it: to love and to cherish," she said quietly, "though perhaps not as much as I would have wished." She hesitated. "To have and to hold ... it is a long

time since I was ... held." She raised a handkerchief to her eyes.

"The prosecution has no further questions."

Crittingdon looked up at Grace and met her shining, beseeching eyes for a moment, before quickly lowering them and shaking his head.

"No questions."

Joseph cleared his throat and took a deep breath. "The prosecution calls its final witness." He paused dramatically. "Mary Crittingdon."

Mary emerged from a side door gently cradling little Jessica in her arms. All eyes were on Mr. Crittingdon who quickly glanced at his daughter and granddaughter and then lowered his eyes again. Joseph thought Mary had never looked more radiant as she ascended the stand and sat down.

"Good evening, Father," she said softly. "I promise to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God."

"What would you like to tell the court about your father, Charles Crittingdon?" asked Joseph.

"I would like to tell the court that I admire him, and love him, and forgive him. I also ask his forgiveness for actions of mine that have caused him pain. I only desire to be reconciled with him, to feel his approval and that he might hold his granddaughter in his arms."

"No further questions, your Honour."

"Does the defence wish to cross-examine Mrs. Addington?" asked Clancy.

This time the question was met with a blank stare.

"The prosecution rests its case," said Joseph soberly.

"The defence may now arraign its witnesses, Mr. Crittingdon."

Slowly, definitely, and without emotion Crittingdon uttered three words.

“The defence rests.”

For a few moments there was silence as Mr. Clancy shuffled some papers in front of him, after which he cleared his throat and began once more to speak. His tone was gentle and restrained, though he spoke with unmistakable authority.

“Upon careful consideration of the evidence presented before us tonight, this court finds you guilty as charged: Guilty of never breaking the law, guilty of never making a mistake, guilty of always being right...” He paused and the silence was deafening. “...guilty of not allowing yourself to love, guilty of not permitting yourself the luxury of forgiving, guilty of not letting yourself live.”

Once more the gavel crashed down.

“The defendant may now rise for sentencing.”

Weakly, Crittingdon staggered to his knees, with his head cast down towards the floor, holding tightly onto the rail of the dock in front of him.

“Charles Crittingdon, I do hereby sentence you ... I sentence you to forgive and to be forgiven. I sentence you to forgive your daughter, Mary, her husband, Joseph Addington, and the late Edward Farrow. I sentence you to love your wife, to treat your employees with kindness, and to be charitable towards the poor and the oppressed.

“Furthermore, I sentence you to receive the forgiveness of your loved ones, your friends and your employees and above all of the Great God Himself Who is rich in mercy to all who turn to Him. This court also sentences you to read the following books: *The Poet's Art*, of which a copy is herewith provided.”

He beckoned to the secretary, and handed him a copy of the slim volume, which he took to Crittingdon, who received it with a look of blank resignation. “And upon its soon publication, the sequel, entitled *The Treasures of the Snow*, by the late poet Edward Farrow, who, as the *London Times*

recently put it, 'were it not for his untimely death could well have blossomed into one of England's finest poets.' All rise."

At that the entire courtroom stood. "This court is now closed."

For the last time the gavel fell with a crash. All eyes were on Crittingdon, who remained motionless for a long time, his eyes fastened to the floor.

Finally he slowly, dejectedly turned and left the room carrying the book in his right hand. A sob broke out. It was Sarah Crittingdon.

Gently Mrs. Crittingdon put her arm around her and both wept. Mary joined them, trying to comfort them.

Joseph looked helplessly at Mr. Clancy, who said softly, "We have done what we could."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

After several more days in London attending to business matters, Joseph and Mary returned to Bishop's Green. A few days after their return, Joseph and Mary were seated, with little Jessie Mae on Joseph's knees, in the sitting room of the little cottage where they now both lived.

Manfully Joseph struggled with two large pins with which he was attempting to fasten Jessie's nappy.

Mary looked on with a mixture of admiration and amusement. After a considerable period of diligent endeavour he finally held Jessie erect to admire his work.

"There! A trifle lopsided perhaps, but it does the trick! I knew I could do it!" At that the nappy promptly slid down to the baby's ankles.

"Here," said Mary, capably taking Jessie from her bemused father, who relinquished her and then looked on crestfallen as Mary deftly fixed the nappy into artistically perfect symmetry within a few seconds.

"Daddy did such a good job, didn't he, Jessie Mae? Don't you have such a clever Daddy!" she cooed, to amused gurgles from the infant. She turned to Joseph who was suddenly gazing at her with an earnestness, which surprised her.

"Mary, I must now speak to you of something which I can no longer suppress," he said.

"Tell me," said Mary, her eyes widening with curiosity.

"Well, you remember I spoke to you before our wedding of a honeymoon?"

"Yes."

"Well, perhaps I should explain, or clarify, or expand."

"Well, go on!" she said with an impatient giggle.

"Mary, my darling, I have yet been thinking there is one wish of Edward's I yet long to fulfil. And not merely of

Edward's--for in my heart and in my thoughts it has truly become my greatest desire."

"Go on."

"Well, I have been observing James and Betty. In our absence they handled the affairs of the refuge more excellently than I could have imagined."

"And?" said Mary.

"I feel that God is calling me ... oh, more than anything, I want to become a missionary!"

Mary was thoughtful for a moment. "I do confess that the thought of leaving our life here, our dear friends, our families, as well as the darling children at the refuge is painful to me, yet I do believe in my heart of hearts that is also what I most greatly desire."

"It is not a decision that I wish to take lightly," continued Joseph, "for I know of the many dangers and difficulties associated with such a life. Yet I feel the Lord's call so strongly, my darling Mary."

"Yes," she replied, "so do I. I believe it is God's will. But where? How?"

"Well, that is something we must give much prayer and consideration," said Joseph, "but while in London I took the liberty of visiting the London Missionary Society."

"Oh," said Mary with a twinkle, "you do move quickly!"

"I inquired as to their needs and opportunities and it seems there are many open doors of service in the continent of Africa."

"Yes," replied Mary, a little less certainly.

"Well, being that we have a young child, I don't necessarily intend that we should immediately venture into the heart lands to emulate Doctor Livingstone's fearless expeditions. But there are many places of service that are well suited to our limitations and humble capabilities."

"Oh," Mary burst out laughing. "I was seeing visions of dreadful savages, lions, tigers, snakes and elephants!"

“Well,” said Joseph, “there is no guarantee that we shall not at some times encounter such things, but would their venom be any more deadly than that of Nathaniel Snyder?”

“Perhaps not,” said Mary, “but Joseph, let us commit the matter unto the Lord and seek His guidance. I’m sure He will show His will for us.”

After some days of earnest prayer and discussion, both of them felt assuredly that their call had come and determined that if there were no further impediments, they should immediately apply for service and if possible depart by the end of the year.

“And what a wonderful honeymoon it shall be!” said Mary.

Jenny, one of the girls from Miller’s orphanage who had come to help at the refuge, had fallen head over heels in love with baby Jessica and even more so with her Saviour. When she heard of Joseph and Mary’s plans, she begged to be allowed to accompany them, both to care for little Jessie and also give her life in missionary service.

Initially Joseph thought it was a girlish fancy, but eventually relented, when he saw her unquenchable zeal. Without further hesitation, Joseph dispatched a letter to the Missionary Society applying for service.

As the days wore on, Joseph and Mary prepared with excitement, as well as continuing to help at the refuge as time permitted.

One day, late in August, Mary was overjoyed when a handsome carriage pulled up outside the Refuge and out stepped her sister Sarah.

“I have come to visit you Mary,” she said, “and to stay for a few days. For I must see for myself what you are up to!”

Mary quickly drew her in to the sitting room where the two sisters sat and excitedly shared all their latest news.

“And what of Father?” cried Mary with a concerned expression.

“Well,” said Sarah, “there definitely has been some sort of a change in him since the trial, but I hardly know what to think. He seems so quiet and withdrawn--sometimes he isn't seen at the office for hours, and he's not at home, and nobody seems to know where he is. Oh, Mary, I'm so worried about him!”

“We pray for him,” said Mary compassionately. “Come, let me show you around!”

As they passed the drawing room door Sarah noticed it was half-open. She could see Joseph giving a class to about fifteen small children. The two sisters paused as Sarah strained to overhear what was going on.

“Now, we shall begin reading at the fifth chapter, three verses apiece. Tommy, you start.”

“And seeing the multi...,” the childish voice began.

“Multitudes.”

“Multitudes, He went up into a mountain.”

“Joseph is a wonderful teacher,” whispered Mary to Sarah, as the little boy continued. “He gives and gives to the children.”

“Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.”

“Splendid, Tommy! Continue, Sally.”

“Blessed are they that moan...,” began Sally.

“Mourn, Sally,” Joseph corrected with a chuckle.

“Blessed are they that mourn...”

“And from where are these children?” whispered Sarah, her interest obviously aroused.

“These are the ones Joseph and his colleagues rescued from the clutches of Mr. Snyder.”

“...which do hunger and thirst after r-r-right...”

“Righteousness.”

“Righteousness, for they shall be filled.”

“Excellent, Sally!” said Joseph, “Now Jimmy, would you like to continue?”

“Blessed are the merciful,” began a little voice, “For they shall obtain mercy, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. Blessed are the p-p...”

“Peacemakers.”

“Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

“Wonderful, Jimmy, you’re making tremendous progress. Jane, continue.”

“And to think that four months ago not one of these children could read,” continued Mary excitedly, “and were slaving away in a factory that resembled Hades, under a cruel oppressor, working for a pittance!”

“It is quite impressive,” said Sarah slowly.

“Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and prosecute you.” The girlish voice hesitated.

“Persecute you,” corrected Joseph gently.

“And persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exciting...”

“Exceeding.”

“Exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven. For so pro ... persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

“Well done! Well done!” exclaimed Joseph, as Mary and Sarah burst into the room clapping loudly.

“Children, that was wonderful!” said Mary. “And now I would like you to meet my sister, Sarah!”

“Good afternoon, ma’am,” chimed the polite voices.

“Good afternoon,” said Sarah. “Good afternoon, Mr. Addington,” she said to Joseph with an outstretched hand.

“Good afternoon, Sarah,” said Joseph taking it gently and kissing it.

“Mr. Addington,” she began, “I do believe I owe you an apology. The work you are doing here is far beyond all I could have imagined. Please forgive my former railings.”

"They have already been forgotten! And please call me Joseph," said Joseph, squeezing her hand, "My dear sister, Sarah!"

She blushed a little as Mary smiled.

"Come along now, Sarah. I'll show you around the upstairs."

* * *

A few days after Sarah's visit, a letter arrived from The London Missionary Society. Joyfully Joseph and Mary read that their application had been accepted. It was decided they would sail on a ship leaving Southampton for Cape Town on the 15th of December. Joseph travelled to London once more and sold the remainder of his properties, dividing up the earnings between the Millers' orphanage and the refuge, as well as booking their passage. He also received the finalized copies of Edward's second volume of verse, which he presented triumphantly to Mary on his return.

One day, about a week before they were to leave for London, Joseph came to Mary with a look of consternation spread across his face.

"Mary, it seems I have made a wee miscalculation," he began. "All our cash is either spent or spoken for, and we have not even a penny left for our food and expenditures over the coming week. Further royalties for Edward's books, as well as my investments that were to support us, will yet be a while in coming."

"Well, my dear," said Mary with a calmness that surprised Joseph, "perhaps it is one of our first tests as missionaries!"

"Perhaps so!" said Joseph and the two prayed together for the Lord to supply.

Half an hour later Mary came into a sitting room with a curious look on her face. Joseph sat poring over an atlas.

"Joseph, the most peculiar thing has just happened! A letter just arrived in the mail. Listen to this.

'To Mrs. Mary Addington, formerly Mary Farrow, of 12 Potter's Lane, Bishop's Green. Please find enclosed reimbursement of the following amount which having been subjected to all due legal procedures and proceedings is now returned to you in full, four pounds and six shillings, minus duty three pence, balance four pounds, five shillings and nine pence. Signed Constable Alfred Higgins, Bishop's Green Constabulary.' And here's a check!"

"Aha!" cried Joseph, joyfully seizing the letter from Mary's astonished grasp. "Cast your bread on the waters and after many days it shall return! And return it did--not a moment too soon."

"Joseph! What on earth is this about?"

"Oh," he said, "it's a long, long story. Remind me to tell it to you on the boat!"

* * *

A week later, a large carriage carrying Joseph, Mary, Jessica Mae and Jenny--along with their many trunks--pulled out of Bishop's Green, to the tears, cheers, smiles and waves of a large crowd of onlookers. Reverend Miller and his wife, accompanied by a throng of happy orphans were there, of course, as were James and Betty, Molly and Elsie. Even the constable came to pay his respects, and Joseph was more than a little surprised to see Dr. Lean, the gaunt physician, his normally mournful face transformed by a wide grin, as he waved goodbye.

After some days in London concluding their affairs and saying farewells, finally the great day arrived. As they stood at the dock waiting to board with their loved ones around them, the first snow of the year began to lightly fall. Joseph thoughtlessly brushed a snowflake off his coat and then in a flash suddenly recalled another similar snowflake that had landed on his coat one year ago to the day. Silently he marvelled at everything that had happened since that inconspicuous event one year before.

Grace and Sarah Crittingdon stood talking to Mary, while Mr. Clancy quietly conversed with Joseph. Cosy Rosey, not to be excluded from such a momentous event, had somehow contrived to bring a large urn of tea, which she dispensed with her customary poetic flair to the thankful recipients.

Nervously, Mary's eyes scanned the crowd. There was one face she had prayed and longed to see on this day, but her hopes were fast fading.

Not far away on an embankment by the sea front, a solitary figure stood staring out into the mist-shrouded ocean. A perceptive observer would have noticed him for hours now walking back and forth along the embankment, sometimes sitting on a bench and apparently reading from a small book, which he withdrew at regular intervals from within his coat pocket. Finally he heaved a sigh, took out the book one more time, and opened to its last page. Silently he read the words, *Oh, seek His cleansing power within the treasures of the snow*. Then he closed the book and put it back in his pocket.

"The sentence is complete," he said softly.

As the first snowflakes began to fall he quickly turned to the road and called for his carriage.

The ship's foghorn had already sounded once. Joseph, understanding Mary's thoughts looked at her sympathetically.

"It's well nigh time to board," he said gently.

Mary nodded silently, trying to hold back a tear.

Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd. A black top hat moved towards them and a grey-clad figure came into sight.

"Father!" cried out Mary.

"Mary!" cried out Mr. Crittingdon as he ran towards her, his arms outstretched. Tears filled his eyes.

"Oh, Mary! My Mary! Please forgive me!" he wept.

"Oh, Father, of course I do!" she replied.

They held each other in a long, fond embrace.

"Here I was always thinking you were my prodigal daughter, and all the while I was the prodigal father!"

"Oh, Father, it's all over now! It's done--it's all past, all forgiven!"

With a great effort, Crittingdon turned to Joseph.

"Addington, I must also humbly beg your forgiveness," he said. "You are a finer man than I."

"I doubt that, sir," said Joseph, his voice breaking with emotion as he grasped Crittingdon's hand warmly.

"The Lord knows if it hadn't been for your discernment of Snyder's character, and his dismissing us from his employ, the whole sordid affair would have cost me a pretty penny. And your work in Bishop's Green was ... admirable. Addington..." -the words seemed to well up from within the deepest recesses of his being--"you were right. I was wrong."

Crittingdon turned pathetically to Mary. "Where is she? May I hold her just once?"

Mary motioned to Jenny who was carrying little Jessica on her shoulder. Quickly she came and handed the seven-month-old infant to Mr. Crittingdon. A little clumsily he took her in his arms, swaying her back and forth and talking to her gently.

"Are you going on the big boat now, Jessica? Going with Mother and Father? You think of your grandfather now?"

Jessica raised an innocent dimpled finger and pointed to the large steamer.

"And when you grow up, you write to your grandfather."

Quizzically, Jessica turned towards him, looked up at him and ran her dimpled hand across his face. Grace Crittingdon, observing quietly, observed the stern face crease into a smile and the long-hoped-for twinkle glisten in his eyes. The foghorn sounded again and Joseph motioned again towards the boat.

"We must be off," he said, "or we'll miss the boat."

Crittingdon reluctantly surrendered Jessica to Jenny. He turned to Joseph, who once again clasped his hand warmly.

"Stay in touch, Addington," he said hoarsely.

"That I will, sir."

"God bless you, Father!" said Mary, brushing away a tear before kissing him on the cheek.

"And God bless you too, my girl," he said tenderly.

* * *

As the ship pulled away from the dock, Crittingdon, still waving, breathed to his wife, who stood by his side, "Ah, Grace, what I have lost!"

"No, Charles," she said warmly, putting her arm around him, "let us think only of what we have gained!"

As the ship disappeared into the white sheets of swirling snow, Mr. Crittingdon breathed softly, "Oh love, thou purest dove! Sail to the skies, across the whispering sea. And gently realize thy destiny!"

When they could no longer make out the dark hull of the ship, the onlookers turned to go.

"Join us for dinner, Clancy?" Mr. Crittingdon said as cheerfully as he could muster.

"Indeed, sir, that I will!" came the warm, though somewhat surprised reply.

* * *

Far out at sea that evening, Joseph entered his cabin where Mary sat in a soft white nightgown with her wavy golden hair brushed out. Jenny had taken little Jessica to bed in her cabin next door.

"My love, you look absolutely radiant," breathed Joseph, as he entered.

"Joseph, what on earth have you been doing?" asked Mary. She had curiously observed her husband pacing up and down on the quarterdeck, and then after dinner walking up and down distractedly in front of the fire in the ship's

dining hall. He had been intermittently withdrawing a small notebook from his pocket in which he seemed to be jotting things down.

At her question Joseph smiled broadly, and produced the notebook from his pocket.

"Mary, I've done it!" he exclaimed. "My first poem!"

"Oh, let me hear it! Please let me hear it!" she cried.

Joseph cleared his throat dramatically, and began.

"Across the seas we now set sail. Let health or courage never fail! Lord, help us not to worry or doubt, as o'er the seas we now set out.

"Let us with fear and doubt dispense, as thus our voyage we now commence. And though the skeptics think us silly, Lord, give us the faith of little Billy."

"Oh, it's splendid!" said Mary, jumping up and down and clapping.

"No, no--what do you think of it, honestly?"

"Honestly?" said Mary, her eyebrows raised.

"Honestly," said Joseph.

"Well, you might not be quite the poet that Edward was." Joseph's face fell. "But..." A slim hand rested on his shoulders and slim fingers caressed his face. "...you're an excellent missionary..." A slim arm slipped around his waist. "...a fine father..." Her body warmly meeting his. "...and a wonderful husband!"

What transpired during the rest of that evening I will leave to the reader's imagination. But it may be noted that the following September, Mary gave birth to a fine young baby boy, whom they christened Edward Farrow Addington.

* * *

Meanwhile back in London at the Crittingdon residence, supper was ending.

"That was excellent," said Mr. Crittingdon. He gently took his wife's hand, pressed it affectionately to his lips and said,

“Grace Crittingdon, I believe you are the finest wife a man could ever have!”

A grateful tear started in Mrs. Crittingdon's eye.

This highly unprecedented event caused the normally imperturbable butler's mouth to drop open and eyes to bulge with astonishment, and further resulted in the chambermaid upsetting a jug of cream on the tablecloth.

Mr. Crittingdon thereupon continued to cause further amazement by waving his hand jovially, and pronouncing, “Ah! Don't worry! That will wash off!”

The butler and the chambermaid beat a hasty retreat and as soon as they were on the other side of the dining room door, she whispered breathlessly, “What's got into 'im?”

“I've no idea,” said the butler, shrugging helplessly. “First snow of the season perhaps?”

The two shook their heads in bemused unison. Neither of them could explain it, but both sensed that something highly unusual was happening, and that things in the Crittingdon household would never quite be the same again.

THE END

ENDNOTES:

Samuel Chadwick (1860-1932) became one of Britain's greatest preachers. At the age of eight he went to work in the cotton mills, and developed the discipline of early rising, a practice he continued throughout his life. His parents being Methodists, he became convicted to serve the Lord as a young teen, at the age of fifteen. He often worked up to twelve hours daily in the cotton mills before returning home to spend from four to five hours studying the Bible. After several years he was ordained and sent to a chapel in Leeds, where he started tremendous revivals.

There was a strong agnostic movement in Britain at that time, with secularist societies springing up in almost every city. One night the entire Secularist Society of Leeds filled the gallery of his church, hoping to disrupt the service. But that night their leader was converted, and within the next few weeks every single officer in the group was also saved.

Chadwick later became principal of a Methodist college, where for twenty years he taught students how to pray, preach and win souls.

Glossary:

Note: These definitions cover the meanings of the words as they are used in this story, and are in many cases not complete descriptions of the word's wider usage.

arbiter: one who is appointed as judge or arbitrator to decide a disputed issue

avaricious: greedy

de facto: Latin for "in fact"--used to describe something that is so in reality, even if not officially

gelding: a castrated (gelded) male horse, generally tamer (and thus more commonly used for riding) than a stallion

guffaw: a hearty, boisterous burst of laughter

halcyon: calm and peaceful

harbinger: a forerunner, a herald foreshadowing or indicating what is to come

impetuosity: impulsiveness, the quality of acting suddenly on impulse of energy or emotion

impetuously: impulsively, without a lot of thought

inclement: severe, stormy

inexorably: relentlessly

journeyman: one who has served an apprenticeship in a specific trade or craft, and is a qualified worker in another's employ

nonplussed: at a loss of what to think, say or do

paroxysm: a sudden action or motion

persona non grata: Latin for "unacceptable person"--used to describe someone who is strictly unwelcome

pro bono: Latin for "for the good"--used to describe work that is performed free of charge for a good cause

puerile: childish

punctilious: precise, strictly adhering to the minutest details

remonstrance: a protest

remonstrating: to present an objection or reproof

repast: meal

sally (sallies): a sudden rush forward, or into a certain position

skeins: lengths of thread or yarn

wraiths: ghosts

writ: a written command or notice served by a court of law or other authority

